

Houston Humanist Alliance

Newsletter

[The Newsletter for Houston's Humanist and Freethought Community](#) [July 2002 - Issue 33](#)

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About the Houston Humanist Alliance:

The *Houston Humanist 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 humanists in the Houston area.

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Essay (#1 of 2)

Nature As It Is

"Nature doesn't give a damn for your wishes"

Dostoevsky

By Ross Hamilton Henry

Dr. Stephen Weinberg of the University of Texas was presented our Humanist of the Year award for the year 2001 to 2002. He spoke to the gathered humanists from all over the U.S. at our national convention that was held in Houston this year. Bob Finch and I had the honor of greeting him as he arrived for his speech and of speaking with him briefly before the meeting began. I stuck around after the meeting and got an autographed copy of his book *Dreams of a Final Theory*. I am now reading it. In it, he quotes from one of Dostoevsky's novels "Nature doesn't consult you. It doesn't give a damn for your wishes or whether its laws please you or do not please you. You must accept it as it is."

In my opinion this is the major problem in the world today. Hardly anyone is willing to accept Nature as it is.

Robert Ingersoll says, "In nature there are neither rewards nor punishments; there are only consequences."

The motto of *Skeptic World* is: "Reality is that which does not cease to exist when you stop believing in it." Reality is not like Tinkerbell in Peter Pan who is on the verge of dying because children have ceased believing

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Essay (#2 of 2):

Exploring Humanist Perspectives 9-11 and the Middle East Conflict

By Alice Leuchtag

The tragedy of the attack on the World Trade Center buildings and the Pentagon was followed by the retaliatory mass bombings of Afghanistan by the United States. Thousands of civilians were killed in New York and many more were injured or otherwise affected by the suicide hijackings. An even larger number of civilian casualties was reported in Afghanistan.

The conflict between the Palestinians and Israel has heated up, again with retaliations and counter-retaliations against civilian targets. Israeli bombings and targeted assassinations were followed by Palestinian suicide bombings. We hear reports of serious violations of human rights in Ramallah, Jenin and at the Church of the Nativity. U.S. actions in Afghanistan have become a model for Israeli actions in the illegally occupied territories. An American woman living in Ramallah had her house broken into and turned into a shambles by Israeli soldiers, who pointed their bayoneted rifles at her and her husband. When she complained to the Israeli officer in charge, he said, according to an Amnesty International interview, "We aren't doing anything here that your guys aren't doing in Afghanistan."

How can we, as Humanists, understand these events? One way is to look for their causes in

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From the Editor's desk:

By Ron Titus

Dear Readers,

[1] I attended the AHA (American Humanist Association) National Conference in Houston in May, reported some of my observations thereof in the Ramblings column in the June issue of this newsletter. But as I said "What the lecturers said and what I heard may be two different things."

Admittedly, on the last day of the Conference I was tired, less alert, and slowed in taking notes. As a result, I missed reporting what Alice Leuchtag said as a panelist in the final presentation. Thanks to her hub Richard, a copy was emailed to me, and it begins on Page One. If you've already read it before reading this, you might want to read it again. She makes a good case for change in our society's behavior.

I would like this newsletter to make a complete report on the Conference. Perhaps someone else out there in Readersland attended, got an idea thereat, and would like to share ... (Hint! hint!)

[2] With this issue you will find an application for membership in one of the Alliance organizations. If you are receiving one of the complimentary copies of this newsletter and are not yet a paying member, please consider. Thanks!

Peace!

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From NATURE on Page 1

in fairies and can be preserved only if enough children close their eyes and say, "I believe, I believe, I believe." Reality persists in spite of wish fulfillment fantasies to the contrary and in reality no amount of believing will give any sort of fantasy, the flesh of hard reality.

Few people today take these words to heart. Most still cling to childhood beliefs in benign spirits lurking in the neither regions plotting to do them good; or in guardian angels who will protect them from harm, or in demons tempting the naive to do evil, or in psychic healing or telekinetic powers or in supreme beings looking down from "Shamyaem" intervening on their behalf in the affairs of men and Nature.

Stephen Weinberg addresses this dichotomy in thinking in his chapter three "Two Cheers for Reductionism." In it he states: "The Reductionist world view is chilling and impersonal. It has to be accepted as it is, not because we like it but because that is the way the world works."

