



HOUSTON HUMANIST ALLIANCE

The Newsletter for Houston's Humanist and Freethought Community

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Calendar of Events:

Sunday, November 6 | 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, November 6 | 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 Sundays monthly | Contact: Tom Brucia*

Every Monday | 10:30 pm – 11:00 pm | *New Atheist "Hour"* | KPFT 90.1 FM | Gipson Arnold leads a discussion with other HHA members. The last Monday of each month is listener call-in night.

Wednesday, November 9 | 6:30 pm | *Drug Policy Forum of Texas* | TV 26 or 95 | Drug policy reform discussed every other Wednesday | Contact: G Alan Robison*

Saturday, November 12 | 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, November 13 | 10:30 am -11:30 am with coffee available at 10:00 AM. | *Houston Church Of Freethought (HCOF) Service* | at the Courtyard by Marriott on 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*

Friday November 18 | 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, November 19 | 2:30 pm - 4:30 pm | *Humanists of Houston (HOH) Regular meeting* | in the Unitarian Fellowship hall at 1504 Wirt Rd | Contact: Tom Brucia*

Sunday, November 20 | 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, November 23 | 6:30 pm | *Drug Policy Forum of Texas* | TV 26 or 95 | Drug policy reform discussed every other Wednesday | Contact: G Alan Robison*

Sunday November 27 | 10:30 am - 12:00 noon | *Ideas Club* | At Dr Louis Daily's family house at 1506 North Boulevard. See directions at bottom of Pg.7. | Book reviews by members are held on fourth Sundays monthly, Contact: Bob Finch*

Wednesday, November 30 | 6:00 pm | *Houston Atheist Society (HAS)* | at Ziggy's, corner of West Alabama and Greenbriar. Meetings are held on the last Wednesday of each month. | Contact: Gipson Arnold *

Sunday, December 4 | 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 December 4 | 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: Tom Brucia*

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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 Freethinkers in the Houston area.

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Publisher:

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

[2] The purpose of the HHA 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 HHA 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 HHA. 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

The monthly service of The Houston Church of Freethought was held Sunday, October 9, at the Courtyard By Marriott 3131 West Loop S (Just North of Richmond)

PROGRAM:

Opening and Introduction Jim Ashmore
"Neurotheology" Judith Wible
"Intelligent Design" - Bill Maher DVD Ed Uthman
FTOTM: George Gershwin Ed Uthman -

Prepared by Nancy Fay

Music: "It Ain't Necessarily So by Alec Richmond

. Anthony Stott

"Halloween History" Jim Ashmore -

Prepared by Nancy Fay

"Hurricane Rita – Through the Eyes of Children"

. Anthony Stott

Closing and Announcements Anthony Stott

After the service, many gathered for lunch at Jason's Deli on Westheimer between Augusta and Fountain View (north side of Westheimer).

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HOH

The Humanists of Houston monthly meeting for October was presented by Arthur A. Fay, director of the Houston Church of Freethought. He spoke on 'Natural Atheism'. His talk, based on David Eller's 2004 book of the same name, was an expansion of a talk he gave at HCOF on September 11th.

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IDEA's CLUB

At the October meeting Sheila Finch made a presentation on "The Meaning of Things: Applying Philosophy to Life" by the British contemporary philosopher A.C. Grayling.

[Note: New venue – directions on HOH WEB site.]

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New Atheist Hour

NEW ATHEIST "HOUR" ON KPFT, 90.1 FM

Each Monday night from 10:30 to 11:00 PM, you can hear a resurrection of the Atheist Hour popular in the 1980's and early 1990's. Although it is not yet a full hour, it's a great way for us to get our viewpoints out to the general public.

You can download the show as a MP3 file from the KPFT archives: <http://www.kpft.org/archive>

If anyone wishes to volunteer either part-time or full-time in helping make this show a success, please email either Gipson or myself: Gipson Arnold enrdd@hal-pc.org; Art Fay-director@hcof.org

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TWO STORIES or How it would be if... And what in reality happened.

By Felipe A. Hexsel, M.D.

Story Number One

A very powerful and rich man bought a huge area of land, hundreds of thousands of acres. He knew that families were living there dedicated to farming, ranching, hunting, fishing and other occupations. He did not care that they continue with their normal lives, as long that they would follow the regulations and rules that he would establish.

