



# HOUSTON FREETHOUGHT ALLIANCE

## Newsletter

### For the Humanist and Freethought Community

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#### Calendar of Events:

**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\\*](#).

**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\\*](#)

**Date & Time Varies By Event** | *Humanists of Houston (HOH) Young Adults Club* | Different events geared toward the 18-30s crowd. To get in on this group's activities, please see [www.HumanistsOfHouston.org/youngadults.htm](http://www.HumanistsOfHouston.org/youngadults.htm) or sign up to the Young Adults email list at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/HOH\\_Young\\_Adults](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/HOH_Young_Adults). | Contact: [Daniel Strain\\*](#)

**Saturday, December 8** | 10:30 am | *HOH Women's Club* | Ziggy's Healthy Grill, 2202 W. Alabama at Greenbriar, Houston. | Meeting on the 2nd Saturday of each month | Contact: [Sheila Finch\\*](#)

**Saturday, December 8** | 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: [Ross Henry\\*](#)

**Sunday, December 9** | 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, December 15** | 2:30 pm - 4:30 pm | *Humanists of Houston (HOH) Main Monthly Gathering* | See Solstice party announcement pg.2 – This month only | Contact: [Daniel Strain\\*](#)

**Sunday, December 16** | 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\\*](#)

**Friday, December 21** | 5:00 pm | *Newsletter Deadline* | all articles, letters, and submissions of interest are welcome if on editor's desk, postmarks notwithstanding (e-mail format required), | Contact: [Jim Knierien\\*](#)

**Saturday, December 22** | 10:30 am - 12:00 noon | *HOH Religion, Society, and Ethics Club* | The club will not meet in December to allow everyone to participate in the Solstice Party on Saturday the 15<sup>th</sup>, Contact: [Marian Hillar\\*](#)

**Sunday, December 23** | 10:30 am - 12:00 noon | *HOH Ideas Club* | The club will not meet in December to allow everyone to participate in the Solstice Party on Saturday the 15<sup>th</sup> | Book reviews by members are held on fourth Sundays monthly, Contact: [Bob Finch\\*](#)

**Thursday, December 27** | 6:00 pm | *HOH Humanist Contemplatives Club* | Location varies. Please see the WEB site for information on our next session's location | Meet the fourth Thursday of the month | WEB site: <http://www.humanistsofhouston.org/contemplatives>

**Sunday, January 6** | 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, January 6** | 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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Alliance member's reports:

## Houston Atheists Meetup

Nigel Bedrock Reporting

With 383 members at the time of writing the Houston Atheists Meetup group is now the third largest in the world, possibly in the universe! We regularly have 25+ in attendance for socializing and general chit-chat. Our main Meetup, at Cafe Express (Woodway at Voss) has been very successful of late with our group being a very visible (and loud) presence within the shadow of Second Baptist Megachurch.

We're still trying out venues on the West side of town for the first weekend of the month - it's hard to satisfy all tastes and the busy schedules of Meetup members. Still we persevere! Suggestions for venues that cater for bookings of 30+ on the West side are welcome.

We're proud to announce our first married couple that met through the Meetup group - Bruce and Erin Lovell. We wish them a long and happy togetherness.

[nige\\_the\\_atheist@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:nige_the_atheist@yahoo.co.uk)

## Houston Church of Freethought

The November 2007 service of The Houston Church of Freethought program was:

Listen

Presenter: Ed Uthman

Fragmentation

Presenter: Jim Ashmore

FtoTM (FreeThinker of the Month) (Jared Diamond)

Presenter: Tammy Rezni

## THE HUMANISTS OF HOUSTON (HOH)

*Promoting reason in Houston Since 1978*

**December 15, 2007**

### WINTER SOLSTICE CELEBRATION!

Mark your calendars! The Alliance-wide Winter Solstice celebration is coming this December 15th, 1:00pm, Emerson Unitarian Church, Westwood Hall, 1900 Bering Drive, Houston, 77057! **This is the largest regular event for Humanists, atheists, agnostics, and freethinkers in the Houston area**, with members from all five *Houston Freethought Alliance* groups coming together to celebrate. **Space is limited so RSVP soon** by calling Art Fay at 281-933-2986 or emailing: [freethinker1943@yahoo.com](mailto:freethinker1943@yahoo.com). For more information on this holiday, and pictures of last year's event, please visit

[www.HumanistsOfHouston.org/wintersolstice.htm](http://www.HumanistsOfHouston.org/wintersolstice.htm).

**Current**

### CHILD CARE AVAILABLE AT HOH MAIN MONTHLY GATHERING

HOH Gatherings are aimed at positive Humanist concerns and include presentation as well as group discussion.