I believe that that is essential for the progress of human culture that we now, here at the beginning of this new millennium grow up and face the realities of existence and stop basing our actions on faulty views of "the way the world works." The majority of the people of the world hold and cling tenaciously to this mode of thinking today.

We, the civilized people of the world, keep tending down that path. Periodically, over the history of our race, the view that logical thinking is the way to evaluate reality, seems to be emerging as the dominant perspective. And then something happens that reverses that trend. For example during the enlightenment Voltaire's ideas were widely revered and his attack on superstition and illogic seemed to be winning the hearts and minds of the public. And then Rousseau emerged with his intellectual anti-intellectualism, proposing that the ignorance was a prerequisite to happiness.

In our modern age, the post modernists, who decry science and logic as mere prejudiced constructions of the elite of our society are once again attempting to use reason to destroy reason. They tried to destroy E.O. Wilson at Harvard for suggesting the Concept of "Conciliation", the idea that scientific methods should be applied to all areas of human inquiry.

What is the answer to defeating this disturbing recurring phenomena in the human cycle of history? Will we once again, as the followers of Rousseau in the French Revolution did, behead our Lavoisiers and Murder our Marquis de Condorcet? Or will we finally find a way to convince the public that, Reality is what it is and not what you wish it to be? The survival of our culture depends on it.

[Ross Hamilton Henry is President of the American Humanist Association of Montgomery County The Isaac Asimov Chapter and is a Humanist Minister.]

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From RAMBLINGS on Page 4

Am I associating believers in a deity with schizophrenics? I've made the insinuation before, and I only ask that the likeness be given serious thought. Before Copernicus' discoveries became popular, a lot of folks believed that the sun rotated around our earth. They were not schizophrenics, but they WERE mistaken.

[7] FREEDOM

In defense of a religious humanism: I believe that people should be allowed to pursue an understanding of their experiences, wherever the search takes them.

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Letters:

[1] [This letter introduces the essay on Page 1]

Dear Ron,

HHA Newsletter readers who missed the closing plenary panel discussion of the AHA Conference (and even those who didn't) might be interested in the text of Alice's presentation.

Panel members Alice Leuchtag, Samantha Smoot and Edd Doerr presented their views on the theme, "Exploring Humanist perspectives: 9-11 and the Middle East conflict." Led by moderator Fred Edwards, Editor of *The Humanist*, they responded to written questions from the audience.

All the best,

Richard (Leuchtag)

[2] Ron, I always enjoy your newsletter, and I hope you keep sending it to me.

I find it interesting how humanism has moved to a more exclusionary view. That is, it is so adamantly anti-religious. Whereas at one time, there was room for religious humanism, today I don't see that even as a possibility. Am I wrong in that perception?

On the other hand, I find it interesting that UUs are now less centered in humanism. I also find my own denomination is increasingly traditional--I no longer consider myself a fellow traveler in that group.

Choose joy,

Bob

[Editor's note: Bob is retired from ministering in the United Church of Christ (UCC), not to be confused with the Church of Christ which tends to be much more literal in their understanding of the Bible. The former (the UCC) still advertises reason as a requirement for membership. Bob's observations serve as the basis for this issue's Ramblings column.]

[3] Thanks for newsletter Sorry I had to miss the Humanist Conference Especially liked the idea of "speaking from a different linguistic box"...maybe we should refer to it as a crate...that connotates open slats that show that linguistics is operative in an ever changing familial-cultural habitat dependent on age, activity level, sex, etc. etc. etc. An afterthought, aren't we always "teaching olddogs new tricks" and teaching them "to sit up and speak"....must be someconnection to your discussion on the human-4 legged connection! Sdb

From PERSPECTIVES on Page 1

the contingencies surrounding them. It is certainly true that they follow a change of administration in the U.S. that can not exactly be described as a legitimate electoral process. We have read reviews of a book published in France by intelligence authorities Jean-Charles Brisard and Guillaume Dasquie, *Bin Laden: The Forbidden Truth*, which details the secret negotiations between the Bush administration and the Taliban government in the months preceding the attacks on the World Trade Center. It charges that the Bush administration, under the influence of U.S. oil companies, blocked secret service investigations on terrorism. The head of Asian Affairs in the State Department met with the Taliban ambassador to Pakistan in August 2001. The book states that the representatives of the Bush administration offered the Taliban regime two choices as to the granting of rights for U.S. corporations to run an oil pipeline through Afghanistan: "Accept our offer of a carpet of gold, or we bury you under a carpet of bombs." The attack on the Trade Towers and Pentagon followed on September 11. So we can find clues of a causal chain.