Soon after the purchase he went to visit his property. After arriving he called a general meeting of all the population, men, women and children, without exception. When everybody was there, he went up on a hill where he could be seen by all the ones present. First he showed to all the title and deed of the property that he had purchased, leaving no doubt that in fact he was the absolute owner of all that vast extension of land. Then he declared that they could continue living and working as before, as long as they would strictly obey the laws that he would present.

These laws limited the hunting and fishing to prevent the extinction of the species. Also limited the cut of trees to prevent deforestation. It established what could be used as fertilizers and insecticides. Penalties were established if they did not follow the law, and for the ones who acted in an antisocial way. Drunks, the ones that committed sexual crimes, thieves, assailants, and troublemakers would be expelled from the property.

And finally he said: "Everybody knows Peter here. He will be my administrator and he will control everything. Should any irregularity happen he has the authority to take action that he deems necessary, and if he is not respected I will come personally and in front of all, make justice with my hands. Besides he will collect 10% of what you earn and send it to me. The one that doesn't pay will be banish from this premises. Peter will keep 10% of what he collects to cover the expenses. From time to time I will appear in person so that everybody sees me and remember who is the owner, especially the new generations. Did you all understand? So, that's it "!

Story Number Two

Once upon a time there was a huge piece of land, hundreds of thousand of acres, without an owner. People and families lived there, farming, ranching, hunting, fishing and performing other tasks. One day, one of the inhabitants, tired of the hard work in his farm, decided that it was time to change and to have an easier life. The others should support him. He called all the population, men, women and children, for a meeting. Going up on a hill where he could be seen by all he decided to try his luck with the greatest scam of his life. Trembling a little he declared: " You all know me. I am Moses. A very powerful and rich man bought all this vast extension of land. Yesterday night he came in secret to my house and showed me the title and deed of this property. I do not have doubts about the legitimacy of the documents. To me he is really the owner. He said that he does not care if you continue living and working as you always have. But you must comply with the law, rules and regulations that he set forth. Here they are

in writing, as he gave them to me. The ones who don't follow the rules will be banish without exception ". The rules also establish that one day of the week nobody should work, but they should come to this same place in order to pay the tenth and to hear new instructions in case that the Master, as he called Him, transmitted to Moses.

With the time some of the inhabitants started to relax the payment and not fulfill some of the rules. Seeing that his authority was in jeopardy, Moses hired a group of bodyguards and by force they started to impose the law and his will. One afternoon relaxing at home and sipping wine, Moses wondered in awe how smart he was and what an easy life he was having.

When there was a drought or if there was too much rain that ruined the plants, Moses let everybody know that it was the Boss who caused it to impose more respect. He used the occasion to increase the contributions to satisfy Him.

On the very back end of the land, lived a strange man. He had some yellowish skin and pulled eyes. Some called him Confucius. One day when he went to the general store to buy some articles, on hearing what a group was saying about the calamities, the situation in general and the requirements of the Master, he decided to give his opinion. "The Sun arises because this always happened, it rains because its time to rain, nobody gives any orders to Nature, and there is no sense to pay for it. The Big Boss has no power to change the weather. If you don't kick the other person's rear, the other will not kick yours. This is the only true rule in the World. That's it". Some few agreed with him, but at the end he finished being forgotten. The bodyguards of Moses spoke more clearly and with more authority.

Who was not very satisfied with the situation was Paul. He never liked to work and lived of odd jobs. He saw clearly that all that Moses' talk was pure invention. And he decided to get his chances also. On the day of the weekly meeting, when they were all congregated in the open field, he went up the hill and confronting all the people, said: "Last night the Master appeared to me in a dream and he said that Moses was abusing the authority that had been conferred to him. The Master is not happy and therefore these calamities are happening. I will show you the laws that he order me to divulge. Moses had modified the current ones without his knowledge. And the payment that I am going to receive will be 10% and not the excessiveness that is being charged ". With this last item he obtained the adhesion of a great number. He established also that the day of the weekly meeting, he meant when the payments should be done, would be the following day to the one established by Moses.

Knowing very well with whom he was dealing and which would be the reaction for his defiance, he had already organized his group of bodyguards just in case. On the beginning there were many fights until each group decided to follow their one way.

