



HOUSTON FREETHOUGHT ALLIANCE

Newsletter

For the Humanist and Freethought Community

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Calendar of Events:

Sunday, March 5 | 10:30 am - 12:00 noon | *Coffee Social* | at Borders Books & Music in Meyerland Plaza (I-610 W Loop S at Beechnut) | Spontaneous informal discussions are held on first & third Sundays monthly | Contact: Art Fay*

Sunday, March 5 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.

Saturday, March 11 | 1:00 pm | *HAMCIAC Regular Meeting* | Montgomery Co. Library in the Woodlands (2nd floor) [From I-45 go west on Woodland Pkwy to 2nd traffic light; turn north (right) on Six Pines Dr; cross bridge & watch for wavy sculptures in the median; turn west (left) to Lake Robbins Rd; pass Woodlands Pavilion; turn left into Library parking lot] | Regular meetings are held on second Saturdays monthly | Contact: Curt Loose *

Sunday, March 12 | 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*

Saturday, March 18 | 2:30 pm - 4:30 pm | *Humanists of Houston (HOH) Regular meeting* | in the Unitarian Fellowship hall at 1504 Wirt Rd Meetings are held on the third Saturday of each month | Contact: Tom Brucia*

Sunday, March 19 | 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*

Monday March 20 | 5:00 pm | *Newsletter Deadline* | all articles, letters, and submissions of interest are welcome if on editor's desk, postmarks not withstanding (e-mail format required), | Contact: Jim Knierien*

Sunday March 26 | 10:30 am - 12:00 noon | *Ideas Club* | At Dr Louis Daily's family house at 1506 North Boulevard. See HOH WEB site for directions | Book reviews by members are held on fourth Sundays monthly, Contact: Bob Finch*

Wednesday, March 29 | 6:00 pm | *Houston Atheist Society (HAS)* | at West Gray Café 415 W Gray St between Stanford and Taft. Meetings are held on the last Wednesday of each month. | Contact: Verónica García *

Sunday, April 2 | 10:00 am - 12:00 noon | *Coffee Social* | at Borders Books & Music in Meyerland Plaza (I-610 W Loop S at Beechnut) | Spontaneous informal discussions are held on first & third Sundays monthly | Contact: Art Fay*

Sunday April 2 | 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, February 12, at the Courtyard By Marriott 3131 West Loop S (Just North of Richmond)

SPECIAL DARWIN DAY PROGRAM

Background music/Setup.....	9:30-10:00
Welcome and Introduction.....	10:00-10:02
DVD: Carl Sagan from. Cosmos.....	10:02-10:13
Jim A's Presentation.....	10:13-10:33
Readings: Darwin Quotes.....	10:33-10:43
DVD: Watson & Wilson.....	10:43-10:56
Break/Background Music.....	10:56-11:06
DVD: Richard Dawkins.....	11:06-11:21
Darwin's Home (Bob Finch).....	11:21-11:41
DVD: "Inherit the Wind".....	11:41-11:56
Closing.....	11:56-12:00

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HOH

The HOH held its monthly meeting Saturday afternoon, February 18 at the Unitarian fellowship on Wirt Road.

This month's program was an excellent video lecture by Sam Harris expanding on his book *The end of Faith*. Many thanks to Judith Wible and Ariel Thomann for this presentation.

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HAS

The Houston Atheist Society monthly meeting: was held Wednesday, February 22, 2006 at West Gray Café. The discussion began at 7pm.

The West Gray Café is located at 415 W Gray St between Stanford and Taft streets in the Montrose area. (713) 528-2887

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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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Is religion the root of all evil?

by Richard Dawkins

The Philadelphia Inquirer Posted on Sun, Jan. 29, 2006

Imagine, sang John Lennon, a world with no religion. Imagine no suicide bombers, no 9/11, no 7/7, no Crusades, no witch-hunts, no Gunpowder Plot, no Kashmir dispute, no Indian partition, no Israel/Palestine wars, no Serb/Croat/Muslim massacres, no Northern Ireland "troubles."

Imagine no Taliban to blow up ancient statues, no public beheadings of blasphemers, no flogging of female skin for the crime of showing an inch of it. Imagine no persecutions of the Jews - no Jews to persecute indeed, for, without religious taboos against marrying out, the Diaspora would long ago have merged into Europe.

