

HOUSTON HUMANIST ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

THE NEWSLETTER FOR HOUSTON'S HUMANIST AND FREETHOUGHT COMMUNITY

DECEMBER 2003 ISSUE 50

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From the Editor's desk:

By Ron Titus

Dear Readers,

[1] *Feast or famine! Is this a first? 'No submissions to the LETTERS department!*

[2] *Page Layout Editor Jim Knierien wants everyone to know that an Adobe PDF version of this newsletter (same format as snailmail printed edition) is available. To add your name to this email list (anonymously sent), send an email to: jim.knierien@thermo.com*

[3] *Ron Jones reported a new NL subscriber who wrote him, "Amazing! I didn't know there was another in Angleton."*

[4] *Peace!*

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Essays (#1 of 2:

Freethought Fiction

by Keith Irish

Previously, I wrote an article where I discussed works of fiction, particularly science fiction, that inspired me to humanist ideas or played a role in my evaluation of my present attitudes. This will be part two in the series.

I would like to discuss the works of Robert A. Heinlein. Heinlein is a noted SF author whose writing career spanned from the 1930s to the 1980s. He is a very well known SF author, and people tend to have strong feelings about his writings. The Idea's Club previously reviewed his book, *Stranger In A Strange Land*, which looks at the human world from the perspective of someone raised by aliens.

However, I would like to focus on the novel *Job: A Comedy of Justice*. This book takes its title from the biblical book of the same name, wherein a devout follower of God is beset by a series of trials by Satan to determine the strength of his devotion. Heinlein's *Job* is set in a contemporary setting involving alternate worlds. *Job* is the pastor of a church, on a vacation to the South Pacific, wherein he finds himself performing a firewalk with the natives. He experiences a bizarre event during the firewalk, after which his world comes apart. Everything is slightly off. Everyone calls him a different name, his boat has completely different technology, and customs are eye-raisingly different - such as everyone swims in public naked.

Through the series of events, the "world" in which *Job* is imbedded keeps changing, with differences in technology levels and cultures. He finds a companion that becomes his traveling partner through the multiple worlds, a young Danish woman. This presents a serious problem for the

devoted Christian who finds the love of his life (as opposed to his wife in the original world) is decidedly Norse.

But the real adventure doesn't begin until the Rapture occurs, and Job finds himself in heaven without his new love. And heaven isn't quite the pleasure he thought it would be. He searches heaven and hell to find her, before learning the truth - that there are other options. He learns Satan isn't so bad and Jehovah is really kind of petty and selfish.

Job provides a critical examination of religion in general and christianity in particular, by taking a different (and perhaps more straightforward) interpretation of the biblical text. I found it a provocative story and well-told.

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Essays (#2 of 3):

Capitalism & Marxist communism

By Ron Jones

On 8/24, the fourth Sunday of the month the ideas club reviewed Eric Fromm's "Man's Concept of Man". Che (Alvandli) did the presentation.

In the HHA NL 2003 10 issue of this newsletter, Ron Titus said that he had moved from hating Marx to loving him, because he "advocated principles with which I am now trying to live my life."

I am afraid that I still hate Karl Marx. I have never believed that he wanted to see the abomination of Communism as practiced in the Soviet Union or other Communist countries, but he did advocate the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat". Anyone who advocates dictatorship, no matter who is doing the dictating, is evil, in my opinion.

The other reason I consider Marx to be evil is that he had contempt and hatred for Capitalism and by extension, the Capitalist. Marx claimed that the capitalist was a parasite who grew fat off the labor of the worker. Marx never considered what goes into the creation of capital. I suppose that to Marx capital is a part of nature. He ignored the enormous amount of knowledge that must go into the production of wealth. He never considered who would take the place of the capitalist in his communist utopia. Who would decide what would be done? How would the enterprise be managed? Who would provide the technical know-how?

Marx must have thought that manufacturing consists only of manual labor. Could you turn loose a group of workers into a field, and they would (somehow) build a factory? Who would pay them? How would they know what to do? Marx does not answer these questions.

One emotion which I felt before for Marx has grown as a result of reading Fromm's book. That is a profound sadness that such a brilliant man could be so wrong about everything, in spite of his genius, simply because

he was so naïve and so misinformed, and as a consequence, had such irrational premises.

Apparently he actually believed that it was inevitable that people would someday embrace a system in which not only private property would not exist, but a totalitarian state that prohibits private property would not exist either. There would be no capitalism, no private property, and the State would wither away. Those who wished to produce, would work, those who did not wish to produce would not work, yet still receive their "basic" needs. From whom? No answer. Who would decide what "basic" needs are? No answer. No one would produce anything that he could not use or consume himself, because if he or she did, the labor would be "Alienated". Since there would be no "useful things", there would be no "useless people"!

I submit that such a situation could never exist. If it could, either Mankind would have to have been socially engineered to have the motivation, intelligence, and drive of social insects, or would exist in the most abysmal poverty imaginable.