Martin was one of the bodyguards of Paul. One day, by chance, he had the occasion to see the paper that Moses said that he had received from the Master. He immediately saw that it was nothing

more, nothing less, than a fake handwritten document done by Moses. Immediately he realized the scam that was occurring. And he thought that the time of his chance was now. In the weekly meeting, after Paul's address to his followers, for surprise of all specially Paul, Martin went up the hill, and showing a long written document, declared: "Here are the true instructions that the Master gave to Moses. What Moses and Paul showed to you is false, so they would be able to take advantage. For now on these are the laws that are going to govern our lives ". As a foresighted man he was surrounded of a great number of bodyguards, strongly armed.

Paul still was trying to say something, but he was booed. Finally he left with a group of followers who, despite what Martin said, still found that he was right. The fight started all over, now between the three factions. In some cases the violence came to a point to cause deaths. Slowly some form of peace was found between the parties, despite the mutual accusations of the respective leaders. Never more there was a complete peace and harmony in those faraway lands.

Long time after all these episodes, two friends were sitting in a bar and drinking beer. After some time one asked: "What do you think of all this situation " The other after some time in deep reflections finally answered:

"Well, if the owner, that they call Master, had appeared here at the beginning, he himself, and had shown to all the people the title of ownership, everybody would have believed. But this story to appear hidden and to send orders and messages through others or then to appear in dreams, I do not know. It is very strange. Before Moses started his story, all the people were happy, and all worked diligently. No fights. What one earned with his work he could keep for himself. Really it is a very strange story. Probably many others will come forward with their own version of contact with this unknown owner or master. And I think that from now on everything is going to get worse ".

Felippe A. Hexsel, M.D.
October 2005

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Ron's Ramblings

By Ron Titus

[1] At the October monthly brunch meeting of the HOH (Humanists of Houston), Jimmy Dunne introduced what turned out to be the main topic of discussion: a description of his summer vacation included a visit to an Amish community.

Almost immediately I experienced and then soon expressed dismay on how to impose education on an unwilling public while respecting individual freedom of choice. To wit:

(1) Although I believe in freedom of religion, I also believe that certain religious practices ought not be tolerated.

(2) I believe that the repressive practices that occur in Amish communities and in regimes run by Islamic Talibans ought not be tolerated by civilized nations.

(But what the heck?! The USA is not necessarily a civilized nation, considering it's profiteering in arms sales, and its promoting and exporting war abroad.)

(3) If school systems are to meet their educational goals, they must enforce their standards. I believe that France was not out of step when it imposed a dress code on its religious students.

(4) Both Amish and military communities have something in common: They repress freethinking, i.e., they repress individual thought and choice.

(5) It would be useful for the Christian theocrats in the USA to acknowledge the possibility that the theocracy that they are working hard to install throughout the country may turn out to be a Muslim or a Hindu one. Separation of church and state serves religionists as well as secularists.

(6) Even parental education must be supervised if a civilized society is to be realized.

(7) Sex education needs attention if society is to mature any faster than it is. Unfortunately, sex education is wrapped in secrecy. Secrecy more often serves exploitation than it serves justice.

(8) Lying both in government and in the public media makes it more difficult to maintain an awareness of what's going on. Who can one trust these days?

[2] During the discussions that occurred at the October regular Saturday meeting of the HOH, I realized that although I am still trying to respect other people with whom I disagree, I can honestly say that I DO NOT RESPECT other people's bad religions. 'And will NO LONGER TOLERATE bad religions.

Are there "bad religions"? Religions are bad if they produce bad outcomes; they are good only if they produce good outcomes. Pretending that fantasy is reality and reality is fantasy is not a good outcome.

"An ounce of pretension is worth a pound of manure."
(Steel Magnolias)

[3] As I review the foregoing, I notice a new concern: Am I becoming less tolerant in my old age? Has tolerance for me become a vice rather than a virtue?

[4] Well, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have come and gone. Opportunities have come but have not gone.

Opportunities to humanize ourselves are always with us.

I was and am delighted that so many ordinary people rose to the occasion to lend assistance to their fellow persons in what was their hour of need.

God didn't do it; PEOPLE did it!

While some will argue that "god did it THROUGH people", I for one would not like to stand by and watch god do it WITHOUT people. (I guess I would also not like to watch FEMA or any other governmental body do it without common people.)

Hurricanes Katrina & Rita remind me of at least one of the many pluses for my being an atheist: I no longer have to "explain", make excuses for, or apologize for God.

In yesteryear, I would not have fretted over the advance of Hurricane Rita. I would have told myself quite confidently, "God will take care of me. And even if I should die in the ordeal, I'll go to a better place. So, I can't lose!"