Hitler invoked "My feelings as a Christian" to justify his anti-Semitism, and he wrote in Mein Kampf: "I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator: By defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord." Nevertheless, most such atrocities are not directly motivated by religion. IRA gunmen didn't kill Protestants (or vice versa) over disagreements about transubstantiation or such theological niceties. The motive was more likely to be tribal vengeance. One of "them" killed one of "us." "They" drove "our" great-grandfathers out of ancestral lands. Grievances are economic and political, not religious; and vendettas stretch "unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me."

A child's 'own' religion

Quoting Exodus reminds me, incidentally, that humanists prefer Gandhi's version: "An eye for an eye leaves everyone blind."

But if tribal wars are not about religion, the fact that there are separate tribes at all frequently is. Some tribes may divide along racial or linguistic lines, but in Northern Ireland what else is there but religion? The same applies to Indo-Pakistan, Serbo-Croatia, and various regions of Indonesia and Africa. Religion is today's most divisive label of group identity and hostility.

If a social engineer set out to devise a system for perpetuating our most vicious enmities, he could find no better formula than sectarian education. The main point of faith schools is that the children of 'our' tribe must be taught "their own" religion. Since the children of the other tribe are simultaneously being taught the rival religion with, of course, the rival version of the vendetta-riven history, the prognosis is all too predictable.

But what can it mean to speak of a child's "own" religion? Imagine a world in which it was normal to speak of a Keynesian child, a Hayekian child, or a Marxist child. Or imagine a proposal to pour government money into separate primary schools for Republican children and Democrat children.

Everyone agrees that small children are too young to know whether they are Keynesian or monetarist, Democrat or Republican, too young to bear the burden of heavy parental labels. Why, then, is almost our entire society happy to privilege religion, and slap a label like Catholic or Protestant, Muslim or Jew, on a tiny child? Isn't that a form of mental child abuse?

Belief in one's God

I once made that point in a broadcast debate with a Roman Catholic spokeswoman. I've forgotten her name, but I think she was some kind of agony aunt, and a stalwart of religious radio talk shows. When I said that a primary school child was too young to know whether it was a Catholic child, she bristled: "Just come and talk to some of the children in our local Catholic school! I can assure you they know very well that they are Catholic children." I believe it. The Jesuit boast - "Give me the child for his first seven years, and I'll give you the man" - is no less sinister for being familiar to the point of cliché.

But what if religion is true? Surely sectarian indoctrination wouldn't be child abuse if it saved the child's immortal soul? Despite the smug presumptuousness of that, I can almost sympathize, if you sincerely believe your religion is the absolute truth.

Let me, then, be ambitious if not presumptuous, and try to shake your belief.

Why do you believe in your God? Because he talks to you inside your head? Alas, the notorious Yorkshire Ripper's murders were ordered by the perceived voice of Jesus inside his head. The human brain is a consummate hallucinator, and hallucinations are a poor basis for real world beliefs.

Or perhaps you believe in God because life would be intolerable without him. That's an even weaker argument. Lots of things are intolerable, and it doesn't make them untrue. It may be intolerable that you are starving, but you can't eat a stone by believing - no matter how passionately and sincerely - that it is made of cheese.

By far the favorite reason for believing in God is the Argument from Improbability. Eyes and skeletons, hearts and nerve cells are too improbable to have come about by chance. Manmade machines are improbable too, and designed by engineers for a purpose. Surely any fool can see that eyes and kidneys, wings and blood corpuscles must also be designed for a purpose, by a master engineer. Well, maybe any fool can see it, but let's stop playing the fool, and grow up. It is 146 years since Charles Darwin gave us what is arguably the cleverest idea ever to occur to a human mind. He demonstrated a beautiful, working process whereby natural forces, by gradual degrees and with no deliberate purpose, forge an elegant illusion of design, to almost limitless levels of complexity.

I have written books on the subject and obviously can't repeat the whole argument in a short article. Let me give just two guidelines to understanding.

