



# HOUSTON FREETHOUGHT ALLIANCE

## Newsletter

### For the Humanist and Freethought Community

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#### Calendar of Events:

**Sunday, March 4** | 10:30 am - 12:00 noon | *Coffee Social* | at Borders Books & Music in Meyerland Plaza (I-610 W Loop S at Beechnut) | Spontaneous informal discussions are held on first & third Sundays monthly | Contact: [Art Fay\\*](#)

**Sunday, March 4** | 12:30 pm - 2:00 pm | *Humanists of Houston (HOH) Brunch* | Randall's 11041 Westheimer Road at Wilcrest (S.E. corner) | Topics chosen by the group are discussed on first Sunday monthly | Contact: [Daniel Strain\\*](#)

**Monday, Weekly** | 7:00 pm - 10:00 pm | *Freethought Forum* | Starbucks at Louetta and Kuykendahl | Freethinkers gathering socially to discuss current events and anything else on our minds | Contact: [Curt Loose\\*](#)

**Wednesday, March 7** | 7:00 pm - 10:00 pm | *North Houston Atheist Meetup* | Bennigan's Grill & Tavern at 4505 Fm 1960 Rd W | Social dinner with humanists and atheists on Houston's north side, first Wednesday monthly | [Contact Nigel Bedrock.](#)

**Alternate Thursdays** | 11:45 am - 1:00 pm | *Hungry Heathens* | Lunch and informal discussions at various restaurants for those who have time on a weekday | Contact: [Art Fay\\*](#)

**Saturday, March 10** | 1:00 pm | *HAMCIAC Regular Meeting* | Montgomery Co. Library in the Woodlands (2nd floor) [From I-45 go west on Woodland Pkwy to 2nd traffic light; turn north (right) on Six Pines Dr; cross bridge & watch for wavy sculptures in the median; turn west (left) to Lake Robbins Rd; pass Woodlands Pavilion; turn left into Library parking lot] | Regular meetings are held on second Saturdays monthly | Contact: [Curt Loose\\*](#)

**Sunday, March 11** | 10:30 am - 11:30 am with coffee available at 10:00 AM. | *Houston Church Of Freethought (HCOF) Service* | at the Holiday Inn which is located at 3131 West Loop (northbound just north of Richmond) | Services (including song, humor, lectures & discussion with children's classes & baby sitting available) are held on second Sundays monthly | Contact: [Art Fay\\*](#)

**Saturday, March 17** | 2:30 pm - 4:30 pm | *Humanists of Houston (HOH) Regular meeting* | in the Unitarian Fellowship hall at 1504 Wirt Rd Meetings are held on the third Saturday of each month | Contact: [Daniel Strain\\*](#)

**Sunday, March 18** | 10:30 am - 12:00 noon | *Coffee Social* | at Borders Books & Music in Meyerland Plaza (I-610 W Loop S at Beechnut) | Spontaneous informal discussions are held on first & third Sundays monthly | Contact: [Art Fay\\*](#)

**Wednesday, March 21** | 5:00 pm | *Newsletter Deadline* | all articles, letters, and submissions of interest are welcome if on editor's desk, postmarks not withstanding (e-mail format required), | Contact: [Jim Knierien\\*](#)

**Sunday, March 25** 10:30 am - 12:00 noon | *Ideas Club* | At Dr Louis Daily's family house at 1506 North Boulevard. See HOH WEB site for directions | Book reviews by members are held on fourth Sundays monthly, Contact: [Bob Finch\\*](#)

**Thursday, March 29** | 6:00 pm | *Humanist Contemplatives Club* | at Rothko Chapel, 1409 Sul Ross St. | Meet the fourth Thursday of the month | For more info: <http://www.humanistsofhouston.org/contemplatives>

**Sunday, April 1** | 10:00 am - 12:00 noon | *Coffee Social* | at Borders Books & Music in Meyerland Plaza (I-610 W Loop S at Beechnut) | Spontaneous informal discussions are held on first & third Sundays monthly | [Contact: Art Fay\\*](#)