There are two reasons it could never exist. The first is because people really want to improve their lives. Someone would produce more than someone else, and would demand to keep what was earned. You would have the beginnings of capitalism (horrors!) The second is that people would be so poor, there would be food riots, and then some thug would arise and form a government to "restore order".

On the fourth Sunday of this month, the Ideas Club will review Ayn Rand's "Capitalism, the Unknown Ideal". This is the absolute antithesis of the works of Karl Marx. The book consists of a series of essays, most written by Rand. One of the most interesting in the context of the August meeting of the Ideas Club is the 23rd essay, "Alienation" written by Nathaniel Branden. That essay deals with Eric Fromm and his fear and hatred of Capitalism, and by extension, his fear and hatred of mind, and his fear and hatred of mankind.

Those of you that plan to attend, be sure to read the first essay "What is Capitalism" by Ayn Rand and the 23rd essay, "Alienation" written by Nathaniel Branden.

[Editor: Ron Titus comments in his *Ramblings* column.]

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Essays (#3 of 3):

Corporal punishment

By Jimmy Dunne

I went to a dinner for Spring Branch ISD (Houston suburb) senior volunteers last night and asked the new superintendent Yvonne Katz about corporal punishment in their schools. (It is not used now but still legal)

She told me an interesting story about when she was a new principal at a middle school in the Northside ISD in San Antonio. Teachers asked her about paddling and

who would do it, principals, coaches, etc? She said they could do it but they would have to have training before a child could be paddled.

At a teachers meeting she had the women wear slacks. The 18 teachers who wanted to paddle were given paddles that she had made in the shop. They were like ping pong paddles with longer handles, a hole to hang them up and the teacher's name on it.

They were paired up, women with women, men with men. One played the student to be paddled, the other the paddling teacher. The "students" bent over and the teacher pretended to paddle with very light taps. She said is this the way you are going to paddle students? They said no. So they had to really swing the paddles hard on each other. About half put their paddles on the table and walked out. The others stayed with the program.

Only one teacher ever came to the office to paddle a child. She was a special ed teacher with a male student. She had to call the parent first to get an OK. She got it. When she pulled the paddle back before making the swing, she got a funny look on her face like she realized what she was going to do. She swung the paddle anyway. She started crying and walked out with the boy.

That was the last paddling in this school.

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Chronicles (#1 of 2):

Foreign policy remarks by General call for his removal

AHA News Release (2003 1022w1649)

Contact: Roy Speckhardt (202-238-9088)

"A person who publicly views U.S. foreign policy as a Christian crusade should not be representing American interests abroad or be making policy decisions," stated Tony Hileman, executive director of the American Humanist Association (AHA). Army Lieutenant General William G. "Jerry" Boykin, who was recently named deputy undersecretary of defense for intelligence, has on several occasions, publicly announced that the United States' war against terrorism is a religious conflict.

Boykin spoke to evangelical Christian groups declaring that Islamic extremists' hatred for the U.S. is "because we're a Christian nation," and referred to Muslims saying "Well, you know what, I knew that my God was bigger than his. I knew that my God was a real God, and his was an idol." Boykin also said George W. Bush is a president "appointed by God" and specifically called the enemy in the war on terrorism "Satan" rather than the Bush administration's declared enemies, Saddam Hussein or Osama Bin Laden.

Hileman responded "Such irresponsible rhetoric will inflame already strained US relations in Muslim countries around the world, endangers Americans abroad, including our troops in Iraq, and is detrimental to our efforts to stem terrorism of all types everywhere."

Senators John W. Warner (R) and Carl Levin (D), also raised their concern with Boykin's "inappropriate behavior" to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. The senators insisted "there are limits on the right of expression for service members" and asked Rumsfeld to begin a review of Gen. Boykin and for Boykin to be reassigned in the interim. A review will soon begin, but as to a temporary reassignment, Rumsfeld's spokesperson said this morning that wasn't going to happen.

AHA president Mel Lipman added, "Top ranking officials should take exceptional care in publicly portraying their views. But, by appearing in uniform and failing to qualify his remarks, Boykin showed no effort to separate his comments from his public position and showed no restraint in his religiously bigoted expressions. Boykin's characterization of himself as a warrior in God's kingdom and the portrayal of the U.S. war against terrorism in harsh religious terms is a blatant misuse of his high profile position."

"Boykin's utter disregard of not only separation of church and state, but also the separation between personal views and official policy is precisely why he should be removed from his post," added Lipman. "Together with coalition partners, the AHA is working to distance Boykin's extreme religious views from American public policy."

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

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Chronicles (#2 of 2):

Bush Administration business directed by religion

AHA News Release (2003 1106th1133)

Contact: Roy Speckhardt (202-238-9088)

Yesterday President Bush signed the so-called "partial birth" abortion ban into effect that outlaws a medical procedure even when it is used for the health of the woman.

At the signing ceremony he said "This right to life cannot be granted or denied by government, because it does not come from government - it comes from the creator of life." While internally inconsistent with Bush's pro-death penalty position, such a statement makes clear that Bush has been guided in this matter by his beliefs about God's will, not about the interests of our country's citizens.