First, the commonest fallacy about natural selection is that it is a theory of chance. If it were, it is entirely obvious that it couldn't explain the illusion of design. But natural selection, properly understood, is the antithesis of chance. Second, it is often said that natural selection makes God unnecessary, but leaves his existence an open plausibility. I think we can do better than that. When you think it through, the argument from improbability, which traditionally is deployed in God's favor, turns out to be the strongest argument against him.

Science and reason

The beauty of Darwinian evolution is that it explains the very improbable, by gradual degrees. It starts from primeval simplicity (relatively easy to understand) and works up, by plausibly small steps, to complex entities whose genesis, by any nongradual process, would be too improbable for serious contemplation. Design is a real alternative, but only if the designer is himself the product of an escalatory process such as evolution by natural selection, either on this planet or elsewhere. There may be alien life forms so advanced that we would worship them as gods. But they too must ultimately be explained by gradual escalation. Gods that exist ab initio are ruled out by the Argument from Improbability, even more surely than are spontaneously erupting eyes or elbow joints.

Religion may not be the root of all evil, but it is a serious contender. Even so it could be justified, if only its claims were true. But they are undermined by science and reason. Imagine a world where nobody is intimidated against following reason, wherever it leads.

"You may say I'm a dreamer. But I'm not the only one."

Richard Dawkins is the author of "The Ancestor's Tale," "The Selfish Gene," and other books. His series "The Root of All Evil?" appeared earlier this month on Channel Four television in the United Kingdom. A version of this essay appeared in the London Independent.

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Ron's Ramblings

By Ron Titus

[1] This is to commend the editor (Jim Knierien) & whomever he consulted for the decision to change the name of the *Houston HUMANIST Alliance Newsletter* (HHA NL) to the *Houston FREETHOUGHT Alliance Newsletter* (HFA NL).

The name change took effect with the January issue, but I didn't notice until the February issue.

I consider myself as both an aspiring humanist and an aspiring freethinker. I say "aspiring" because I am still working at both of them.

Just as the Hippocratic Oath obliges medical doctors to first render no harm to their patients, so too I as an aspiring humanist feel obliged to first refrain from any INHUMAN behavior. Positively, my commitment to humanism moves me to pursue justice and honesty.

I could add "with compassion" because without it, maybe anything I do is somewhat inhuman. The trouble with "compassionate conservatism" is that it is frequently practiced without the compassion.

As an aspiring freethinker, I believe that it is useful for me to think "outside the box", to consider alternate ways of doing things, especially the untried because of ancient taboos. (But don't be fooled; I am as chicken as anyone about trying new things.)

Freethinkers are people who think beyond the restrictions of conventional thinking and preconceived prejudices.

Denise Branson recently quoted Edward R Murrow as saying "A great many people think they are thinking when they are really rearranging their prejudices." (HCOF-Talk, 2006 0208, Digest 2389 Message 7)

And just as "It is better to become human than it is to join a Humanist organization", so also "It is better to think freely than it is to join a Freethinker organization."

My challenge to my fellow freethinkers is to think about how little freedom we have, get mad about it, and then to do something about getting more freedom for ourselves and for

others. 'Because unless others are free, our own freedom is threatened.

And, of course, I do not speak for any other Humanist or Freethinker, much less for any other humanist or freethinker.

[2] I wish to go on record as saying that the celebration of Darwin Day on 2006 0212su was the best that I have yet attended. It's participants are to be commended for a job well done. It'll be a "tough act to follow" next year. Programs are great when I learn a lot. And I learned a lot.

Highlights for me were the DVDs of Carl Sagan (in his *Cosmos* series), of Charlie Rose interviewing James D Watson & E O Wilson, and Richard Dawkins, and of Spencer Tracy & Frederick Marsh (in the movie "Inherit the Wind").

[3] 'Saw the Iranian film "A Simple Lawyer" at the Rice University Media Center.

The film is a documentary about Shirim Ebadi, a female Iranian Muslim, who related some of her experiences as a civil lawyer under the former secular regime of the Shah and the current "Islamic" regime of the Ayatollahs.

Islamic is put within quotation marks because Ebadi said the Ayatollah regime is NOT Islamic but a perversion of Islam. The human rights-abusing regime does not reflect the true human rights-respecting Islamic laws of Allah.