**Sunday, April 1** | 12:30 pm - 2:00 pm | *Humanists of Houston (HOH) Brunch* | Randall's employee training room 11041 Westheimer Road at Wilcrest (S.E. corner) | Topics chosen by the group are discussed on first Sundays monthly | Contact: [Daniel Strain\\*](#)

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### About the Houston Humanist Alliance:

The *Houston Freethought Alliance* is a collection of local humanist and freethought organizations in Houston, which have come together to provide a wider range of services, information, and activities to their members. While still separated in their membership, leadership, and schedules, member-organizations of the *Alliance* share the same newsletter and mailing lists. This allows our organizations to cooperate effectively and enables individual members to be kept informed of virtually all activities of interests to Freethinkers in the Houston area.

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### Publisher:

[1] The Houston Freethought Alliance Newsletter (HFA NL) is published monthly by the Houston Humanist Alliance (HFA).

[2] The purpose of the HFA NL is (1) publicizing events, i.e., keeping members informed of regularly and specially scheduled meetings, (2) providing for the public at large information about humanism and humanist thought, and (3) providing a platform for members to express their viewpoints and opinions.

[3] The HFA and the editor do not necessarily agree with nor endorse the views expressed herein. Many humanists and freethinkers pride themselves with being individuals. Consensus among Humanists is therefore difficult to achieve. No one humanist can speak for all other humanists.

[4] Anyone may quote from the newsletter but is asked to please give credit where credit is due, i.e., cite author, newsletter issue (number or date), & page.

[5] All articles, letters, and submissions of interest are welcome if on editor's desk by deadline (12:00 noon on the 15th of each month), postmarks not withstanding. E-mail format required. <mailto:Jim.Knierien@thermo.com> Name, phone number, & street address required for editorial contact purposes only.

[6] The editor reserves the right to edit all submissions for space or clarity, but never with the intent to alter the thrust of the author.

[7] Snailmail editions are sent gratis to paid members of the AHA/HOH. Email editions are sent gratis to anyone else upon request. Adobe PDF editions are available gratis by sending an email to: <mailto:jim.knierien@thermo.com>.

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### Explanation of iih symbol:

The ii of the iih represents two or more people. The h of the iih represents the humanness to which they aspire. A lower case h is used instead of an upper case H to indicate that it is better to become human (as opposed to inhuman) than it is to join a Humanist organization.

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### Alliance member's reports:

## HCOF

### *Houston Church of Freethought*

#### February Service program:

Prelude: Richard Strauss: Vienna Philharmonic Fanfare

Welcome and Introduction

Presenter: Jim Ashmore

"Thinking About Ethics In A World Without God"

Presenter: Dr. Alastair Norcross

"Dear Chuck"

Presenter: Jim Ashmore

"Humor: Mr. Deity"

Presenter: Art Fay

Closing and Announcements

Presenter: Anthony Stott

Postlude: Nobuo Uematsu: Victory Fanfare from Final Fantasy X

As always, your directors Jim Ashmore, Ed Uthman, Anthony Stott, Nancy and Art Fay welcome your feedback and participation in Church Services and Sunday school.

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## HOH

The February meeting of *The Humanists of Houston* was the Darwin Day Celebration at: **BORDERS BOOKS & MUSIC** 3025 Kirby, Houston, TX 77098. See "News Room" for more.

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## Ideas Club

The *Ideas Club* book that was reviewed for January was the book *Why Darwin Matters* by Michael Shermer The review was presented by Jerry Harris.

The March book will be *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah* by Bequer Moin. The review will be conducted by Tom Brucia.

Bob Finch <mailto:rdfinch@houston.rr.com> will provide interested parties with updated lists of books to be reviewed and the review dates.