Today, of course, I see things differently. And I am glad.
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Food for thought and/or thought for indigestion

By Ron Titus

[1] "Although it is not true that all conservatives are stupid people ... it is true that most stupid people are conservative."

[John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), Northern Sun catalogue, Winter 2004-2005, P 13]

[2] It's not possible to live on earth without lying, because life and lies are synonymous.

[Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881), quoted in the playbill for Tom Stoddard's play "Hapgood", Alley Theatre, Houston TX]

[3] Truth is a symbol pursued by mathematicians and philosophers. In human relationships, goodness and lies are worth more than a thousand truths.

[Graham Greene (1904-1991), *ibid*]

[4] Lying is a very effective tool for survival.

[5] Children (people) learn to lie when they learn that it is not safe to tell the truth.

[6] We are such a fucked-up species, so prone to disbelieve the obvious and credulously adhere to the unlikely, it's amazing we got to where we are today.

[Ed Uthman, HCOF-Talk, 2005 0929, Digest 2258 Message 1]

[7] Religion, IMNSHO, is one of the purest expressions of Murphy's Law around.

[Erikc Sadler, HCOF- Talk, 2005 1010, Digest 2269 Message: 7]

[8] "What I don't understand is how a bunch of people who claim not to believe in evolution could put a monkey in the White House and then expect him to somehow evolve into a President".

[Erikc Sadler, HCOF-Talk, 2005 1004, Digest 2263 Message 3]

[9] A civil ruler dabbling in religion is as reprehensible as a clergyman dabbling in politics. Both render themselves odious as well as ridiculous.

[James Cardinal Gibbons (1834-1921), second American to be made a Catholic cardinal, quoted in Highlights, 9707, P 3]

[10] We are all Human beings here together. We have to help one another, since otherwise there is NO ONE who will help.

[Ariel Thomann, email dated 2005 1014]

[11] "Imagination is more important than knowledge."

[Albert Einstein (1879-1955), Northern Sun catalogue, Winter 2004-2005, P 10]

[12] "First they ignore you... then they laugh at you ... then they fight you ... THEN YOU WIN."

[Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), Northern Sun catalogue, Winter 2004-2005, P 12]

[13] "We are Americans, and we hold ourselves to humane standards of treatment of people – no matter how evil or terrible they may be. ... This isn't about who they are. This is about who we are."

[US Senator John McCain (R-AZ), speaking to colleagues about torture of prisoners by US military, quoted by Nat Hentoff, "The McCain Rebellion", The Progressive, 2005 10, P 12]

[14] Humans aren't the only species on earth ... we just act like it.

[Northern Sun catalogue, Winter 2004-2005, P 9]

[15] If you're not OUTRAGED, you're not paying attention.

[*ibid*, P 4]

[16] "I do not intend to tiptoe through life only to arrive safely at death."

[*ibid*, P 14]

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Ideas Club, at Dr. Daily's family Home October 23, 2005



CFI Conference at Amherst, NY October 29, 2005

Letter:

The Dark Side of the Amish

Dear Philadelphia Inquirer Op-ed Editor:

On a recent bus Fall Foliage tour of New England, we started out in Philadelphia and concluded with a tour of Hershey World, Gettysburg battlefield, Valley Forge and a stop at the Amish village east of Lancaster.

It was fascinating seeing the Amish farmers use teams of four to six horses to pull their plows and seeing their one room schools and their clothes hung out to dry on clothes lines. We learned that the women never cut their hair or wear makeup and must wear long sleeved dresses with hems half way between the knee and the ankle.

It was sad to learn that the children only go to school through the eighth grade and never to public schools. It is also sad that they are cut off from TV, radio and newspapers. Looks like their leaders want to keep them dumb or dumber. It was even sadder to learn that teens are given a chance to leave the Amish community but that if they make that choice they will be "Excommunicated" and their families will never speak to them again. This is a very

coercive rule and is the opposite of the "family friendly" Christian religion we usually hear about. Why should a teenager have to give up their family if they want to join the free world where they can pursue higher education and employment other than in the Amish village? This disgusting Amish rule should fall faster than the Berlin wall fell.

It gets even darker. An Amish teenage girl reportedly was raped over 200 times by her two brothers and her uncle. When she complained to her mother about it, she was told to hush up about it. Thankfully, she went to the police and the perpetrators were charged with rape and her brothers were sentenced to prison terms. It sounds like the hideous practice of rape and incest is widespread among the Amish and well hidden from the authorities who are doing nothing to dig it out. This abuse of female teens must stop.