Thanks to Ms. Clara Lee, who has volunteered to baby sit

in an adjacent room during the HOH [Monthly Gatherings](#), those with children can now attend with ease. Clara is a high school student with experience as a summer camp counselor. For parents who wish to do this, **please RSVP to 832-778-7382 or [humanistsofhouston@yahoo.com](mailto:humanistsofhouston@yahoo.com) so we can know to ask Clara to be there and be prepared.** We will provide you with direct contact information to Clara so that you can feel free to ask questions or make any other arrangements you'd like. But in general, you need only show up and the whole family can now be welcome!

**November 18, 2007**

### HOH ELECTION RESULTS

At the November Main Monthly Gathering, Officers were elected: Daniel Strain was re-elected to another term as president, Roxie Deaton was elected to a new term as vice-president, Jerry Harris was re-elected as Secretary, and Ron Jones was re-elected as Treasurer. Tom Brucia was also re-elected to the Development Fund Committee. In addition to these votes, a [five-year plan](#) was amended and voted in. This plan will help chart the course of HOH in both the near and far future.

**November 18, 2007**

### HOH YOUNG ADULTS CLUB LUNCH & BOWLING

The new HOH Young Adults Club recently got together for lunch and bowling on Sunday for a great time. To see pictures and learn more about the HOH Young Adults Club, please contact Daniel Strain at 832-778-7382 or visit [www.HumanistsOfHouston.org/youngadults.htm](http://www.HumanistsOfHouston.org/youngadults.htm). If you would like to get in on talking with everyone in the Club about fun things to do in the future, please sign up at [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/HOH\\_Young\\_Adults](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/HOH_Young_Adults)

**Current**

### LOWER PRICES FOR HOH MERCHANDISE

Prices have just been lowered for every item in the [HOH Store](#). **They now reflect the minimum we are able to charge** for each item, given our costs. Your purchase of these items is a great way to help spread awareness of Humanism and the organization, as well as being great conversation-starters! Included are: Basic HOH T-shirt (\$8.99), Navy Blue HOH T-Shirt (\$18.99), HOH Long Sleeve T-Shirt with front & back image (\$21.99), HOH Mug (\$10.99), HOH Large Mug (\$11.99), HOH Teddy Bear (\$12.99), HOH Humanism Button (\$1.25), HOH 10-pack of Buttons (\$10), and the **new HOH Bumper Stickers** (\$2.99). These can be purchased online at [www.cafepress.com/hohshop](http://www.cafepress.com/hohshop).

**November 23, 2007**

### HUMANISM DISCUSSED ON HOUSTON KPFT

90.1 FM, [Pacifica Houston](#), has recently discussed secular Humanism on its program, Peaceful Coexistence. You can listen to the program by going to <http://archive.kpft.org> and finding "Peace Hour - Peaceful Coexistence" for Friday, November 23, 2007. Thanks to HOH Member Ariel Thomann for reporting this!

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## HOH Ideas Club

Bob Finch Reporting

The Ideas Club meets to discuss important concepts in the history, philosophy, and ethics of Humanism. We are also interested in social, economic and political issues as well as what Humanism implies for future worlds. Participants usually base their presentations on a book.

The November meeting was a discussion based on the book "Religion Explained" by Pascal Boyer. C.J. Renzi presented some of the findings Boyer made during his research. Boyer maintains that religion comprises numerous distinct beliefs reinforced by social mores.

The club will not meet in December to allow everyone to participate in the Solstice Party on Saturday the 15<sup>th</sup>. We will reconvene on January 27<sup>th</sup> to hear Tammy Renzi talk about Ayaan Hirsi Ali's "Infidel"

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## HOH Religion, Society, and Ethics Club

The November meeting was a discussion of the Psychology of Atheism according to Nietzsche's third essay in "Genealogy of Morals". Marian Hillar made the presentation.

The club will not meet in December to allow everyone to participate in the Solstice Party on Saturday the 15<sup>th</sup>. We will reconvene on January 26<sup>th</sup> to hear Sara Simon discuss "Purpose for your Life" by Abraham Maslow and Lyle Simpson

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## THE SECULAR STUDENTS OF RICE

The annual "Ask an Atheist" forum was held on the campus of Rice University on November 15th at 7:00pm. After some submitted questions the audience members asked questions and got answers to whatever questions they might had about atheism.

This year, our panelists were: Dan Barker (co-president of the Freedom from Religion Foundation), Dr. Barry Sullender (Professor of Evolutionary Biology at Rice), and Arturo Munoz (a student of philosophy at Rice).

All three panelists made an excellent presentation of the non-theist point of view.

As your local student atheist organization promoting the cause to a nearly all-Christian university, we need all the support we can get. For information on other "Secular Students of Rice" events contact Alex Gorischek <mailto:alex.gorischek@gmail.com>.