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# A Search for the Best Way to Live

## Research Proposal

By Robert D. Finch

We have given much attention lately to Atheism, because of the spate of new books on the subject, as discussed in our February issue. The conclusion from these books, as also from all the old books on the subject, is that there is no evidence that God exists, i.e. there is no proof that a supernatural agent, omniscient and all-powerful, either created the universe in the first place or subsequently guides events. To many people brought up in the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity & Islam) this comes as a profound shock. They might have to contemplate forsaking their birthrights, and their lives will no longer be centered on the worship of God, deriving ethical precepts from ancient scriptures and priestly liturgies and with all the cultural contrivances of religion. As human beings we have to decide how best to live our lives for ourselves. Atheism is not enough. The Gods who were at the center of the old religions have been replaced by human beings. We are not in any way proposing to worship human beings: there are certainly human beings who have done many evil things. As Grayling (2003) has put it in his book, we have to use our human faculties to search for the best way to live.

I hope that in the next few months we will devote more time to exploring Ethics and Morality. Dewey defined ethics as the study of behavior. How should we live and behave? Humanism is a pragmatic approach to life in which we employ all the arts and sciences. However when it comes to matters of the individual's life, there are certain subjects which are the most relevant, namely, ethics, psychology, management and increasingly these days the biological and medical sciences. Ethics, the first of these areas, began as a systematic discipline in the time of the ancient Greeks, while the subject of management, was only recognized as an academic discipline in the twentieth century when schools of business finally won acceptance on American campuses. Thus, we are constantly learning. But precisely because we are in a period of rapid learning ethics remains a difficult and mysterious domain. I believe that more emphasis should be placed on Hume's assertion of the primacy of emotion in determining human behavior. He maintains that it is our emotions (passions he calls them) which drive our behavior. The burden which ethics has to carry in the problem of Free Will and Egoism is related to this issue of the primacy of emotions and as Humanists we need to get a clear understanding of these issues. We may moderate our behavior using our reason, or use it to investigate the consequences of actions, even using long chains of reasoning in the process, but the "bottom line" (Hume refers to it as the "last sentence"), is some act of evaluation. In another place he refers to reason as being the slave of the passions. Psychology, the study of human behavior, as it actually occurs, has demonstrated that we are able to modify our emotionally driven behavior as we acquire experience in growing older, as recounted in a fascinating article by Ken Livingston (2007).

The further influence of biology stems from the realization that some of our behavior dates back to times far in our evolutionary past. There are certain modes of conduct which clearly have

survival value: for example, pairing between male and female, empathy and caring for others. Such behaviors are passed on to succeeding generations and some of them become part of our moral heritage. Hume stated clearly that such instinctive behaviors were taught by nature itself. Darwin believed in this origin of morality and of course saw evolution as the means by which nature did its teaching. The theory has recently been revived by E.O. Wilson in his writings on consilience and sociobiology. We do not have a complete understanding of the biological mechanisms whereby this instinctive behavior is inherited but Wilson suggests that the explanation lies in the realm of epigenetic phenomena. A recent study by Hauser (2006) points to the parallels between instinctive moral behavior and the learning of an innate grammar as in Chomsky's theory of speech. In a recent interview for Scientific American, James D. Watson, co-discoverer of the double helix, stated that if he were to be starting again, he would work in this very area of the biological determination of behavior.

In an earlier essay, Finch (1992), I proposed that ethics and morality can be described in terms of systems. In the fifteen years since that paper was published I have had the occasion to read more extensively and reflect on the subject, and while the central point of the basis in system theory remains unchanged there are many facets which seem to clarify and amplify the thesis, which I hope to explain in a new essay for EPH. Only in the past few years that it is become possible to model with computer simulations the behavior of complexly motivated systems. The earlier essay did not convey the wide scope that Ethics has come to cover with the passage of time. To correct this impression the reader might well consider the compendium edited by Peter Singer (1991). This massive work contains some 47 original essays covering the range that the discipline now encompasses. It is interesting to note that in an Afterword to the volume Singer asserts that "If ethics is a jigsaw puzzle, then we are at the stage where we have laid out all the pieces, and are beginning to see the outline of the picture. For ethics is not a meaningless series of different things to different people in different times and places. Rather, against a background of historically and culturally diverse approaches to the question of how we ought to live, the degree of convergence is striking." Singer does not indicate the nature of the unification which he sees emerging. The concept of the meme, invented by Dawkins (1972), and applied to morality and ethics by Dennett (2003) has a definite similarity to system theory, which I hope to elucidate further. There is a clear need to establish a unified theory of ethics and the systems interpretation might contribute to the effort. Writers on ethics seem almost deliberately to emphasize the dissimilarities between various writers, but it seems to this author that progress toward a unified theory could be much advanced by stressing the common historical threads in the work of philosophers such as the idea of utility first proposed by Hume.

