

HOUSTON HUMANIST ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

THE NEWSLETTER FOR HOUSTON'S HUMANIST AND FREETHOUGHT COMMUNITY

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From the Editor's desk:

By Ron Titus

Dear Readers,

[1] *I was pleased to learn that somebody at the national level of the AHA (American Humanist Association) was reading our HHA NL (Houston Humanist Alliance Newsletter). I felt flattered. Don't miss in the Letters section Bette Chambers' pointed and well appreciated comments.*

[2] *I retrieved another appreciated endorsement from my email box: "All members of HAS (Houston Atheist Society) are encouraged to subscribe to the FREE monthly e-mail publication ... (HHA NL) ... Ron is a fixture at many Houston area humanist/freethinker/Atheist meetings and events. His newsletter is read eagerly by a large number of us!"*

[3] *Anthony Stott wrote me, informed me that the HCOF (Houston Church of Freethought) is creating its own newsletter, and asked if the new newsletter could use the HHA NL Calendar. Anthony's letter and my response with the rationale used can be found in the Letters section. Maybe the HHA NL policy will become more restrictive after watching the outcome of the immigration policies in Canada. (???) (Ha?)*

[4] *Some of the snailmail copies of the September issue appeared over-inked. Hopefully, Office Depot will correct the problem.*

[5] *My apologies to Howard Thompson whom I quoted in the "Food for thought etc" column last month. I referred to him as "Michael". Howard was the editor of the now defunct newsletter Texas Atheist.*

Consolation to myself: Not remembering a person's name is better than not remembering the person!

[6] *Peace!*

Essays (#1 of 2:

Freethought Fiction

By Keith Irish

I was reflecting on choices of reading material the other day while reading a book review. I found myself turned off about a book because of the reviewer's description of how the book focused on religious elements. I began to wonder why that is. It dawned on me that so much of the type of books I read is science fiction and fantasy, and how many authors draw on elements of religion in their stories. I realized why I don't find this book appealing is because the characters are searching for a god, and I have gotten beyond that. I no longer have the need to find god, to justify god, to rectify god with the universe as it is. To me, since there is no god, I don't have that lack.

I started thinking about books I have read that one way or another helped shape my world view. These are books that explored the angle of religion from a skeptical bent, books that I enjoyed for their insights to the questions I'd been asking and their approach to the topic of religion. I have decided to share a few with the rest of you. Maybe some of you will be encouraged and share as well. I'll spread out a few reviews (whenever I feel like it) over a few issues of the newsletter.

The first book I wish to discuss is actually an author and a set of books: Terry Pratchett and the Diskworld novels. In particular, I wish to point out *Small Gods* and *Hogfather*. Terry Pratchett is a satirist and a hugely popular and funny writer. He also happens to be British, which can be mildly confusing at times when reading his works in the vernacular, but one gets used to the flavor and makes adjustments.

Diskworld is a special setting for Pratchett's works. It is a magical planet that happens to be flat, like

the old religious descriptions. It is circular, with a central hub mountain and water flowing perpetually over the edge. Diskworld sits upon the backs of four elephants, who walk on the back of a giant space turtle. This is said to come from the ideas of all the old religions. Diskworld is a magical fantasy realm, with wizards and trolls and dwarves and all the stock fantasy elements - twisted just a bit, for comedic purposes. Through the guise of Diskworld, Pratchett pokes fun at all the serious topics that permeate our world. The Diskworld series of books has several different character sets that function in their own slices of the Diskworld stories. Different books focus on different character sets as necessary, with some overlap when useful. This makes for an interwoven overall universe where one can never be sure who is going to appear.

Pratchett himself appears to be a freethinker, for he frequently makes fun of religious stupidities. The two books mentioned are ones I've found especially on topic.

Small Gods explores the idea that gods on Diskworld are real. You really don't want to be an atheist, because the gods are likely to fling lightning bolts at you to get your attention. The power and abilities of gods are determined by their number of believers. The more believers, the more power. This is an element throughout Diskworld, how belief leads to being. Once something is believed in, it comes into being, whether it existed before or not. Thus Death (i.e. the Grim Reaper) is a character who takes on all the ascribed traits expected of him - with a few idiosyncrasies that keep him a fun guy. Diskworld is infested with gods, from Offler the Crocodile God to the whole panoply of Egyptian desert gods to Greek type gods hanging out on the central mountain playing games of chance with the lives of their followers.