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## THE GOD OF THE KARAJAS

By Felipe A. Haxsel

The Karajas (Carajás in Portuguese) are indians living on the shores of the Araguaya River, deep in the Amazon Rain Forest. Only in the beginning of the last century full contact was made with the civilized whites. Among their peculiar way of live, costumes and traditions is the belief on the Karaja's God.

According to their myth, God created them immortals inside the water, where they happily lived (the living cells started in water and not in Paradise, so this is more scientific than the Judeo-Christian story). The Creator made one restriction. They could not cross and not come out of a light hole that was located in a spot on the side of the water. If they would do it, they would lose their immortality and suffering from diseases and maladies as the ones who lived outside.

One day a young warrior, very curious, decided to take the risk. When he surfaced close to the shores of the big river running through the forest, he saw the beauty of nature, the colors of the birds and flowers, the different animals, the Sun and the shades that the light produced on the trees, the Moon and the stars shining at night, the variety of animals, the myriad of sounds.

He went back and told the others how nice it was outside. After some discussion everybody decided to leave the safe place and to risk the future in the marvelous outside world. But first they went to talk to their God. He told them that they would not be immortals any more and that there was a hardship in order to survive. Then he asked them if they really had decided to go. Unanimously they said yes. He wished them good luck and let them go.

Nothing else happened.

No God's jealousy, no vengeance, quiet different from the Judeo-Christian's God, who ban Adam and Eve from the Paradise with an Angel guarding the entrance with a flame spade, cursing all descendants and casting all evil over them, specially the women.

The Karajas' God is calm, doesn't punish and doesn't blame anybody for what has happened. It is their free choice. There is no guilty feeling, no hell to go if you do not repent. He knows that the Humankind wishes to be free to decide their best ways and does not accept interference on his decisions not even from God.

The Human Being has an innate desire for freedom and to choose his ways by himself and this is the beauty and the greatness of Life!

I am really sorry that I was not born under the Karaja's God. How nice it would have been!

(Adapted from an article by Fritz Utzeri in Jornal do Brasil, March 21, 2001).

## Research Project: Search for the Good

### Part 9. The Methods of Ethics

By Robert D. Finch

In this installment of the Search for the Good I want to discuss the methods by which we arrive at ethical decisions. One of the most thorough and systematic treatises on moral philosophy of the nineteenth century was Sidgwick's 1874 book "The Methods of Ethics". It covered a wider range of topics than any previous work on the subject with meticulous precision in wording, clarity of exposition and care in arguments, as attested by Schneewind (1977) and Williams (1995). Sidgwick seems to have been the first to argue that the methodology of ethics is important to our moral reasoning. Sidgwick saw the methods of ethics as threefold: egoism, intuitionism and utilitarianism. In the present context we might equate egoism to following one's emotions, intuitionism as finding principles through higher level cognitive processes and utilitarianism as finding systems meeting the desires of the larger society. One hundred years before Hauser, Sidgwick undertook an extensive study of commonsense morality from which he extracted some low level generalities. From these low level results he derived three principles which were required to arrive at his final ethical system: 1) a variant of the golden rule; 2) a long term outlook, and 3) a need to take the point of view of the universe. Williams (1995) explains that Sidgwick follows these arguments through and finally concludes that intuitionism is in fact equivalent to utilitarianism. As I mentioned in the introductory installment of this series an important objective of the research is to understand why ethicists have overlooked the application of systems science to the subject as outlined in previous papers -- see Finch (1992). Sidgwick seemed to be pointing at such an interpretation and it may be that he might have expressed himself in such a way if he had had access to the systems nomenclature developed in the mid twentieth century. Even if this is wishful thinking on my part, it does seem that there is a revival of interest in Sidgwick's work, as evidenced by Schultz's book from 2004, Henry Sidgwick: The Eye of the Universe, and rationalism seems to be getting the upper-hand in Philosophy once more.

For this reason I thought it would be interesting to review recent developments in philosophy, particularly as they relate to ethics in the hope of finding some linkage to systems theory. We can gain some insight in this connection from three papers in the Blackwell Companion to Philosophy (1996). The first paper is by Searle on "Contemporary Philosophy in the United States". This is of interest firstly because of his stress on the widespread transition to the analytic approach pioneered by Frege, Moore, Russell and Wittgenstein. In short there has been a change in approach from an earlier historical perspective to one in which particular issues are chosen for investigation in rather the same way in which a topic might be selected for a paper in mathematics or physics. This lesson seems to have taken hold in Ethics. Searle explains how the logical positivists in the mid twentieth century found that most ethical, political and religious discussion was neither analytical nor empirical and thus without meaningful interpretation. Fortunately for the ethically inclined this situation was overturned by a number of developments which included Quine's argument (1953) that there are no statements whose