It is time for the Pennsylvania police and your newspaper to investigate the allegations of widespread rape and incest among the Amish. They are not above the law.

Jimmy Dunne

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Press Room:

Toward a New Enlightenment World Congress

a Resounding Success!

By: Nathan Bupp

The Council for Secular Humanism at the Center for Inquiry hosted its 25th Anniversary World Congress, "Toward a New Enlightenment" in Amherst, New York from October 27- 30th. The conference attracted well over 800 attendees, about a third of whom came from overseas, making this one of the Council's best attended conferences. Conference organizers brought together some 41 speakers—including two Nobel laureates—from 22 countries and a broad array of fields and disciplines.

The conference began Thursday afternoon with an exciting opening ceremony. This included special welcoming remarks from William Greiner, former president of the State University of New York at Buffalo, and Arnold Gardner, member of the New York State Board of Regents, an opening address by Paul Kurtz on the New Enlightenment, and of all things, a surprise appearance from Charles Darwin, played (of course) by Clyde "Kipp" Herreid, a distinguished professor of biology at the University at Buffalo. Of special significance was a multi-media retrospective of humanism's heroes and heroines titled "In Praise of Free Inquiry." At the conclusion of the opening ceremony, conference-goers were treated to Mozart's Sonata in D-Major for Two Pianos performed by Buffalo's own world-class pianists Frieda and Stephen Manes.

After an opening panel chaired by Paul Kurtz called Secularism, Humanism, and Democracy, the Thursday night keynote address was delivered by Richard Dawkins. In addition to the registered conference audience, many from the local community came out to hear Dawkins speak. Dawkins enthralled the crowd with his take-no-prisoners approach, and often cutting, but witty remarks directed toward those who embrace Intelligent Design—including President Bush. At one point he displayed a power-point slide which read simply—"intellectually lazy." One of Dawkins' most salient points came to the fore when he said, "The argument [is] that because living things appear to be so statistically improbable, so fantastically complex, therefore they must have been designed, I shall show, on the contrary, the more improbable, the more statistically improbable and complex something is, the less likely it is to be designed. The only thing that can conceivably, as far as we know, explain the illusion of design in living things is Darwinian Natural Selection." At the conclusion of his address, Dawkins fielded a wide range of questions from the audience.

On Friday morning, conference participants packed the main ballroom at the Hyatt Regency in downtown Buffalo for an exciting day of sessions. David Koepsell, executive director of CSH, chaired the opening panel called

"Secularism and the Threat of Fundamentalism." Papers were delivered by Jean-Claude Pecker, Ioanna Kucuradi, Lionel Tiger, and famous physicist Lawrence Krauss, who spoke on why Intelligent Design is simply a red herring to conceal a concerted effort from a variety of groups—including the White House—to attack and marginalize science. The luncheon panel was chaired by former executive director of CSH, Ed Buckner. Presentations were delivered by Richard Dawkins, Margaret Downey from the Greater Philadelphia Freethought Society, and psychologist R. Elisabeth Cornwell from Scotland. The afternoon session on Science and Fundamentalism was chaired by Center for Inquiry—Metro, New York, chairman Austin Dacey. Chris Mooney, author of the new book *The Republican War on Science*, detailed the rise of the conservative think tanks in America, and the often-bogus science they sponsor. Dr. Etienne-Emile Baulieu from France, from Bangladesh, moderate Muslim activist Fatemolla, and psychiatrist Thomas Szasz were also part of the panel.