I am beginning to believe that ethics has its greatest importance when extended into the social realm. A society is any group of individuals including families, businesses, schools, churches, local and country-wide communities. Sheila and I are presently taking a course on political philosophy taught by Fernando Casas who is using Wolff's book (1996) as a text. Aristotle used the term politics for the subject of the correct conduct of any of these societies. The word derives from the greek "polis", the state. As Protagoras and Socrates argued we should aim to be good people in a good society. A primary problem becomes: who should rule? The Greeks themselves defined several types of system: aristocracy, democracy, oligarchy, plutocracy etc and we have learned a great deal about social systems under the various rubrics of sociology, political science, law, economics, business and management. There are many books and specialized disciplines about the conduct of most different types of society. There are some general principles which we have learned. Firstly, those who will be subjected to or affected by decisions should be consulted or represented during the decision making process. Secondly, evolutionary change is both necessary and to be preferred to revolutionary change. Thirdly, sweeping and simplistic ideological theories are suspect in comparison with piecemeal social engineering. Fourthly, the good society is an open society in which good ideas can always get a hearing wherever they are invented. The good society is not equivalent to socialism. It is true that many of the leading humanists of the thirties & forties, such as Lamont, Russell and Dewey, were "left-wing" but then so were most intellectuals at that time. In the end they all repudiated Soviet communism and it was other humanists such as Popper who helped lead the way towards a better appreciation of the merits of capitalism and free enterprise. As far as I know neither Hayek nor Rand called themselves humanists but they are both thinkers admired by many humanists today. We should also point out that democratic socialism, exemplified by Tony Blair's Labor government, has evolved a long way from its nineteenth century roots.

In my opinion, as Humanists or Free Thinkers we should especially avoid over-simplified ideological stances. Karl Marx was a brilliant thinker in his time, showing us how it is possible for a social system to get established. However we now know that Marxism in practice was a very poor model. It turned out to be totalitarian, brutal and inefficient. The people of the Soviet Union threw it out. Frederick Hayek explained in his writings why communism as an economic system was doomed to fail. Karl Popper emphasized the scientific shortcomings of Marx's predictions: revolutions which were supposed to start in the most advanced countries in fact occurred in backward ones. Ayn Rand, who grew up in communist Russia, understood better than most of us the virtues of the capitalist system. To paraphrase Churchill, capitalism is a poor economic system, but it is the best we have. And, we are still working to improve it! The multi-party democratic system serves us well. The parties are like competing companies of political contractors. I believe that legislation should be considered case by case, evaluated for its likely effects on different population groups. Personally I am opposed to being permanently attached to either of the two main parties, and see nothing wrong in assessing presidential candidates on their personal (rather than party) attributes. HOH has members who range from democrat to libertarian. I myself have voted in the

past for both democratic and republican presidential candidates depending on their experience and program.