meaning can be totally exact, so that a strict analytic – synthetic distinction is invalid. This has been largely accepted and philosophy is no longer seen as something sharply distinguished from science. Another development was the elucidation of "speech acts" by Austin (1962) who saw that utterances such as "I pronounce you man and wife" are meaningful although neither descriptive nor evaluative. A third important event was Rawl's publication of "A Theory of Justice" in 1971 which received great attention and was clearly a meaningful ethical theory. The final development of great importance which Searle mentions is the growth of cognitive science and in particular the blossoming of parallel distributive processing and its impact on the theory of mind.

But Searle says nothing about Ethics in his "Companion" paper, and says so, leaving that subject to Bernard Williams (1996) in a "second look" at contemporary philosophy. Williams argues that if philosophers are to have a claim to attention they should be prepared to offer ethical theories. He maintains that there are three basic types of such theories which are sometimes called consequentialist, deontological and virtue theories. The second category puts an emphasis on duty or obligation. We might suppose that the theorists are essentially political philosophers of liberal to libertarian views. Presumably, although Williams does not call them out, the group might include writers from Plato and Aristotle through Aquinas, Hobbes, Marx, Rawls, Nozick and Habermas, to name a few. Williams' calling for ethical theories seems to me to be one step closer to systems theory. Had he called for making the objective of ethicists the construction of complex pluralistic and adaptive systems I could have been sure we were in complete agreement. At one point he actually speaks of "schema" (a term used in systems theory) rather than "theories". But Williams is concerned that the impact of ethical theories on moral philosophy is very dubious. Perhaps the difficulty comes from the use of the word "theory" which is usually reserved for explanations in natural science. It calls to mind Popper's objection (1957) to Marx's work as being a scientific theory which was quite wrong in its predictions. Human arrangements do not have the exactness of laws of physics. To describe ourselves and our societies we have to think in terms of systems governed by schema. But such schema could incorporate values such as truth, justice, benevolence and so forth. They could be expressed in terms of behavioral rules and carry emotional connotations, be expressed in analytic terms and be tested by evaluation as applied in the lives of social groups or individuals.

Dale Jamiesan (1991), in an article in the Singer Compendium on "Method and Moral Theory", indicates that philosophers have generally awakened to difficulties in the methodology of moral theory, but only recently. He cites the work of a number ethicists besides that of Bernard Williams already alluded to. The larger sceptical company of anti-theorists includes Jonathan Dancy, John McDowell, Susan Woolf, Robert Fullinwider, Michael Stocker, Alisdair MacIntyre and Annette Baier. Although these writers are

not in agreement in their criticisms, Jamiesan discusses their ideas and his own and comes to the conclusion that the general topic is “large, important and underexplored”. Jamiesan describes what he terms the dominant conception of moral theories, as being abstract structures which sort agents, actions and outcomes into categories. Categories include: virtuous/vicious; permitted / forbidden; good/bad; best/worst; supererogatory/obligatory. Different theories take different categories as primary. For example, utilitarianism takes the goodness of outcome as primary and then derives rightness of action and virtuousness as agents. Deontology on the other hand takes rightness of action as primary. Jamiesan associates the dominant conception with Henry Sidgwick and a group of others including John Rawls. The anti-theorists show a scepticism of authority and tend to emphasize character and motivation. They tend to emphasize Aristotle and Hume. Anscombe (1981) objected to the law conception of ethics and remarked that God is gone and “it is as if the notion of the criminal were to remain when the criminal law and courts had been abolished and forgotten”. Feminism flourished in the 1970’s. Alisdair MacIntyre and Bernard Williams are prominent in wondering how ethics will survive in an age of pluralism and liberalism. Annette Baier (1985) notes that men focus on obligation, women on love. She hopes that they can be reconciled with trust.

Jamiesan notes that the anti-theorists do not succeed in showing that we would be better off without moral theory. Real people engage in moral theorizing in everyday life such as role reversal tests, appeals to possible outcomes and pointing out responsibilities and obligations. We are driven to evaluate our moral theorizing systematically and this can result in further theories or theory fragments. Surely these theories must have an effect on our moral practices. Jamiesan then gives his own review of the methods of theorizing. Philosophers look to epistemology to identify principles that govern theory building (see Grayling (1996)). The two most influential approaches are foundationalism and coherentism. Foundationalism uses beliefs that need no justification as a basis for justification of beliefs that do need justification. The problem here is how some beliefs require no justification – traditionally self justifying or self-evident beliefs. Jamiesan’s belief that there are such things as beliefs may be a self justifying belief. Some philosophers think there are commonsense propositions that we cannot help but believe e.g. that there is an external world. Logical truths are usually accepted as self-evident (eg all ravens are ravens), but logical truths are not rich enough to yield interesting moral theory. Attempts to construct the world from the incorrigible deliverances of the senses have been abandoned since attacks by Wittgenstein, Quine and others. Foundationalism is even more problematic in ethics than in general epistemology since it was never clear what was to do the work of sense data. Foundationalism dominated