Because Islamic law was interpreted as prohibiting women from presiding over men, Ebadi was dismissed as a civil judge, but allowed to continue as a clerk in the same court over which she once presided.

Because Ebadi continued to speak out publicly in favor of the human rights of women, she was imprisoned for 26 days in a small windowless room with a non-extinguishing light making it impossible to determine time (the hour, the day, the week, the month, the year).

She did not complain because she knew that others were detained for much longer periods and endured various physical tortures as well.

Ebadi resisted being labeled a hero/idol, stating that idolizing people is what gets people into trouble in the first place.

[4] Since the HFA NL does not censor me, I, believe it or not, spend time censoring myself. In fact, I spend a lot of time ANGUISHING over censoring myself.

I don't feel comfortable when I publish something that I suspect will upset readers. But I feel agitated (even worse) when I shelter readers from what I believe is useful for our mutual survival.

And I love what Glen Ellen Chandler once said, "Silence is no way to practice freedom of speech".

Hence, roses are red,
And violets are BLUE.
Seen any cartoons lately?
Are they too real to be TRUE?
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Food for thought and/or thought for indigestion

By Ron Titus

[1] Harry Whittington (accidentally shot while hunting with US VP Dick Cheney) served on both the Texas Board of Corrections and on the bonding authority that builds prisons. He said:

Prisons do not curb crime, they are hothouses for crime. Prisons are to crime what greenhouses are to plants. ... The only thing prisons are good for is segregating violent people from the rest of society, and most of them belong in psychiatric hospitals to begin with. The severity of sentences has no effect on crime. ... If we could ever get to where we spend as much per pupil on education as we do per prisoner, this state would take off like a rocket. In 2003, we spend nearly \$15,000 per prisoner, while average per-pupil spending was just over \$8,000.

[Molly Ivins, "Dick Cheney goes hunting: Accident or not, Cheney's responsible", 2006 0214, (c) 2006 Creators Syndicate, forwarded in emails from both Jimmy Dunne and Bob Tucker, dated 2006 0215]

[2] CHENEY ACCEPTS BLAME

[Front page headline, *Houston Chronicle*, 2006 0216th, P A1]

While (US VP Dick) Cheney accepts blame for accidentally shooting his hunting buddy Harry Whittington, when is he going to accept the blame for the deaths of over 2,000 American GIs in his personal war for oil in Iraq?

[3] When US VP Dick Cheney doesn't want to do something, he gets GWB to say "the Congress won't let me"; if Cheney WANTS to do something, he gets GWB to do it without asking anybody! Why should Dubya ask Congress, or anyone else for that matter, when the gods via Dick Cheney, have already told him what to do?

[4] In May of 2005, Tricky Sticky Dicky Cheney said that the insurgency was in its "final throes"... and where are we at now 9 months later?

[Anthony D. Stott, HCOF-Talk, 2006 0206, Digest 2386 Message 2]

[5] "I think this (US rebuilding Iraq since its invasion) is going along very well."

[Texas Governor Rick Perry, *Houston Chronicle*, 2006 0125w, P A1]

Is it going along better for Laura Bush than it is for Cindy Sheehan?

[6] I hate it when they say "He gave his life for his country." Nobody gives their life for anything. We steal the lives of these kids. We take it away from them. They don't die for the honor and glory of their country. We kill them.

[Combat veteran of 13 sea and land battles, former Adm Gene LaRoque, quoted by Coleman McCarthy, "There's nothing noble about war", *National Catholic Reporter*, 2006 0203, P 21]

[7] Are more people going to be killed? You bet.