The Humanist and Free-Thought communities are also societies. We Humanists and Free-Thinkers need to plan for the future but are notoriously unsuccessful in coming up with plans. I am coming to believe that the reason for this is that we are unable to reconcile the concepts of democracy and leadership. Perhaps we can address these problems in our research program in the coming period. Unfortunately there is not much written material to guide us in running the Humanist movement. We will have to find our ways forward by trial and error and by learning from general principles as listed above. The primary purpose of belonging to our movement is educational: learning and researching with talks, lectures, discussions and debates on a wide variety of subjects including history of ideas, ethics, politics etc. Another very important function of our movement is to provide community support. Our local groups should have celebrants, leaders and counselors to help members. Finally we have an outreach component. We need to participate in aid to the less fortunate, and in the wider political process. In the latter function a national organization with headquarters in Washington might be particularly helpful. I do not believe we are primarily charitable organizations, political parties or political organizations. Humanists who wish to dedicate themselves to some single issue are welcome to do so but must be prepared to join with others of various religious or philosophical persuasions. The AHA needs to publish a document with a regular update on positions of the Humanist movement. There are some issues, eg church-state separation which we can support more strongly than others. Finally, as regards our newsletters and journals it seems to me that the correct policy is to preserve a neutral forum where political issues can be discussed. Our newsletter should not be a vehicle for political advocacy or propaganda. In my opinion the only situation in which editorial neutrality can be set aside is when the integrity of the democratic process is in danger.

#### Notes:

Dawkins, Richard, (1976), "The Selfish Gene", Oxford University Press.

Dennett, Daniel C., (2003), "Freedom Evolves", Viking.

Finch, Robert D., (1992), "What We Owe to Others: Humanist Ethics and Systems." Essays in the Philosophy of Humanism, Eds. M. Hillar and H.R. Leuchtag. Vol. 1, 41-54.

Grayling, A.C. (2003), "What is Good? The Search for the Best Way to Live" Weidenfeld & Nicholson.

Hauser, Marc D., (2006), "Moral Minds: How Nature Designed our Universal Sense of Right and Wrong" Harper Collins.

Livingston, Ken, (2006) "God, Aristotle, and the New Science of Happiness" in Free Inquiry, 26, 32-38.

Singer, Peter, Ed., (1991), "A Companion to Ethics", Blackwell.

Wolff, Jonathan, (1996), "An Introduction to Political Philosophy" Oxford University Press.

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# Ron's Ramblings

By Ron Titus

[1] YT (Yours Truly) attended the HOH (Humanists of Houston) monthly brunch meeting wherein all attendees are given three minutes to share in a discussion their thoughts, ideas, and/or comments. The thoughts that I jotted down for comment (some expressed, some not) were:

(1) The topics were (a) humanism without religion: Is it useful for Humanists to embrace or shun religious topics? and (b) evangelical atheists: Is it useful for Humanists to be evangelistic?

(2) I began my comments with Bob Finch's famous quote (I heard him say it more than once, but I do believe that I've repeated it more times than he said it): "I am an atheist. But I never think about god until I come to these meetings."

(3) With some regret, I am still an atheist (because I believe that gods do not exist outside of people's minds). I would prefer to be a nontheist because nontheists supposedly believe that the existence or nonexistence of gods doesn't matter.

(4) I describe myself as a retired professional theologian; I studied and taught theology for a good many years, I did so as a profession, and I still think about it a lot even though now only academically.

(5) Apologetics is the art or science of verbally defending one's position. It is often used by religious folks. I find that I still use mine. 'And I wish to break the habit.

(6) It was suggested that religion would be just fine if it could lose its theism. But is there such a thing as atheistic religion or religious atheism? Can one be a religious atheist?

(7) Bill Frisk made an interesting and useful suggestion: Better than saying "I believe" is saying "I conclude". 'Because it is based on reason rather than on unreasonable faith. It is not called "blind" faith for nothing.

(8) Idiocracy is a non-belief in reason. Is our nation an idiocracy?

(9) Education is still the end-all solution to most of life's problems.

(10) Instead of shaking hands as a greeting, the ancient Romans used both of their own hands to hold both of the hands of the people whom they were greeting. How so? 'To keep the greetees from using a sword with one hand and a knife with the other.

(11) Many Orientals use bowing as a greeting instead of handshaking. Aditya Mishra added that it was much more sanitary.