epistemology for the first half of the twentieth century but now there are few moral theorists who endorse it, and nowadays some version of coherentism is the dominant view. Beliefs can only be justified by their relation to other beliefs. According to Jamiesan the most influential form is Rawls’ method of reflective equilibrium. This starts with a set of considered beliefs; we formulate general principles to account for them and then revise both principles and and beliefs in the light of each other until an equilibrium is reached. Jamiesan remarks that both foundationalism and coherentism start in mid-stream, ie they both begin and end with moral intuitions and they both want to systematize our intuitions. Therefore they both need to identify our moral intuitions. This is commonly done using examples from literature, from real life or from the imagination. He discusses such examples at some length and points out that some that have been posited are very questionable, especially when they involve violations of the laws of physics. He concludes that we should only use hypothetical examples where we have a relatively clear idea as to what would happen with different choices. Examples involving teletransporters or cats provided with human brains or other non-physical constructions are very suspect.

Through the reading performed in preparing for this essay and some other input I believe that I now see the outlines of an answer to my puzzlement over the failure of the philosophical community to frame ethics in the context of systems theory. It seems to me now that the papers cited by Williams, Jamieson, Quine and Austin and others are in fact using systems related concepts. The ideas of “systems theory” came to fruition during and after World War II but not in such a way that there was a coherent body of knowledge anywhere near as well known as the basics of physical science. In particular, the idea of recognizing a system from its constancy, which can be traced to Hume, himself a giant of moral theory, should have been a cornerstone in the understanding of ethics as systems. I am presently reading Finlayson’s book (2005) about Habermas with some interest because it seems to me that it is in Habermas’ combination of philosophical and social theoretic expertise that we might expect to find systems concepts best understood. In subsequent installments I will discuss how as humanists we can best bring together our individual lives with our social behavior to serve such goals as expanding knowledge, preserving the physical environment, to contribute and uphold the world of aesthetics and to pursue justice and a more benevolent society. Our aims should be centered on pluralistic systems and we should be committed to work for them as professionals, scientists, leaders, artists, lovers, parents and children. The humanist movement should be an attempt to develop theories and systems which will be of real utility as described in the writings of Kurtz (1983, 1988, 1989), Storer (1980) and Lamont (1982).

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# Socinianism and Arminianism. Antitrinitarians, Calvinists and Cultural Exchange in Seventeenth-Century Europe

Martin Mulsow and Jan Rohls, eds., (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2005)

Book Review by Marian Hillar

Socinianism is the most important and most consequential movement in the sixteenth century that grew out of the critique of Catholic dogmatism, especially of the trinitarian speculations and eventually developed into the Deism and Enlightenment and gave foundations for the modern times. This book is a collection of eleven essays which were presented at a symposium Socinianism and Cultural Exchange which was organized by the editors on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of July 2003 at the Ludwig Maximilian University. The symposium was sponsored by the Center for Collaborative Research "Pluralization and Authority in the Early Modern Era."

The subject of the present volume is a study of interactions and relationship between antitrinitarianism and reformed Protestantism: Dutch Remonstrants, some French Huguenots, and English Latitudinarians. It is divided into five parts.

The first part, Introduction, sets the scene in two essays. Jan Rohls in an essay "Calvinism, Arminianism and Socinianism in the Netherlands until the Synod of Dort" gives a brief outline of the religious scenery in this country from the Congress of Dort in 1572, which established relative religious freedom to the Synod of Dort in 1618/1619. The dominant church was the Calvinist-inspired Dutch Reformed Church. An important role was played by the University of Leiden, founded by William of Orange in 1574. Rohls traces the history of theological controversies and disputes initiated by disputes in 1578 around the issue of predestination connected with the right relationship between the church and state. Jacobus Arminius, Reformed pastor and later professor at Leiden university, became a prominent exponent of opposition to the Calvinist predestination doctrine. The church became split into two camps, Remonstrants and the Contra-Remonstrants after Johannes Wtenbogaert wrote in 1610 a tractate entitled "Remonstrance." The other controversy which was to persist for a long time not only in the Netherlands but in entire Europe arose around the doctrines introduced by the Socinian visitors from Poland in 1597/98, Christophorus Ostorodt and Andreas Voidovius, and who influenced Conrad Vorstius (1569-1622), the first Socinian in the Netherlands. Vorstius was nominated in 1611 to replace Arminius as professor at Leiden. With him began the Socinian discussions in the Republic. Discussions and debates were characteristic events in the Republic and they were centered on the theological doctrines, especially of satisfaction, predestination and on the church-state relationship. To resolve the issues between the Remonstrants and Contra-Remonstrants the States General appointed a committee to convene a National Synod on November 13, 1618 and which ended on May 9, 1619. The Synod was really a tribunal to convict the Remonstrants over five articles of faith. The Synod confirmed the teachings of the Contra-Remonstrants as legitimate in the Republic, and established five conservative canons as the foundation of the public church. It allowed, however, a certain degree of interpretation of the canons. Remonstrants not complying were subject to exile. The persecution finally ended in 1625 when Frederik Henrik became the Stadholder. The decrees of the Synod were abolished in 1631 and a relative tolerance was