In *Small Gods*, Om is a god who has slowly lost all his believers to other gods and faded from popularity. He decides to visit Diskworld and manifests, only to find himself stuck in the body of a tortoise and with no abilities left. Well, he can talk - to a simpleton who seems to be his only follower left. Through Om and his journey to regain status, Pratchett explores the religious craziness of zealots, of inquisitioners, of high priests and low priests and prayer. He spares no prisoners in his exploration of the lengths people go in religious nuttiness.

The other book mentioned is *Hogfather*, who is a stand-in for Father Christmas (i.e. Santa Claus) in Pratchett's warped world. Hogfather is the deliverer of solstice presents to all the good boys and girls who send him a letter. He arrives via the chimney with his bag of toys, wear's a red coat with white trim, has a long white beard, and has many of the attributes of Mr. Claus... with the exception that his sleigh is pulled by six large hogs rather than reindeer. As mentioned before, things that are believed become real on Diskworld. *Hogfather* explores this concept in a variety of ways, beginning with the Hogfather himself and how an assassin is hired to kill the Hogfather, i.e. make him no longer exist. Leave it to Pratchett to devise a way to accomplish this. Of course, the world needs the Hogfather, so when the Hogfather goes missing on Christmas Eve, someone has to step in - that someone being Death. Meanwhile, Death's granddaughter

(yep) is working as a nanny for some children who have learned that monsters are real. The thing is, since she can see the monsters (unlike most adults), she has taught the children a new way to deal with the monsters - she bashes the monsters over the head with her fireplace poker. Through the eyes of children, Pratchett explores various myths taught to children (at least on Diskworld, as some I did not recognize). There's the bogey man in the closet and under the bed (a race of beings called bogey men), and then there's bears that attack people who step on cracks in sidewalks, and there's the Tooth Fairy - actually, a bunch of young ladies hired out because there's so much work to do collecting teeth. Diskworld is certainly a bizarre place.

What I liked about *Hogfather* is Pratchett's use of insanity to point out the insanity of it all. Though I suppose I should point out in the end Pratchett comes down on the side of defending the Hogfather (Santa Claus) as being necessary. The theme of the story is that a certain amount of belief is required so that humans can create the things that need to be created - things like *justice* and *mercy*. I guess a little belief in a harmless winter god (god of the return of the sun) is a small thing when balanced against the need for the myths of *fairness*, *justice*, and *mercy*.

Pratchett is an excellent writer and a great satirist of religion, politics, academia, capitalism, monarchy, heroes, adventure novels, fantasy writing, Hollywood, the music industry, marketing, feminism and equality, racism, and just about anything else he can work in. For anyone who enjoys reading good fiction, and doesn't mind exploring our world through the looking glass of an alternate one, I thoroughly recommend Terry Pratchett and the Diskworld novels.

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Essays (#2 of 3):

Alabama judge's actions spark a church-state standoff

By Leonard Pitts Jr.

Knight Ridder Newspapers

Thanks to Charlotte Coffelt for calling attention to this article, reprinted from the *Houston Chronicle*, 2003 09 01

The United States is not a Christian nation. It seems sensible to begin there, since it's the crux of the dispute.

Yes, the men who invented the nation were mostly Christians. Yes, too, Christianity is the nation's majority religion.

But the point is, this is not a theocracy, not a nation where the rulings of holy men carry official weight. The framers made that impossible when they wrote a First Amendment forbidding the government from endorsing any religion.

If you want to know why this is a good thing, you have only to recall how tenderly the Taliban once ruled Afghanistan. Or look to Nigeria, where religious leaders are debating

whether an adulterous woman should be stoned to death. To consider those nations is to be convinced that separating the functions of church and state was one of the brighter things the founders ever did.

This is not complicated stuff. It's the stuff of eighth-grade civics.

Roy Moore evidently skipped class that day. If a new Gallup poll is to be believed, many of us did. Moore is the now-suspended chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court who, two years ago, surreptitiously installed a granite monument to the Ten Commandments in the rotunda of the state judicial building. This sparked a church-state standoff that climaxed with Christians praying and protesting on the building's steps while a work crew carried out a federal court order to remove the statue.