But as Humanists we may wish to dig deeper, to try to place these events into a broader historical framework. After all, the American public has been shocked and dismayed by wars, bombings, raids and even school shootings in the last few decades. The sanctions following the Gulf war have been responsible for the death of a thousand Iraqi children a month.

Is there a pattern to this violence? How can we characterize those who carried out these violent actions? Well, they are mostly men, aren't they? And did these men direct their weapons exclusively against other fighting men? Not at all. In almost every case, the brunt of the violence was borne by women, children and noncombatant men. But we must be careful not to generalize on the basis of an individual's sex. We must look for the roots of male violence in the masculine, patriarchal culture. This culture is a social construct with ancient roots, and some anthropologists have suggested that it originated when male hunting cults formed during

Ron's Ramblings:

By Ron Titus

[1] RELIGIOUS HUMANISM?

Is there such a thing as a "religious humanist"?

This topic was brought up in last year's December issue (Is "secular humanism" a redundancy?) and again in this year's January issue. And among the letters in this issue, the question is again raised. 'Perhaps because it was never adequately answered before. Then again, maybe it's because our understanding of the terms has changed. Either way, here goes another shot at a response. But keep in mind that the writer of this column (me) and the editor of this newsletter (me again) expresses the opinion of himself alone; I said before and I repeat: No one humanist can speak for all other humanists. Others are herewith invited to share their own viewpoints.

Recently, Tom Brucia repeated his description of humanists as people who regard other people as subjects rather than as objects.

[2] CHRISTIAN HUMANISM

True, I considered myself a religious humanist before I became a secular humanist. And I even regarded myself a Christian humanist before that! 'To wit:

Long before I stopped wearing Vatican clergy garb, a colleague once pejoratively exclaimed, "My God, Titus, you're a humanist!" To which I responded defensively, "Is that bad? God created humans, so they can't be that bad! And God sent his son to become a human, so humans must have SOME value!" But my colleague was unimpressed.

[3] NONTHEISM

Currently, I define (1) theism as believing that a deity is as real as is the rest of the universe; (2) atheism as believing that deities do not exist outside of believers' minds; and (3) nontheism as neither believing nor not-believing in a deity, ie, it doesn't matter, it's irrelevant.

I have said before that I am trying to be a nontheist, but right now I am too busy being an atheist. Why? Because too many theists are still trying to kill off all atheists, and I want to be right there in the trenches defending them and myself, and as Americans our constitutional rights.

[4] SECULAR HUMANISM

Bob Finch has more than once suggested that a positive humanism is better than a negative nontheism.

As I strive to be less militantly atheist, and more placidly humanist, I am coming more and more to a better understanding of what humanism is. My usual definition [Humanists are people who strive to be human (as opposed to inhuman)] now appears to me to be perhaps over-simplistic. Hence, today I might define humanists as those who believe in their own capacity and potential without the need for supernatural support.

[5] HUMANIST NEEDS

But this for me does not exclude humanists' continuous dependency on and consequent need for the rest of the universe. 'More specifically, for planet earth. 'AND, more specifically yet, for other people! I believe humanists need other people for survival!

Some of the Humanists that I know seem to believe that they don't have much need for other folks.

Although I consider myself politically an independent, I generally lean more to the Democrat Party than to the GOP. 'Because to me: Republicans seem to favor money over people while the Democrats seem to favor people over money.

[6] REALITY FOCUSED

Today, I believe that belief in a god or gods muddies the waters when seeking truth. It perpetuates false concepts.

My complaint against my religious colleagues is their apparent failure to distinguish the "true god" from the many false concepts thereof.

I have no argument with the great St Thomas Aquinas when he says "We don't know WHAT God is; we only know THAT God is." I DO find fault with his consequently writing volumes and volumes about this god that he says he himself cannot know.

I myself have moved away from theism, because theism seems to me to be less perceptive of reality. Theism to me seems unbecoming to humanists, ie, people who are wired from conception with the potential to become human (as opposed to inhuman) beings. Believing in a god or gods seems to me to be attributing existence to something that isn't there.

It's like John Nash's hallucinations. 'Except in American society today the hallucination is shared by a majority of the population, which thus makes severing oneself from the unreality more difficult. John Nash's recovery would have been umpteen times more difficult if all of his associates saw the same hallucinations as he did.