(12) I use hugging as a greeting because ... well, ask me about it some day; it's too long of a story.

(13) I took delight when I heard mentioned "social economic justice". Why did I think "as opposed to libertarian freetrade?"

(14) The role of a prophet is two-fold: to comfort the disturbed and to disturb the comfortable.

(15) This turned out to be one of the better meetings for me, because I learned so much.

[2] YT attended the HCOF (Houston Church Of Freethought) service at the Holiday Inn near the Galleria. Rice University Professor Dr Alastair Norcross made a presentation on "Thinking About Ethics In A World Without God". Tidbits:

(1) Is murder bad because God says so, or does God say so because murder is bad?

(2) 72 virgins = 72 raisins.

(3) Four approaches to Ethics without God are: Bentham's utilitarianism, Kant's universal behavior (What's good for the goose is good for the gander, and acting for ends is better than acting for means), Rouseau's social contract, and virtue for its own sake.

(4) During a very brief Q&A period, Bob Finch's question about the relationship of ethics and politics led me to think ... Is ethical behavior in the USA evolving from morality/immorality to legality/illegality? To wit: Lying is okay when not under oath. Torture is okay when not explicitly prohibited by law.

[3] Two other programs that I enjoyed recently: Darwin Day at Borders Bookstore (I counted over 50 attendees) and Presidents Day at the UU Fellowship (James Hodge came dressed as George Washington).

[4] I got a mailing soliciting a financial contribution for the National Coalition Against Censorship. It's ironic that I am asked to pay for what I already theoretically and legally have as guaranteed by the US Constitution.

[5] When I first experienced as a kid that it started to rain while the sun was still out, I ran to my mother to point out this strange and yet very interesting phenomenon.

She explained the phenomenon to her young brood (me and my then three brothers), "This is a sign that the devil is beating his wife."

She told this to us in a jocose manner, so we kids accepted it as a joke or funny saying, and laughed.

While reflecting on the inevitability of my mortality, I found myself crying and laughing at the same time.

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# Food for thought and/or thought for indigestion

By Ron Titus

[1] (According to) Richard Glen Boire, senior fellow on law and policy at the Center for Cognitive Liberty & Ethics in Davis, Calif., "some schools require kids – not diagnosed with ADHD by doctors – to take Ritalin to attend school."  
[Francine Russo, "How to change a personality", *Time*, 2007 0129, P 101]

[2] "In questions of science, the authority of a thousand is not worth the humble reasoning of a single individual."  
[Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), *Writer's Almanac*, 2007 0215]

[3] The argument is not that we lack consciousness but that we overestimate the conscious control of behavior.  
[Robert R Provine, quoted by Kenneth W Krause, "Intelligence and Creative Magnificence", *Skeptical Inquirer*, 2007 03/04, P 72]

[4] (E)vidence seems to suggest that circular reasoning is every bit as common as intelligent life.  
[Kenneth W Krause, "Intelligence and Creative Magnificence", *Skeptical Inquirer*, 2007 03/04, P 71]

[5] Freethinking is a redundancy. If thinking is not free, it is not thinking.

[6] Successful lying depends on ignorance. Gullibility is a form of ignorance.

[7] "We have to change free trade to fair trade."  
[Congressman Conyers, summarizing a remark of activist actor Danny Glover, KPFT's *Democracy Now*, 2007 0216f0934]

[8] Although the name of the infamous "School of the Americas" in Fort Benning GA was changed to the "Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation" to help improve (sanitize/whitewash) its public image, its practice of exporting torture techniques remains the same.

[9] "The Constitution doesn't say every individual in the United States or every citizen is hereby granted or assured the right of habeas corpus."  
[US Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, *National Catholic Reporter*, 2007 0202, P 3]

[10] Torture is inhuman. It is inhuman to torture.