The poll found that 77 percent of us disapprove of that order. Supporters of "Roy's rock" seem united in their belief that the government again showed its hostility toward believers and belief.

I find myself wondering where they got the building permit for that persecution complex. Are we talking about the same federal government whose legislative bodies begin their sessions with prayer? Whose money carries the legend, "In God we trust?" Whose official calendar recognizes neither Yom Kippur nor Ramadan but gives a day off with pay for Christmas?

Government has traditionally interpreted with equal doses of liberality and practicality the religious restrictions placed upon it by the First Amendment. It hasn't ignored the primacy of faith in modern life or its central role in our history. Rather, it has tried to walk a fine line between that which is constitutionally permissible and that which is not. Between acknowledging faith and advocating it.

The problem isn't that government hates Christians but that some Christians hate that line. They're the same folks who have never forgiven the Supreme Court for ruling that school children cannot be forced to begin their day with prayer. Now they see -- or think they see -- another instance of government stomping their beliefs.

One wonders how they'd feel if a Judge Muhammad had snuck in one night to install a monument carrying a few choice words from the Quran. Might they not be offended that he was pushing upon them an alien religion?

Judge Moore's supporters will say, of course, that it's not the same because this is a "Christian" nation founded on "Christian" principles. In other words, what he did was OK because it's "our" country.

But the Constitution doesn't just protect church from state and vice versa. It was also designed to protect the minority from the tyranny of the majority -- from the indifference with which the majority sometimes wields power.

Because the majority doesn't always see how others might be affected. To tell the truth, it doesn't always care.

From where I sit, Roy Moore isn't fit to judge a dog show. He is a zealot cynically manipulating a powerful mixture of grievance and faith. It's frightening to know that 77 percent

of the people support him. Thank goodness the Constitution does not.

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Essays (#3 of 3):

Evolution or Genesis?

By Louis W Cable

The theory of evolution, although long accepted as fact by almost all accredited academic institutions world wide, remains an anathema to many Bible believing Christians. In that regard, it is indeed interesting to note that on October 22, 1996 in his message to the Pontifical Academy of Science (an oxymoron if ever I heard one) Pope John-Paul II proclaimed (on what evidence I don't know) that between ancestral apes and modern humans, there was an 'ontological discontinuity' - a point at which God injected a human soul into an animal lineage. So, after many years of tenacious and unyielding opposition the Roman Catholic church, in an abrupt and somewhat dramatic about face, relented and endorsed evolution. In the face of the huge and growing body of scientific evidence supporting evolution the church had no recourse but to concede defeat. The pope, relying I'm sure on the advice and his assistants, thought he had figured out a way to in effect have his cake and eat it too. But, in accepting evolution on whatever pretext, this well meaning but ill advised pope may actually have done irreparable harm to Bible credibility because by endorsing evolution he rejected the Book of Genesis.

The Christian belief system rests on two biblical concepts - the fall and the redemption. The fall refers to Adam's disobedience known as "original sin." The redemption refers to Jesus' personal sacrifice exonerating all mankind from the burden of original sin. Because these two basic concepts are inextricably connected, if either is removed, the entire Christian belief system comes crashing down.

The theory of evolution in essence asserts on the basis of reliable evidence that all living forms are linked together through a long series of common ancestors stretching all the way back to the beginning of life on earth some 3.5 billion years ago. Such simplistic myths as those found in Genesis are easily pruned by way of a judicial application of Occam's razor. When this happens the Genesis myths become irrelevant in the search for human origin.

The lesson here is that the theory of evolution and the Genesis accounts of the origin of humans and other life forms are not only incompatible; they are mutually exclusive. If the one is true, the other is not.

Louis & Maryjane Cable live in Lufkin TX. He invites all to visit his atheist web site "Skeptics Corner": www.inu.net/skeptic

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Chronicles (#1 of 6):**Reproductive choice
blocked by Administration & supported by AHA**

AHA NEWS RELEASE (2003 0821th1013)

Contact: Roy Speckhardt (202-238-9088)

(Washington, DC) "Confirming our fears, the Bush administration continues to feverishly block reproductive choice at every turn. Now politicians are attempting to interfere with the responsibility of physicians to use their best judgment in serving the reproductive health needs of women. Government should not be in the business of making complex medical decisions. Women should be left free to follow their own individual conscience in deciding if and when to become a mother," said immediate past president of the American Humanist Association (AHA), Edd Doerr.