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Food for thought and / or thought for indigestion:

By Ron Titus

[1] Scientists used to believe that each of us was born with a set number of brain cells, and we lose them as we age. Now we know that the brain keeps making new cells every day.

[John J Ratey MD, *Bottom Line Personal*, 2002 0215, P. 11]

[2] The church forbade the reading of the Bible because it might lead to unpredicted results and conclusions. It was a threat to the orthodoxy epitomized by the notion of a "total heretic" who might emerge from such an exercise as illustrated by Herman van Rijswick who was condemned to burn at the stake in Gravenhage in 1512. Preserved is the text of his last "confession of non-faith" in which he refers in the last point to the Bible:

"Christ was none but an illumined fool who seduced the little people. All his acts are contrary to human nature and right reason... I deny that Moses received the Law through a face-to-face encounter with God. Our faith is founded on fables: it is proved by our puffed writings, our bible full of lies, and our delirious gospel... I was born a christian; today I am no longer a christian because all this christian story is erroneous and an aberration."

[Translated from *Le temps des Réformes et la Bible* (Guy Bedouelle and Bernard Roussel, eds., Beauchesne, Paris 1989) and submitted by Marian Hillar in an email dated 2002 0606]

[3] "No one who cannot rejoice in the discovery of his own mistakes deserves to be called a scholar."

[Donald Foster, Quote Of The Day, *The New York Times* on the Web, 2002 0620th]

[4] Below is a partial list of corporations that have continued to be awarded lucrative contracts by the US government, even after they were found guilty and fined by both the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) and OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) for a number of violations.

(Corporation)	(EPA & OSHA Violations)		(Fines in \$)	(Contracts in \$)
Ford Motors	12	292	6,082,271	442,000,000
TRW	3	79	5,745,234	10,267,000,000
Archer Daniels Midland	4	93	1,676,850	471,000,000
Exxonmobil	20	5	1,481,400	2,173,000,000
E I Du Pont de Nemours	17	23	956,700	446,000,000
Avondale Industries	1	73	759,100	1,347,000,000
General Motors	21	14	418,393	4,854,000,000
General Electric	27	48	369,363	9,777,000,000
Olin Corp	7	4	168,500	1,310,000,000
Atlantic Richfield	10	1	150,600	675,000,000
Daimlerchrysler	7	166	130,121	1,575,000,000
Textron	4	78	111,215	5,507,000,000

[For source and more detailed information, see article by Ken Silverstein, "Unjust Rewards", *Mother Jones*, 2002 05/06, P. 68]

Bush Bashing & War Whacking:

By Ron Titus

[1] "Track down those killers!"

That's what I heard Dubya say on National Public Radio's "All Things Considered" (KUHF FM Radio, 2002 0607f1703). 'To which I exclaimed ...

"George! Run into the nearest closet, close the door behind you, and you will have one of them!"

(Sigh!)

[2] Dubya Bush is quoted as saying "Freedom of religion is not something to be feared; it's to be welcomed, because faith gives us a moral core." (*Secular Humanist Bulletin*, Summer 2002, P.3).

If that's the case, then Dubya must have no faith, because he appears to me to have no moral core. Consider his record of killing people.

Of course, if his faith actually endorses killing people, then, I guess, he does indeed have a moral core. It's just not the core I endorse.

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the hunter-gatherer stage of human evolution, at the dawn of patriarchy. Some men, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Bishop Desmond Tutu, have been able to overcome this culture and practice nonviolence.

The violent aspect of masculine culture may be epitomized by Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, which resulted in a carnage of 22,000 people dead, 30,000 injured and half a million people displaced. Robin Morgan, in her book, *The Demon Lover: The Roots of Terrorism*, tells of the devastation this invasion brought about over a span of several years. During the 1985 siege of Beirut-area refugee camps, Shatila camp alone sustained a 95% rate of destruction of homes.

Morgan writes: "The women scream, run, hide, mourn, and die. The women wail, all the time." She interviewed a woman who fled, again and again, with her seven remaining children. Her eight other children had disappeared or been killed, including two sons, both dead, who had called themselves guerrillas and said they were fighting for Palestine. At this point in the interview a man intervened to pay his respects to the woman as a "Mother of Martyrs."

"To what have you given birth?", the woman shouts at him. "Who have you nursed at your breast? In God's name, I swear I will give you no more martyrs! I am done with being a mother of martyrs!"