established, a confessional pluralism, which included Remonstrants, Contra-Remonstrants, Catholics, Mennonites and Socinians. The second paper by Martin Mulsow "The New Socinians: Intertextuality and Cultural Exchange in Late Socinianism" discusses the further development of the original Socinianism of the XVI<sup>th</sup> century into a new Socinianism in the XVII<sup>th</sup> century which is a "product of cultural exchanges and transfers .... In other words, the 'new' Socinians, as a 'Transferprodukt,' are the result of frequent mixing which arose from the migration of Socinian people and ideas to western Europe, and into a completely different intellectual milieu." This was a long process beginning with the Protestantism in the Italian Cinquecento, then emigration to Poland, Moravia, and Transylvania, expulsion from Poland and the emigration of many Socinians to Brandenburg-Prussia, England, and the Netherlands.

On the basis of the Socinian antitrinitarian and philosophico-religious doctrines were crystallized many modern views. They were formulated on a fundamental intellectual ground: appeal to reason in the interpretation of scripture, worldview, social and moral doctrines, appeal to one's conscience in personal and societal conduct. The next logical step was development of Deism and Enlightenment. The author traces here ideas and writings of a number of prominent Socinians such as Johann Crellius with his revolutionary ideas about freedom of religion and the effect of his book on the west, Christoph Sand and Samuel Crell in England, Noel Aubert de Versé also in England, translations of the Socinian texts by Charles le Cène, among others.

The second part, French Connection, includes one paper by Didier Kahn "Between Alchemy and Antitrinitarianism: Nicolas Barnaud (1539-1604)." Barnaud was a burger in Geneva of antitrinitarian orientation who is better known for his writings in alchemy. Barnaud translated Socinus into French, wrote several antitrinitarian treatises and corresponded with Socinus and Ostorodt.

Part three entitled "Arminianism and Religious Plurality" contains three papers which discuss in detail the role of Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) in the development of Remonstrantism, how it was affected by Socinianism and in turn how it reacted to other religions exemplified by Islam. The first paper by Florian Mülhegger, "Pluralization and Authority in Grotius Early Works," deals with early works of Grotius "*Meletius*" (1611) and "*Ordinum Pietas*" (1613). In these works Grotius defended Remonstrants against accusation of heresy by the orthodox. His line of argumentation was based on the idea that development of a plurality of views and doctrines in Christianity was nothing new, it existed since the beginning, thus it is something genuinely Christian. Moreover, on the level of authority, he referred to history of dogmas as produced by various councils, church fathers and confessions again documenting plurality. Next he defended the rationality of Christian religion by referring to ancient Hellenistic philosophers as authorities. In the practical aspect of religion he defended subordination of dogmas to ethical concerns. In all these issues he followed the ideas and practice of the

Socinians, thus he was accused of being one of them. In the second paper entitled "Grotius and Socinianism" Hans W. Blom discusses in detail how Grotius participated in the theological debates through several treatises concerning the Socinian doctrines of justification and satisfaction which were spreading in the Netherlands. What is interesting, however, and characteristic of Grotius is that starting with a theological issue he develops it into an issue of secular theory of justice and punishment. He operated at the interface between a theological and natural-law conception of punishment and integrated theological and legal arguments by describing God as a king in execution of justice. At issue were the reordering and reconciling of reason and revelation and placing the human and divine justice under one concept.

He developed modern and secular ideas which have, however, antecedents in ancient Hellenistic and especially, Stoic thought. Grotius thought underwent a transformation as well and in the end he developed in "*De iure belli ac pacis*," which was published only in 1868, a very radical doctrine: the justice obtainable among men is the result of the human capacity of self-justification thus preparing the direct way for the Enlightenment. Further development of Grotius ideas is exemplified by writings of Lumbertus van Velthuysen (1622-1685) who arrives at similar results but starts from another position, namely from the love of self, from the law of self-preservation which is a sufficient cause of benevolence or other-regarding attitude. He may be considered as precursor of the characteristic Dutch permissiveness, the idea that the evil that does not noticeably damage the State can remain unpunished.