Opponents of a woman's right to choose have coined the term "partial birth" abortion, although the expression has never appeared in the medical literature. Both chambers of Congress passed bills to ban the procedure this year, and President Bush has promised to sign the forthcoming compromise legislation. Pro-choice proponents have threatened to file a suit that will almost surely be decided at the Supreme Court.

The AHA continues to support the United States Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision recognizing the constitutional right to privacy that protects the right of every woman to free reproductive choice.

The freedom to make decisions regarding one's body is one of the most fundamental human rights that exist. Thousands of children go unwanted, yet anti-choice activists would force a woman to have a child, whether she wants to or not, or is able to adequately care for a child or not—even if it would gravely imperil her health! Their blind zealotry knows no reason," added AHA president Mel Lipman.

Lipman continued, "The best way to prevent abortions is not by forcing a woman to bear a child but through complete reproductive health information and services that include access to contraception. Opponents of choice suffer from a severe case of historical amnesia—they would have us go back to the dismal days of back-alley abortions and the subjugation of women."

Concluded Doerr, "Emotional fallacies and distorting language do not change the egregious fact that anti-choice zealots are trying to deny women freedom of conscience. They are sanctioning blunt intrusion into the most private decision she can make."

The American Humanist Association (www.americanhumanist.org) is the oldest and largest Humanist organization in the nation. The AHA is dedicated to ensuring a voice for those with a positive outlook, based on reason and experience, which embraces all of humanity.

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Chronicles (#2 of 6):**New poll on school vouchers
a wake-up call to politicians**

AHA NEWS RELEASE (2003 0821th1050)

Contact: Edd Doerr (301-260-2988)

(Washington, DC) "Continuing opposition to school vouchers shown by a new poll should serve as a wake-up call to President Bush and congressional Republicans," according to educator and Americans for Religious Liberty president Edd Doerr.

"The 35th annual Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa survey released today," Doerr added, "shows that public opinion is opposed to school vouchers by 60% to 38%. This compares to the average two-to-one opposition to vouchers or their analogs registered by votes in 25 state referendum elections from 1967 to 2000."

"The Gallup/Phi Delta Kappa poll also showed that 88% of respondents gave a satisfactory or higher rating to the public school attended by their oldest child," Doerr noted.

"The Bush administration and Republicans in Congress and state legislatures need to pay attention to the majority of Americans who do not want their tax dollars to pay for sectarian or other nonpublic schools which commonly practice forms of discrimination and indoctrination that would be unacceptable in public schools," Doerr concluded.

Edd Doerr, president of Americans for Religious Liberty, is a former teacher in public and private schools. Americans for Religious Liberty is a nonprofit public interest educational organization dedicated to defending religious freedom and church-state separation.

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Chronicles (#3 of 6):**More threats to civil liberties
patterned by Administration**

AHA NEWS RELEASE (2003 0825m1004)

By Jende Huang

Yet another threat to our civil liberties has reared its head in Congress. Coupled with previous attacks on constitutional protections in the war on terror, the Bush administration has set a disturbingly consistent pattern of whittling away constitutionally protected rights and liberties.

A draft of the Vital Interdiction of Criminal Terrorist Organizations Act of 2003, dubbed the VICTORY Act, was recently leaked to the media. Although the draft has not yet been introduced in Congress, it contains numerous provisions that have generated attention because they expand the government's control, including increased wiretapping powers and easier access to the financial records of suspected criminals.

Though other government policies have attracted controversy, the PATRIOT Act is the best known. The PATRIOT Act allows surveillance orders based in part on government obtained records of websites you visited and books checked out of public libraries. To facilitate this process it authorizes governmental investigators

to force Internet service providers, libraries, and others to provide patron records on request.

Separate from that much maligned bill is the alleged maltreatment of so-called “enemy combatants” at Guantanamo Bay, racial and religious profiling, undisclosed detentions, and a spike in deportations of Muslim men.