Paul Kurtz hosted the Friday night reception and banquet at the Buffalo-Niagara Marriott Hotel in Amherst. Kurtz began the banquet with a few words reflecting and reminiscing on the founding of *Free Inquiry* magazine and the Council for Secular Humanism some 25 years ago. He pointed out just how prophetic the magazine's founding statement has turned out to be—first articulated back in the winter of 1980. "A Secular Humanist Declaration," (drafted by Kurtz) attempted to defend the Enlightenment and secular humanist values and virtues and pointed out the dangers of the rapid growth and popularity of the Christian fundamentalist Right and their attempts to seize political power. Here we are 25 years later, and the political right wing has become thoroughly entrenched in the political process—gaining enormous power. Immediately following his opening remarks, Kurtz surprised everyone with a birthday cake celebrating the Council's 25th anniversary and an impromptu version of "Happy Birthday," with the large crowd joining in. Sir Harold Kroto, Nobel Laureate in Chemistry, delivered the second keynote address of the conference. Amidst serious concerns about the fundamentalist's war on science, he reminded everyone that bringing science education to young people is not only an important task, but a joyful endeavor full of value and purpose. He highlighted the power of the Internet to reach the public, played videos from his Web site, <http://www.vega.org.uk/>, and shared stories from his many adventures bringing Buckyballs and soccer balls to the children of the world. His inspiring work brought the guests to their feet and left most feeling ready to go out and change the world. During the special awards ceremony, Paul Kurtz bestowed awards to Kroto, Ioanna Kucuradi, Ibn Warraq, Mona Abousenna, and in absentia, Mourad Wahba (who was ill and could not attend) for their courage and persistence in furthering the aims of science, humanism, and secularism, worldwide. Following the ceremony, the evening was capped off with a performance by Max Maven, world-renowned "mind reader," who dazzled the audience with his displays of psychological subterfuge and razor-sharp wit.

Saturday morning began with a Center for Inquiry board meeting over breakfast to discuss the organization's future agenda to mount a rigorous defense of the New Enlightenment. Saturday morning's panel, chaired by

Richard Hull, found everyone back once again at the University at Buffalo. This panel focused on the intersection of reason, ethics, morals, and values. Distinguished philosopher Antony Flew, delivered a paper titled "A Syllabus for Moral Education." Flew—a strong conservative—tried to defend traditional morality grounded in secular values. Philosopher John Novak, from Brock University in Ontario, Canada, delivered a talk on Values and Educational Living—grounded firmly in the tradition of John Dewey. Other papers were presented by Michael Ardon from Israel and Dr. Dennis Razis from Greece.

The afternoon panel, *The Scientific Examination of Religion*, was moderated by R. Joseph Hoffmann from Wells College in Aurora, New York and director of the Committee for the Scientific Examination of Religion (CSER).

One of the truly magnificent events of the conference came on Saturday night, when a group of conference attendees and speakers gathered at the Center for Inquiry for a semi-formal, black-tie- optional affair, to celebrate the grand opening of CFI's 2.5 million dollar new wing expansion of its transnational headquarters in Amherst. Partygoers were joined by special guests of honor Richard Dawkins and Ann Druyan, CSICOP Fellow, and wife of the late Carl Sagan. The champagne and hors d'oeuvre were flowing, as we were all entertained by an elegant string quartet. Richard Dawkins was particularly entranced by them, at one point uttering in his indomitable British style, "the string quartet is absolutely superb!"

On Sunday morning, attendees split up for two concurrent sessions: "The New Enlightenment in the Islamic World" chaired by the distinguished Ibn Warraq, and a panel chaired by Vern Bullough on "What is Necessary to Achieve a New Enlightenment?" This panel was truly transnational in scope, as taking part in the discussions were members of the International Academy of Humanism, Ruben Ardila from Columbia, Professor Valerii Kuvakin from Moscow, Svetozar Stojanovic from Belgrade, and Innaiah Narasetti from India.

This concluded the conference, but not the weekend. *Skeptical Inquirer* managing editor Benjamin Radford and director of grants and special projects Sherry Rook, led a group of conference attendees on a bus excursion to the pride of Western New York, Niagara Falls. Trip goers enjoyed a dramatic view of the Falls at night, illuminated by an ever-changing gallery of colored lights, and got to experience an IMAX theatre presentation on the history of old Niagara.

All in all the World Congress was a grand success, with an abundance of enthusiasm sparked, and a shared desire to continue the dialog amongst the 800 or so participants. We have already developed a listserve where members can exchange ideas and join the battle, "Toward a New Enlightenment."

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Membership and Contact Information:

Whether you are a humanist, or seeking to pursue a meaningful life without theism, or simply reexamining your beliefs and exploring the humanist approach to knowledge and moral issues, consider contacting one of our organizations. We will be happy to answer any questions about humanism and/or membership.

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 (HAMCIAC): Montgomery County chapter of the American Humanist Association / Curt Loose <mailto:contact@asimovhumanists.org>

Houston Atheist Society (HAS): Affiliated with American Atheist Society / Founded 2003 / Gipson Arnold / <mailto:enrrdd@hal-pc.org>

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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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