[11] Hierarchy of blame goes like this,

Why isn't there a national news organization that appeals to free thinkers? The establishment news is telling us tonight that there was bad intelligence that got us into Bush's war, but I would be careful to remember that it was Bush who selectively chose the intelligence he wanted to trust while he ignored his advisors and ultimately was told by his false, state approved, man made god to go to war. Why doesn't a reporter publicly question the obvious confusion here? How can some confuse the situation here when it was Bush's god that told Bush to go to war yet now it's being credited to "bad intelligence"? There was no "intelligence" involved here; it was Bush's a\*\*hole god that told us to go to war. He took his evil false god's advice despite any good or bad intelligence or advisor input. No, the way I see it there are three places of blame for Bush's war. The first is the fish head, ignorant amerikan voting public. They vote for all of this republican and democratic crap we have to live in and they love it and only want more. They can't get enough. So they get what they deserve, Bush, which gives the rest of us the big shaft. The second is the false, state approved, man

made god that Bush (on his knees of course) prays to. This evil false man made state approved god told Bush to go to his war and this god of his needs to be pointed out publicly for such. Then, finally and lastly we can blame Bush. He's only doing what he was enabled to do by ignorant amerikan voters. Even after the irresponsible, yo-yo, backsliding, whacko voting public finally told him enough was enough in the last (ha ha ha) elections, the chaos of democracy makes it possible for him to be a lame duck and still continue with this buildup that he, and for sure, his evil state approved god obviously, wants.

My 2,  
Tony

[Tony Messina, "Who's to blame?", HOH Roundtable, 2007 0213tu0758]

[12] Is it Dubya leadership? Or Dubya leadership?

[13] "Meanwhile, religion continues to be granted far too much respect and too little critical examination in our culture and mainstream media. We need to change the cultural climate so as to make supernatural, occult, and faith based claptrap feel unwelcome and to make adults ashamed of the blithe surrender of their otherwise sound minds to idiocy.

We need climate change. Bullshit levels are rising globally, threatening to submerge intellectually low-lying areas. Much of the United States is already inundated. Temperatures are rising; IQs are dropping. Four of the five stupidest years on record have occurred since 2000."

Review of Jack Huberman's book *The Quotable Atheist: Ammunition for Nonbelievers, Political Junkies, Gadflies, and Those Generally Hell-Bound* (Nation Books, 2007), forwarded by email to HOH Roundtable from Jim Knierien, 2007 0215]

[14] "What distinguishes humans is that we do have the ability to reason, think, and exercise free will based on moral and ethical values."

[Kate Michelman, American Humanist Association brochure]

[15] "I am a humanist, which means, in part, that I have tried to behave decently without expectation of rewards or punishment after I am dead."

[Kurt Vonnegut, *ibid*]

[16] "The knowledge that immortality is an illusion ... liberates all our energy and time for the realization and extension of the happy potentialities of this good earth."

[Corliss Lamont, *ibid*]

[17] "We are fortunate: we are alive; we are powerful; the welfare of our civilization and our species is in our hands. If we do not speak for earth, who will? If we are not committed to our own survival, who will be?"

[Carl Sagan, *ibid*]

[18] Stop worrying about god's existence, and start worrying about our own.

[Carl Sagan in Lauren Becker's review of *The Varieties of Scientific Experience: A Personal View of the Search for God*, "A Renewal of Sagan's Voice on Science, Religion, and Survival", *Skeptical Inquirer*, 2007 03/04, P 68]

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**Letters:**

From: jimmydunne@sbcglobal.net  
Subject: Dan Patrick's religious views

FYI--

Once again Sen. Dan Patrick is pushing his religion on everyone he comes in contact with. He does this on his radio program and to groups where he is invited to speak.

Patrick should know that there is separation of church and state in the U.S. and he should leave his religious views out of his work at the capitol.

Jimmy Dunne 281.584.9707

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**Press Room**

## **NEW FUNCTIONALITY ON HOH WEBSITE**

**Now your *Humanists of Houston* website is more than just informational - it's also functional!**

It is now possible to **join** the Humanists of Houston through the website, using your credit card. You can also use your PayPal account if you have one, but you don't need one. In addition, previous members can now easily renew their dues online. Also, we now have a functioning donation button in the left-hand menu column, which charitable folks can use to make occasional donations in any amount they see fit. To see these new features, please visit [www.humanistsofhouston.org](http://www.humanistsofhouston.org).