Due process, access to counsel, fair trials--bedrocks of American civil society--are being trampled upon. Americans must not let this continue. To make matters worse, Congress now proposes expanding the government’s already amplified power to circumvent normal investigative procedures and practices. When taken together, these developments paint a very disconcerting portrait.

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Chronicles (#4 of 6):

Exorcism kills autistic 8-year-old Police rule homicide

AHA NEWS RELEASE (2003 0826tu1608)

Contact: Roy Speckhardt (202-238-9088)

(Washington, DC) “Were it not for fundamentalist superstition Terrance Cottrell, Jr. would be alive today. Extreme interpretations of scripture are no justification for the physical abuse of a child,” said American Humanist Association executive director Tony Hileman.

Terrance Cottrell, Jr., an autistic 8-year-old boy, died Friday, August 22, during a Milwaukee prayer service aimed at removing the “evil spirits” within him. The medical examiner reported that Cottrell died of suffocation. Police have ruled the death a homicide and have arrested church member, Ray Hemphill, who admitted to sitting on the boy’s chest while his mother and other parishioners held down his arms and legs. This was done as part of their exorcism.

The Faith Temple Church of Apostolic Faith has been involved in controversy before. In 1998 a girl alleged she had been beaten during a service at the church, but no charges were filed. If this warning had been heeded, this exorcism and Cottrell’s senseless death could have been prevented.

Unfortunately, sections of Wisconsin law are proving problematic for the prosecution. One section states that a person cannot be held responsible for the death of an individual simply because religious rituals are used to treat a person instead of normal medical treatment. Another says that a parent cannot be accused of abuse solely because prayer or other religious practices are favored over medical treatment.

Hileman responded, “Cottrell’s wrongful death cannot be ignored because it came at the hands of well meaning, if severely misinformed, religious practitioners. It would only worsen matters if this crime went unpunished because of a legal loophole.”

“As Humanists we demand and expect justice in this tragic example of the pitfalls of blind faith and superstition taken to the extreme,” concluded Hileman.

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Chronicles (#5 of 6):

Commandments removal victory for rule of law

AHA NEWS RELEASE (2003 0828th0946)

Contact: Edd Doerr (301-260-2988)

Washington, DC – “Removal of the Ten Commandments monument from the Alabama Judicial Building today is a victory for the rule of law and for the constitutional principle of church-state separation that undergirds the religious freedom of all Americans,” said Edd Doerr, president of Americans for Religious Liberty.

“If public display of the Ten Commandments is so important, our tens of thousands of houses of worship could display them on their interior walls and on signs in their churchyards,” Doerr added. “Churches and private citizens are quite free to publicly display the Commandments on private property.”

“Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore and his supporters seem unable to grasp that the religious freedom of all Americans is most secure when government is neutral toward our nation’s rich profusion of religious traditions.”

Americans for Religious Liberty is a nonpartisan watchdog organization founded in 1981.

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Chronicles (#6 of 6):

Religious group recruits children to circumvent separation

AHA NEWS RELEASE (2003 0828th1012)

By Jende Huang

(Washington, DC) “A religious group is unethically circumventing the separation of religion and government by recruiting children to advance its sectarian faith in public schools,” said American Humanist Association Executive Director Tony Hileman.

The evangelical group American Family Radio and Revival Fires Ministries recently started an annual back-to-school “Truth for Youth Revival Week.” By law, adults cannot distribute sectarian literature on public school grounds. So this group recruits children to hand out New Testaments featuring comic strips, which they call “the Youth for Truth Bible,” to “the unsaved” in public schools.

Responded Hileman, “The mere presence of Bible-toting children out to convert “the unsaved” forces fellow students to accept or reject aggressive Christian proselytizing. Given the resources of students backed by a ministry, this raises the

question of whether such students have an unfair advantage over other groups in spreading their message on public school campuses.

"The AHA doesn't advocate censorship but rather fair play, and it is difficult to see how promoting this one-sided view has any academic value. Their purpose is clearly to convert as many youths as possible to their particular sectarian beliefs. That's hardly educational.

"Even worse, they don't shy away from using children to accomplish what they legally cannot do themselves," concluded Hileman.

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Letters:

[1] From Jim Knierien:

(The September) issue may be one of the shortest, but I think one of the best (content). My favorite is:

Humanists direct themselves to the development of the human species.