[Donald Rumsfeld, 2003 0714, quoted by Coleman McCarthy, *ibid*]

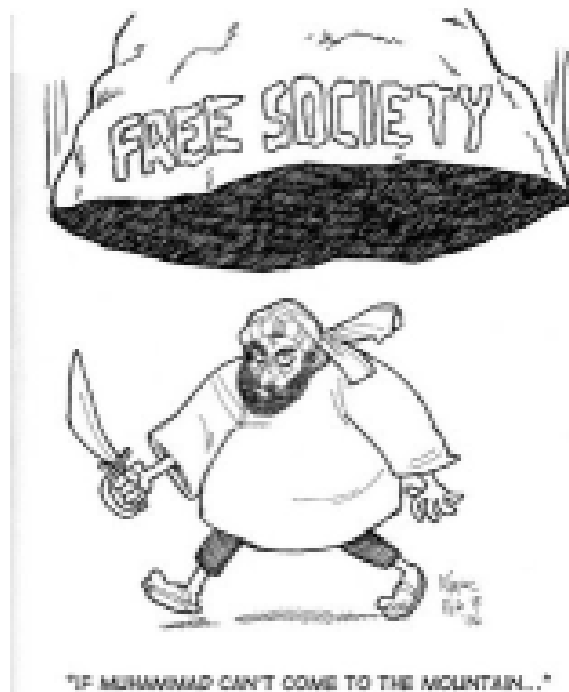
[8] Tom Brucia emailed me these quotes ...

(1) "If you cling to something as absolute truth and are caught in it, when truth comes in person and knocks on your door, you will refuse to let it in." (Attributed to Guatama Buddha)

(2) "In the name of ideologies and doctrines, people kill and are killed. If you have a gun, you can shoot one, two, three, five people; but if you have an ideology and stick to it, thinking it is the absolute truth, you can kill millions... Humankind suffers very much from attachment to views. 'If you don't follow this teaching, I will cut off your head.' In the name of the truth, we kill each other. The world is stuck in that situation. ... Peace can only be achieved when we are free from fanaticism." (Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddhist monk)

(3) "In order to help reconcile a conflict, we have to be in touch with both sides. We must transcend the conflict; if we are still in the conflict, it is difficult to reconcile. We have to have a nondualistic viewpoint in order to listen to both sides and understand. The world needs people like this for the work of reconciliation, people with the capacity of understanding and compassion." (Also Thich Nhat Hanh)

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Letters:

Letter to the Editor

Ehsan Ahrari makes a nice call to reason in "Consider the Muslim view in this clash over cartoons" (Chronicle, 8 Feb 2006).

For every absolute truth there are one or more other absolute truths of equal validity and opposite direction. Beware they who hold an absolute truth, for they are duty-bound to destroy all others.

The Framers of our Constitution did not just leave us a wonderful document. They also showed all future generations the value of compromise, and the value of accepting less-than-perfect human constructs (to me, that includes religions and their gods). If we ignore those principles at home, we must accept that other absolutes elsewhere will be confronting ours - without the opportunity for reasonable, intelligent dialogue.

Ariel Thomann

Dear Houston Chronicle Viewpoints;

It's sad that people like Dick Cheney enjoy shooting and killing innocent animals.

Animals and birds should be able to enjoy their lives without being blasted with gunshot.

Jimmy Dunne

Dear Attorney General Greg Abbott:

This is to inform you that I strongly object

to increasingly bold attempts by members of the Texas State Board of Education to usurp legislative functions as they apply to what Texas children are taught in school. For several years I have fought their efforts to change textbooks to reflect their personal preconceived notions rather than contemporary knowledge. Those misconceived efforts are now in the form of an outright power grab. I have written and testified against textbook censorship in the past, and I am now elevating my concerns to you.

Parents must be allowed to remain responsible for the ethical and moral education of their children. This function must never be pre-empted by any level of government.

Schools must be allowed to remain responsible for providing our children the tools they will need in the global marketplace of employment and human progress. These functions must never be pre-empted by zealots with extraneous agendas.

Please do everything that is in your power to allow Texas children to learn state of the art facts and information, particularly in the fields of science. Those areas of human knowledge must not be subverted to suit ideologies irrelevant to them.

Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Ariel J. Thomann, M.D., M.S.

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Press Room:

Secular Coalition Expands Supporters by Thousands

<http://www.secular.org/news/>

Feb. 13, 2006

The Secular Coalition for America has two new coalition partners: The Society for Humanistic Judaism and the Freedom From Religion Foundation. The Secular Coalition for America is the nation's first lobbying organization that works to increase the visibility and respectability of nontheistic viewpoints in the United States and to protect and strengthen the secular character of our government as

the best guarantee of freedom for all. These two new additions join the other members of the coalition which include the American Humanist Association, Atheist Alliance International, Institute for Humanist Studies, Secular Student Alliance, and Secular Web (Internet Infidels).