From Robin Morgan again, "In the summer of 1986, Lebanon experienced a strange phenomenon ... A spontaneous cease-fire started about nine o'clock in the evening and lasted until almost three in the morning. People weren't being killed -- and the silence itself was an incredible luxury to the ear. Was this miracle accomplished by any of the world leaders calling for peace in Lebanon? No. It was the World Cup."

The World Cup soccer finals were being held and broadcast live. One UNRWA teacher was not surprised. She said, "Men are crazy, aren't they? But they pass for adults. They shoot things. They run the world." While the men were watching TV, the women foraged for food, searched for their children and buried their dead.

Understanding the status of women can give us an insight into the understanding of the status of humanity. So here are a few scattered glimpses into that status:

_ The new provisional Afghan government formed after the defeat of the Taliban consists of many men -- but only two women. What's wrong with this picture?

_ Last year, in Colombia, the mayor of Bogota declared a curfew on men one night. No man was allowed outside after dark. There were plenty of police on the streets, all of them women. The women thronged the bars, clubs and cafes in a carnival atmosphere. That night, murders dropped by 80%.

_ Is it a coincidence that the only vote in Congress opposed to giving President Bush full license to wage an unlimited war against terrorists was cast by a woman? Congresswoman Barbara Lee, a California Democrat, has been accused of aiding and abetting terrorism. But she has won the primary election and will be running for reelection in the fall.

How then do we as Humanists propose to deal with the problem of violence? Certainly not with more weapons systems and military tribunals. The escalation of violence can lead to the ultimate horror of nuclear war, in which everyone loses. No, there is another way: the humanist way of bringing people together. Jewish and Palestinian people have come together in places like the village of Neve Shalom, an experiment in peaceful coexistence in Israel. A picture in the Houston Chronicle four years ago showed two girls from Neve Shalom, Naomi Mark, who is Jewish, and Ranin Boulos, who is Arabic. "She's my best friend," Ranin said. "There's a connection between us. The last thing I think is that we're different."

What we see, then, is that the masculine, patriarchal culture is generally aggressive, sometimes violent and warlike, whereas the feminine culture is generally nurturing and peaceable, seeking to form connections between people. After men bomb, women pick up the pieces. We ask, Can men control their own and one another's aggressive behavior? Can they find the will to address violence as a problem of masculine culture? Will men share power equally with women?

Let us listen to the voices of women, and build a world at peace. That is my humanist perspective, and I believe it will prevail.

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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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Calendar of Events:

Sunday, July 7 / 9:00-11:00 am / *HOH Brunch* / in the coffee shop of the Holiday Inn on I-10 (at Silber) / Buffet breakfasts (available from 9:00) and discussions on topics chosen by the group (beginning at 9:30) are held on first Sundays monthly / Contact: Jimmy Dunne*

Saturday, July 13 / 1:30 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, July 14 / 10:30-11:30 am / *Houston Church Of Freethought (HCOF) Service* / in the Ramada Plaza Hotel on 7611 Katy Fwy (I-10 at Silber) / Services (including song, humor, lectures & discussion with children's classes & baby sitting available) are held on second Sundays monthly / Contact: Art Fay*

Monday, July 15 / 12:00 noon / *Newsletter Deadline* / All articles, letters, and submissions of interest are welcome if on editor's desk, postmarks not withstanding (e-mail format required), / Contact: Ron Titus*

Saturday, July 20 / 2:30 - 4:30 pm / *HOH Regular Meeting* / in the Unitarian Fellowship hall, 1504 Wirt Rd) / Business meetings followed by presentations are held on third Saturdays monthly / Contact: Jimmy Dunne*

Sunday, July 21 / 10:30 am / *Freethinkers Coffee Social* / at Borders Books & Music in Meyerland Plaza (I-610 W Loop S at Beechnut) / Spontaneous informal discussions are held on third Sundays monthly / Contact: Art Fay*

Saturday, July 27 / 6:00 pm / *Freethinkers Movie Night* / at places decided by those interested / Movies and dinners are selected by group on last Saturdays monthly / Contact: Mike Wen*

Sunday, July 28 / 10:30 - 12:00 noon / *Ideas Club* / in Borders Books & Music on 9633 Westheimer (at Gessner) / Book reviews by members are held on fourth Sundays monthly. Contact: Bob Finch*

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