Atheists direct themselves against imposed beliefs in the supernatural.

Freethinkers direct themselves away from imposed pre-existing conventions.

Short but to the point.

[2] From Alice and Richard Leuchtag:

We always enjoy receiving our Newsletter and keeping up with things humanist in Houston. Keep up the good work.

We are forwarding some material on a very important issue: Does the vote we cast count? With new voting machines -- black boxes -- we are losing a paper trail and accountability.

[Ed: The material forwarded seemed too long for reprinting. My fallible summarization: Voting machines are being manufactured by a private corporation. The big plus is that they will simplify and make voting so much easier and efficient. The minus is the potential for tampering and misuse. I personally recall professional gamblers telling me that slot machines in all casinos are geared so that although jackpots are paid out periodically to keep customers interested, the "house" never loses money.

Can voting machines be similarly fixed? Josef Stalin said casting votes isn't as important as counting them. Perhaps we have nothing to worry about if they are managed by the current federal government.]

[3] From past AHA President Bette Chambers:

Thank you for publishing Jim O'Leary's thoughts about Labor Day from the Waverly STAR.

"Humanism and its Aspirations," our new Humanist manifesto, expresses these thoughts in general terms. I asked at its unveiling if more might be said about the "universal right to collective bargaining," in a document intended to encompass global humanity. I was assured that plans are afoot for embellishing many of

its points in-depth in occasional papers which might appear in the Humanist in the future. I trust that this task will not be long delayed.

Some of us have lived to see the US labor movement decimated, reduced to a pathetic shell. And O'Leary cites the virtual absence of organized labor overseas, while workers are exploited by multi-national corporations. If ever there was a "humanist" issue, this is one.

As a child I witnessed my own father beaten and bloodied in a jurisdictional dispute between Dave Beck's Teamsters and Harry Bridges' ILWU during the strike of 1934 on the Seattle waterfront. The ILWU won, and my father, aided only by a 6th grade education, later became an elected member of the Executive Committee of Local #19, and then closed his career having gained a superb retirement program from the employers for all the longtime stevedores and dock workers through tough collective bargaining. The same achievements were repeated throughout the Pacific Rim through workers asserting their rights with the aid of a strong union.

I live about 20 miles from the town of Centralia, WA, site of the bloody "Centralia Massacre" of 1919 when American Legionnaires clashed with members of the Industrial Workers of the World...the IWW, or the "Wobblies." Let's never forget that the 8-hour day was won in the woods of the Pacific Northwest and the coal fields of the east when men working under perilous conditions organized and threatened to withhold their labor through strikes until their remarkably small and reasonable demands were met. In 1919, the US was in the grip of a "red scare." IWW leaders such as the one-eyed giant, "Big Bill" Haywood, were hounded in the courts. Haywood ultimately left the US to design the rail system in the USSR. With John Reed, the writer and poet from Oregon, they ultimately became the only two Americans interred within the walls of the Kremlin. The IWW was not a pro-communist or anti-communist movement. It welcomed workers in all laboring fields for a pittance, issued red membership cards, had central labor halls and organized under the concept of "one big union." It differed from other unions, craft or trade, in that it aimed to enlist all men working in a single industry, such as aircraft or shipping, thus avoiding strike-breaking by shutting down all trades at one time until collective bargaining could succeed, gaining advances for one and all.

Felling gigantic trees is a dangerous occupation. The 8-hour day was based on the fact that logging requires daylight. Summer brought dangerous forest fire conditions, so men logged in the fall, winter and early spring. Even at that, the death rate by accident was alarmingly high. In addition to an 8-

hour day, among their "unreasonable" demands: hot water and soap in the bunkhouses, blankets for their beds, two hearty meals a day and a sustaining lunch in the woods! And for this they were shot at, and one man, Wesley Everest, was lynched on the bridge over the Skookumchuck River near Centralia in November 1919, the mob egged on by Legionaires, townspeople, businessmen and returning WWI veterans who had staged a march through town. Deaths on the other side included veterans fresh from the war, and to this day, the only thing that remains certain is that Everest did not kill anyone.