Organized in 1969, the mission of the Society for Humanistic Judaism is to mobilize people to celebrate

Jewish identity and culture consistent with a humanistic philosophy of life. As the central body for the Humanistic Jewish Movement in North America, the Society assists in organizing and supporting congregations and in providing a worldwide voice for its members. The Society gathers and creates educational and programmatic materials (including holiday and life cycle celebrations), sponsors training programs and conferences, and publishes a quarterly topical journal, Humanistic Judaism. This group has approximately 10,000 members and more than 30 congregations located in the major population centers across North America. The Society is connected to Secular Humanistic Jews worldwide through the International Federation of Secular Humanistic Jews, and to the movement's rabbinic seminary, the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism, and Camp Keshet, the summer camp for cultural, secular and Humanistic Jewish children.

Incorporated in 1978, the Freedom From Religion Foundation is a national association of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics) with 6,300 members working to keep church and state separate and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism. The Foundation publishes the newspaper Freethought Today and files lawsuits on violations of separation of state and church, including

payment of public funds for religious purposes and government funding of pervasively sectarian institutions. It has taken the lead in challenging the "faith-based initiative."

Having both groups join during the same time period clearly demonstrates the goals of the Secular Coalition for America: respecting individuals' right to celebrate their backgrounds and to enjoy whatever traditions they choose -- while at the same time, steadfastly working to ensure that no religion imposes itself on our government.

Herb Silverman, President of the Secular Coalition for America, expressed his pleasure regarding the expansion of the coalition, "With the additions of the Society for Humanistic Judaism and the Freedom From Religion Foundation, I am thrilled that we now have seven outstanding national organizations from across the nontheistic spectrum. By working together, we hope to publicly promote our perspectives and take them to the political table."

The Secular Coalition for America enthusiastically welcomes these new groups and encourages their thousands of members, and other nontheist Americans, to sign up for the e-alert program and financially support its efforts.

RESOLUTION ON DRUG POLICY

Adopted by the Board of Directors

AMERICAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

February 2005 ~ Washington, DC

Humanists -- guided by reason, inspired by compassion, and informed by experience -- long for and strive toward a world of mutual care and concern. We are committed to treating each person as having inherent worth and dignity and to making informed choices in a context of freedom consonant with responsibility.

It has become increasingly apparent that policies seeking to redress the negative consequences of drug use and abuse via prohibition and criminalization have failed. Rather than ridding society of the scourge of drug abuse, current drug interdiction efforts have allowed world-wide criminal enterprise to flourish, fostered class and racial disparities in enforcement, contributed to the degradation of life among many of the nation's poorest residents, and diverted valuable resources from protecting Americans from violence. Therefore, the American Humanist Association advocates rational and pragmatic solutions that focus on harm reduction as a means to resolve the negative consequences of drug use.

WHEREAS, drug abuse is principally a health and social issue best addressed through a combination of education, prevention and treatment, and

WHEREAS, the criminalization of all aspects of production, distribution, sale and use for certain classes of drugs is the proximate cause of a criminal justice system strained by non-violent offenders, and

WHEREAS, current drug laws, including mandatory minimum sentences, tend to disproportionately affect people with few financial resources, leading to selective enforcement and disparities in sentencing, and

WHEREAS, current laws prevent physicians from prescribing some drugs with medically proven uses for the alleviation of pain and suffering, and

WHEREAS, consistent with the principles of personal responsibility and liberty, the possession and use of regulated intoxicants should not be criminalized in the absence of a compelling public health concern, thus freeing the criminal justice system to focus on violent criminal activity, and

WHEREAS, providing unbiased, scientific information about the health, economic, and social consequences attributable to the use and potential abuse of currently illegal drugs will provide a rational basis for responsible decision making by individuals and public policy officials,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the AHA supports implementation of rational drug policies that invest in research, education and treatment, respect civil liberties and use harm reduction as the standard by which they are assessed.

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

12086 Sela Lane
Houston, TX 77072-3341

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:enrdd@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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