In the third paper entitled "Hugo Grotius' Position on Islam as Described in *De veritate religionis christianae, Liber VI*," Dietrich Klein discusses a topic which has a direct relevance for our own times. Christians had to deal with Islam since the beginning of its expansion and the Qur'an was translated into Latin in 1143. He claimed as others before him that God sent Islam as a way of punishment of Christians and argued for the superiority of Christianity over Islam on the basis of Qur'anic analysis, comparison of the theological doctrines, especially that of Christology, and its practice. He treated Islam, however, at the same level as Socinianism, though he recognized fundamental differences between them.

The fourth part of the book contains two papers concerning interaction between Socinians and the Netherlands. Socinians were treated by Reformed theologians as libertines, atheists and later from 1640s as Cartesians and from 1690s as Spinozists. They published in Amsterdam in 1660s multivolume *Bibliotheca*

*Fratrum Polonorum*, the most significant and important compilation of their works. Roberto Bordolli in "The Socinian Objections: Hans Ludwig Wolzogen and Descartes" discusses the opposition of Wolzogen (1600-1661) to Descartes' spiritualism and his defense of materialism against idealism. Wolzogen in opposition to Descartes defended the view that all knowledge begins with the senses and sensible reality. Similarly Wolzogen argued that it is impossible to have natural knowledge of God. We can only know God as the *causa remotissima ac prima*, i.e., as a creator of the world. Further, Wolzogen points to the contradictions in the Descartes reasoning about God. Wolzogen could be thus considered as a precursor of the empiricists of the Enlightenment. Rejection of the Cartesian philosophy by Wolzogen represented the separation of philosophy from religion by the Socinians and their subsequent disinterest in the theological questions independent from scripture.

The second paper by Luisa Simonutti "Resistance, Obedience and Toleration: Przyrkowski and Limborch" discusses the connection between the Dutch and the Socinians on the example of Samuel Przyrkowski who studied at Leiden during the years 1616-1619 and Philippus Limborch, who published the compilation of Przyrkowski's works in 1692. Przyrkowski was one of the most prominent proponents of peace among the various sects and mutual toleration. Przyrkowski and later Limborch developed an elaborate theory of the mutual relations between church and state.

The last part of the book, part V, entitled English Quarrels contains three papers: Sarah Hutton, "Platonism and the trinity: Anne Conway, Henry More and Christoph Sand;" Douglas Hedley: "Persons of Substance and the Cambridge Connection: Some Roots and Ramifications of the Trinitarian Controversy in Seventeenth-Century England;" Stephen David Snobelen: "Isaac Newton, Socinianism and 'the One Supreme God.'" These papers are concerned with the development of the trinitarian discussions in England under the influence of the Socinianism. Especially interesting is the study of Snobelen on the theology of Newton, until now little known and his connections with the Socinian theological doctrines.

The volume represents an extremely valuable contribution to the history of liberal ideas in Europe which eventually led to the development of the Enlightenment. Spreading of such information in America is of special importance since the American Republic is the country that was founded directly on the ideology of the Enlightenment.

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## Ron's Ramblings

By Ron Titus

[1] Sherwin T Wine coined the English word "ignostic", designating a person who holds that the concept of god is meaningless as opposed to being coherent enough to allow God's existence to be judged true, false, or unknown.

[Free Mind, Fall 2007, P 11]

I have said publicly before that I would like to be an agnostic again. 'Because an agnostic is uncertain and open to new evidence. 'But I am an atheist because I am not uncertain about the outside-of-the-mind existence of gods. As certain

as I am about the existence of mermaids and centaurs, I am certain that gods do not exist outside of people's minds.

[2] (1) When I was ordained as a Catholic clergyperson, I took literally the Biblical words "Every high priest is taken from among men, is ordained for men, in the things that appertain to God." (Hebrews 5)

(2) Before leaving the Catholic clergyhood, I interpreted those words to mean "Every priest is taken from among

people, is ordained for people, in the things that appertain to becoming human” (as opposed to inhuman).

(3) Today I interpret further those words to mean “All human beings come from people, commit themselves to people, in the things that appertain to becoming more human”.

(a) All human beings come from, are, and remain people. But not all people are (or will ever become) human. Some people resist growing up, resist allowing their genes to evolve into “all that they can be” (human). (*People ARE people ... and they CAN BE human.*)

(b) If people’s maturation is not adversely interrupted, they will eventually be faced with the challenge of deliberately choosing (freely committing themselves) to follow either a human path or an inhuman path. Fortunately people can reverse poor choices, and unfortunately they can reverse good choices. Renewing one’s commitment daily is probably useful, except that repetitions frequently dull and/or cancel initial enthusiasm.