I grew up regarding Franklin Delano Roosevelt as the hero of the people. Despite his faults which only later became known to me, I still regard FDR as the finest president the country has ever had. What might he think of this "cipher" from Texas, "appointed" by the Republican majority on the US Supreme Court? I cannot now nor will I ever regard George W. Bush as a legitimate president. Nor any of his strike-breaking predecessors.

Collective bargaining and the right to organize into unions must become an international priority once again. It is an issue no Humanist can disregard.

[4] Jim O'Leary:

I can't tell you how flattered and pleased I am that you liked my column well enough to include it in your very good newsletter. Do you accept contributions?

[5] From Anthony Stott:

We at the HCOF are in the process of creating a monthly newsletter and we would like to include an events calendar in there for all Houston Area Atheist/Humanist/Freethought organizations.

I would like to ask your permission if we could borrow the events calendar that is currently in your news letter for this purpose.

{Editor's response: Paragraph 3 in the "Publisher" section of the HHA NL reads in part: "Current editorial policy is: Readers are the board of directors, the advisory board. And since no meetings are set, it is up to readers to make their views known to the editor."}

You (Anthony) are a reader, you have made your idea known to the editor (me), and we agree that an extended use of the HHA NL calendar would be advantageous to a wider range of readers.

Paragraph 6 reads in part: "Anyone may quote from the newsletter but is asked to please give credit where credit is due, etc."

Reciprocally, I am asking that you cite the source. Thanks.]

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Ron's Ramblings:

By Ron Titus

I am reading Eric Fromm's *Marx's Concept of Man*.

I have not yet finished Chapter 4, and already I have concluded that I have moved from hating Marx (whom I did not know except as someone condemned by the Vatican Church for his being an atheist) to loving him because he advocated principles with which I am now trying to live my life. The principles involve capitalism.

I am not an absolute capitalist, because material gain is not my top priority in life. I am a relative capitalist, because I like money and the things that money can provide.

I researched the biographies of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), Karl Marx (1818-83), and Friedrich Engels (1820-95).

Because my early academic exposure to them was eclipsed by the likes of Fulton J Sheen (monsignor, TV celebrity, bishop, 1895-1979) who publicly demonized them regularly, I am only now beginning to appreciate them. (Sigh!)

Wittingly or unwittingly, the Vatican Church has been, and some would argue still is, a bastion of ignorance!

Rightly or wrongly, I have long believed the formulation: The first requisite for condemning is ignorance!

I don't want to enter my final resting place without having spoken my mind.

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Food for thought and/or thought for indigestion:

By Ron Titus

[1] (1) "Whether or not a person is a religious believer does not matter much." (2) "We humans can live quite well without recourse to religious faith." (3) "I sometimes say that religion is something we can perhaps do without." (4) "Religious belief is not a precondition either of ethical conduct or of happiness." (5) "The influence of religion on people's lives is generally marginal, at least in the developed world." (6) "One can teach a moral consciousness that makes no appeal to religious faith. Inner suffering is connected with the growing confusion as to what constitutes morality. The essence of morality is compassion toward other people and all creatures. Choose your own path; it is not necessarily for everybody." [Dalai Lama, *Ethics for the New Millennium*, quoted in a liturgy by Sheila Doran-Benyon, 2003 0914]

[2] "Fascism should more appropriately be called corporatism because it is a merger of state and corporate power." [Benito Mussolini, *Encyclopedia Italiana*, quoted by Tom Brucia, HCOF-Talk]

[3] (C)rime pays and pays real well. But the cost to one's own integrity is very high. [Tim Gorski, 2003 0817, HCOF-Talk, Digest 1267 Message 2]

[4] "I am 80 years old, and I can honestly say that I have NEVER had a bad day."

The bridge you burn now may be the one you have to cross later.

[Testimony & philosophy of Joe Cash (1922-2003)]

[5] "Only two things are infinite; the universe and human stupidity, and I'm not sure about the former."

[Albert Einstein, quoted by Shawn Harrington in a letter to the editor of the *Austin American-Statesman*, and requoted in *TFN Clips*, 2003 0915]

[6] "The trouble with the world is that the stupid are cocksure and the intelligent are full of doubt."

[Bertrand Russell, quoted by Tim Gorski, HCOF-Talk, 2003 0825, Digest 1274 Message 16]

[7] I think the problem of wasted votes is the fault of the electoral system. Here and in the UK winner takes all. The winner is the one with the greatest number of votes and in a 10 horse race this can be 1 vote over 10%. Margaret Thatcher won landslide majorities in parliament three times with most people actually voting against her every time.