Lastly, we now have a new option called the *HOH Patron Program*. For those who might be willing and able to contribute more than the modest yearly dues with a small monthly payment, becoming an HOH Patron would be a wonderful way to support the advertising, event, and other concepts we have planned for this year and beyond. These will help HOH host our community and promote Humanism in Houston. If you are interested in learning more or signing up, please see [www.humanistsofhouston.org/patron.htm](http://www.humanistsofhouston.org/patron.htm).

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## **Join the Humanist Video Challenge**

Express a Positive Vision of Humanism and Win \$500!

The American Humanist Association, EvolveFISH, and Rational Response have teamed up to bring the positive message of Humanism to YouTube!

And you're just the person to help make it happen.

Participation is simple. No matter what your age, and whether or not you're a member of a Humanist organization, you are eligible to participate if you have a North American street address. All you need do is create a short Web video presenting a positive vision of Humanism and upload it to YouTube by the contest deadline of Thursday, May 3, 2007 -- the National Day of Reason in the United States.

Please include the Happy Humanist logo at least once in the piece, preferably at the beginning and end. You can use video, FLASH, animation -- whatever you like -- as long as it can be uploaded to YouTube.

A diverse team of judges will then determine the best video of all qualified entries. The winner will receive a prize of \$500 and have her or his video displayed on the website of the American Humanist Association. The video will also be shown at the AHA National Conference in Portland, Oregon, June 7-10, 2007. The second place winner will receive a

prize of \$300, the third place winner \$100. Those receiving an honorable mention will each be sent a Humanist book. Winners will be announced by June 1, 2007.

**Instructions:**

Once you've shot your positive Humanist vision video, take these two easy steps:

1. Load your video onto YouTube with the tag HumanistVision.
2. When the video appears on YouTube, send its URL to the e-mail address <mailto:HumanistVision@americanhumanist.org>. Also include a complete North American mailing address so we can send your prize money if you are a winner. (Sorry, those using addresses from other continents are NOT eligible.) We will post entries on our YouTube site so others can view them.

For official contest rules and further details, be sure to go to <http://www.americanhumanist.org/humanistvision-rules.php>

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POST MASTER: Please return undelivered copies to sender. Thank you.

12086 Sela Lane

Houston, TX 77072-3341

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### Membership and Contact Information:

Whether you are a Humanist, atheist, or Freethinker seeking to pursue a meaningful life without theism, or simply reexamining your beliefs and exploring the Freethought approach to knowledge and moral issues, consider contacting one of our organizations. We will be happy to answer any questions about Freethought, Humanism, or atheism.

Humanists of Houston (HOH): Houston chapter of the American Humanist Association (AHA) / Founded 1978 / Tom Brucia (281-273-9030) <mailto:tbrucia@houston.rr.com>

Humanist Association of Montgomery County, Isaac Asimov Chapter (Asimov Humanists): Montgomery County chapter of the American Humanist Association / Curt Loose <mailto:contact@asimovhumanists.org>

*Houston Church Of Freethought (HCOF)* / Art Fay <mailto:afay3@houston.rr.com>

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### Statement of Principles:

*The following are the core principles upon which our member-organizations are allied. Individual member-organizations may have missions beyond the scope of the Alliance itself, but any Houston-based group whose mission is compatible with these principles is welcome to join our community of organizations.*

We are committed to freedom of thought and expression, as well as human rights and equality.

Our beliefs are based on healthy skepticism, physical evidence, the scientific method, and naturalistic philosophy - - unfettered by faith, mysticism, the supernatural, or any other form of superstition.

We stand for the pursuit of moral excellence, ethical integrity, and social responsibility based on humanity's needs and happiness in *this* world and not in an alleged "after life."

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