(c) If human actions are perfect behavior, then they cannot be bettered in quality. Increasing their quantity may be the only way to better them. Av, the only way to better oneself is to do good stuff more often.

[3] All US citizens, in theory (in practice it is another matter), have a First Amendment constitutional right to practice freely whatever religion they choose WITHOUT coercion or endorsement of the US government.

(1) Some Humanists and Freethinkers believe that ALL religions should be outlawed and suppressed, because so much misbehavior results from some religions’ codes (laws) and practices.

(2) Others believe that not religion, but BEHAVIOR must be codified (legislated, made into law, regulated) and enforced, to insure the survival of society.

It is useful to note that civil law takes precedence over religious laws, since it is enacted for ALL citizens whereas

religious laws are enacted for individual religious sects. Of course, it is also useful to remember that many religions believe that their own religious laws bind ALL people whether they know it or not, or whether they like it or not. Consequently, it has been suggested that those who believe that religious law trumps civil law ought move to one of the countries where Taliban-like rule is strictly enforced.

(3) Most of the Humanists and Freethinkers that I know pretty much agree with “What religion you practice is your own business; just don’t be pushing it off on me!”

[4] YT attended a program put on by the local chapter of Americans United For Separation of Church & State. One of the presenters was Ray Hill.

I had heard Hill speak about his life and work before, but this time he made an interesting impression on me: He (unwittingly I am sure) prompted me to reactivate my altruistic messianism (save-the-world complex).

I used to do a lot of good stuff (proselytizing to “save souls”?) WITHOUT FEAR, because I believed WITHOUT DOUBT that I was called by an all knowing and powerful God, who was assisting me with his whole army of angels in Heaven, and on earth the whole RCC (the then all knowing and powerful Roman Catholic Church).

Ray Hill was doing his good stuff without all this supportive (and security blanket) baggage; he was and is an atheist!

From his example, I renewed my commitment to “do wonderful things” (ha!), but WITHOUT the commission and moral support of the RCC, and WITH more independence and personal responsibility!

[5] On still another occasion, I attended a lecture after which, when asked to say in one sentence what I learned from the lecture, I said: “There is just so much out there that I do not know!”

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## Food for thought and/or thought for indigestion

By Ron Titus

[1] “I have often thought that my life might well have followed a different route had the church been as adamant about ending racism then as it is about ending abortion now.”

[Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, *My Grandfather’s Son*, quoted in *National Catholic Reporter*, 2007 1019, P 3]

[2] As bad as cigarettes are for you, one cannabis joint has the same impact on your lungs as smoking five cigarettes at once. Pot damages the large airways of the lungs, blocking airflow and forcing the lungs to work harder.

[Hara Estroff Marano, “Breathing Space”, *Psychology Today*, 2007 11&12, P 55]

[3] Religious women support Patriarchy. They are shallow uncritical thinkers that follow traditional ways in keeping with their family. Religious men and women tend to score lower on IQ testing.

[Judith L Wible MD, Humanist Roundtable, 2007 1104]

[4] In Michael Moore’s *Sicko*, one comment by an American living in France really resonated with me. He said the reason social programs worked in France and not in America, was that the French government is afraid of it’s citizenry, in American, the citizens are afraid of their government.

[Brian Ballard, Humanist Roundtable, 2007 1114w0807]

[5] (W)omen are INDIVIDUALS and relate to men as persons, not as personifications of political ideas.

[Tom Brucia, Humanist Roundtable, 2007 1114w0722]

[6] “You want to be entertained? Go to the circus.”

[Newscaster Jim Lehrer, *National Catholic Reporter*, 2007 1114, P 3]

[7] “When I was growing up, denominations were a big deal. I don’t see that today. In our church we have Baptists, Methodists, Jewish people, all kinds of people. ... Those walls have come down.”

[Joel Osteen, *National Catholic Reporter*, 2007 1114, P 3]



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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 / Daniel Strain <mailto:dtstrain@yahoo.com>

*Humanist Association of Montgomery County, Isaac Asimov Chapter (Asimov Humanists):* Montgomery County chapter of the American Humanist Association / Ross Henry <mailto:rosshenry@mac.com>

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

*Houston Atheists Meetup Group.* Meets at least twice a month (once in central Houston and once in North Houston) to discuss the issues of the day and how they affect nonbelievers. / Nigel Bedrock [mailto:nige\\_the\\_atheist@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:nige_the_atheist@yahoo.co.uk)

### 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."