I'm a fan of proportional representation which means that in local and national government the make-up of elected members reflects the local and national votes. Parties with greater than 5% of the vote get representation.

In the present system people often vote against a party rather than for their first choice, which is a great shame.
[*"Nige the Atheist"*, HCOF-Talk, 2003 0905, Digest 1292 Message 10]

[8] No soldier shall, in time of peace be quartered in any house, without the consent of the owner, nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law.

[Third Amendment, U S Constitution]

[9] "Honestly, I think we should just trust our President in every decision that he makes, and we should just support that."

[Pop star Britney Spears, about Geo Dubya Bush & his war in Iraq, *Time*, 2003 0915, P 23]

[10] "If you don't think too good, don't think too much!"

[Ted Williams, quoted by "the Tappet Brothers" on *Car Talk*, National Public Radio, KUHF, 2003 0906sa0916]

[11] How can we be on the same page when we are not (even) in the same book?

[12] When traveling the road of life, many seem to have taken the "cynic" route.

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Publisher:

[1] The **HOUSTON HUMANIST ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER** (HHA NL) is published monthly by the Houston Humanist Alliance (HHA). Since 2001 05 (Issue #22), it is compiled, edited, printed, photocopied, and circulated by J Ron Titus (713-680-2880 / jront@juno.com / 5202 Viking Houston TX 77092-4236). Staff: Jim Knierien (Page-Layout Editor) and Nancy & Richard Chancey (Circulation Assistants)

[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 only free press is the one you own." How true H L Mencken was! The HHA owns this NL. Current editorial policy is: Readers are the board of directors, the advisory board. And since no meetings are set, it is up to readers to make their views known to the editor.

[4] 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.

[5] The current editor operates personally from two principles: (1) "People do not make mistakes by knowing too much; they make mistakes by not knowing enough!" and (2) "Better than censorship of views is education of viewers."

[6] 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.

[7] 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 notwithstanding. E-mail format required. Name, phone number, & street address required for editorial contact purposes only.

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.

[8] Snailmail editions are sent gratis to paid members of the HHA. Email editions are sent gratis to anyone else upon request.

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Calendar of Events:

Sunday, October 5 / 10:00 - 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, October 5 / 12:30 - 2:00 pm / *Humanists of Houston (HOH) Brunch* / in upstairs facility of Kroger's on 1505 Wirt Rd (across street from Unitarian Fellowship) / Topics chosen by the group are discussed on first Sundays monthly / Contact: Jimmy Dunne*

Saturday, October 11 / 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, October 12 / 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*

Wednesday, October 15 / 12:00 noon / *Newsletter Deadline* / All articles, letters, and submissions of interest are welcome if on editor's desk, postmarks notwithstanding (e-mail format required), / Contact: Ron Titus*

Saturday, October 18 / 2:30 - 4:30 pm / *Humanists of Houston (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, October 19 / 10:30 am / *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, October 26 / 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*

Sunday, October 26 / 3:00 - 4:30 pm / *Houston Atheist Society (HAS)* / at Central Market on the corner of Westheimer & Wesleyan / Meetings are held on fourth Sundays monthly. Contact: Keith McCaffety*

Sunday, November 2 / 10:00 - 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 2 / 12:30 - 2:00 pm / *HOH Brunch* / in upstairs facility of Kroger's on 1505 Wirt Rd (across street from Unitarian Fellowship) / Topics chosen by the group are discussed on first Sundays monthly / Contact: Jimmy Dunne*

Monday, December 15 / midnight / Deadline for submitting articles to the *Essays in the Philosophy of Humanism 2004* / Contact: Marian Hillar*

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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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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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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 / jimmydunne@msm.com / 281-584-9707 (1306 W Brooklake Houston TX 77077)

Humanist Association of Montgomery County, Isaac Asimov Chapter (HAMCIAC): Montgomery County chapter of the American Humanist Association / rosshenry@mac.com / 281-288-6064

Houston Atheist Society (HAS): Affiliated with American Atheist Society / Founded 2003 / thinkbolt@yahoo.com / 713-968-6520

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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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