We at the AHA are asking our supporters to call Bush on this inappropriate behavior. As Bush's comments will be published in papers across the nation today, we encourage you to write letters to the editor asking Bush not to cross the line to personal revelation in directing the world's most powerful secular nation.

See an example letter to the editor (below) by executive director Tony Hileman submitted to the Washington Post this

morning as an example of what you might say in your own letters.

Washington Post Editor,

Bush Crosses Line Trading Government for Theology

In signing into law the so-called "partial birth" abortion ban yesterday, Bush stated, "This right to life cannot be granted or denied by government, because it does not come from government—it comes from the creator of life." Using religiously charged language to justify this legislation severely polarizes discussion around this controversial issue. When a leader of a secular nation, allows religion to dictate federal policy such behavior pushes the nation along a theocratic path.

Not only do Bush's remarks blatantly disregard the principles of separation of church and state, but they are also inconsistent with his own pro-death stance on capital punishment. Bush claims he supports the sanctity of life but this legislation makes no exception for the health of the woman.

Bush's uncompromising religious stance is intolerable.

Tony Hileman

Executive Director

American Humanist Association

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Ron's Ramblings:

By Ron Titus

JUDGING & IGNORANCE

I have espoused the principle: "The first requirement for condemning is ignorance."

Since I still haven't finished reading Karl Marx, I best postpone my ultimate judgment of him until I do. But I am willing to pass judgment on what little I know of him AT THIS TIME.

I have changed my mind often in my life. Changing one's mind is a sign of learning. Every time people learn something, they have changed their minds.

I try to keep a "clean" mind by changing it often. Ha!

GOOD & EVIL

A reading from the Biblical Genesis (1:31) introduced me to the idea that EVERYTHING is good. Today, I believe everything is neutral, until we people decide whether things are good or bad. Finding "good" in what appears to be "evil" requires a lot of insight and understanding.

I remember as a youngster saying "I hate flowers" within the earshot of my dad, who immediately shouted "DON'T USE THAT WORD! You don't know what it means!" And he was right; I didn't.

Today, my definitions of love and hate are wishing well and ill respectively. From this, I guess I could say I never really hated Marx (nor flowers for that matter), even if he

was an atheist. I only wished at that time that he would wise up, and believe in the same god that I did. Ha!

Since starting this column, I've gotten to the part in my reading where Marx was indeed opposed to capitalism but only as a means to alienate people from themselves and to capitalists but only as oppressors of other people.

I have not yet gotten to the part where it says that both Fromm and Marx had a "fear and hatred of mankind".

FREEDOM & SLAVERY

In an ideal world, people are "born free". In the "real" world, slavery exists. In various parts of our globe, people "own" other people; people are bought and sold like "owned property".

Even here in America, the "Land of the Free and Home of the Brave", slavery exists. 'But not openly on the books, because it is illegal; and hopefully corrective measures are imposed on law breakers. A more sinister form of slavery exists without impunity. Tennessee Ernie Ford sang of it. "I load sixteen tuns, and what do I get? ... I owe my soul to the company store."

Exploitation is a misuse of one's position of power. Exploitation occurs when people in a position of perceived security or strength take advantage of other people's vulnerability or misfortune.

Were the undocumented who died from suffocation while en route from south of the border free? Were those who survived the trip and deposited in isolated farm areas where their "escapes" were minimized in a land still strange to them free? Did they get a "fair" return for the money they paid for "safe" transportation?

In real estate school I learned that a good deal happened when both buyer and seller were content with their transaction. If either one was not happy with it, something was amiss, there was an imbalance.

Are both employer AND employee happy when the former downsizes (terminates, fires) the latter? Are both employer AND employee happy when the latter "quits"?

Would people who go into prostitution do so if they could make as much money doing something else?

How much is free and how much is exploitation in the World Trade Organization's Free Trade Agreements?

Shit is good; exploitation is not.

SELF-DETERMINATION

In a democracy, the citizens who vote are the dictators. In the USA, minorities are nonetheless theoretically protected from the "tyranny of the majority" by the Constitution.

To me, part of being human is to be self-directed, to dictate one's own destiny.

But freedom is tricky. How "free" is the guy who, after being "offered" a "proposition" from the Mafia, wakes up with a horse's head in his bed?

Since not everyone agrees with our well laid out self-determination plans, it is sometimes a useful survival tactic to moderate or modify them.

Remember the story of the guy who swaggers into a bar and loudly declares, "I can lick anybody in this room! And if anybody thinks otherwise, let him speak up now!"

One grizzly guy speaks up, "I say you can't lick ME!"

The first guy amends his statement, "I can lick anybody in this room, except this gentleman!"

COMMUNISM & CAPITALISM

It is unfortunate that many people still confuse communism and Stalinism. It is equally unfortunate that people confuse communism with any state / government imposed form of communism.

Even Ron Jones once admitted that communism can and does exist "within families". And in the state of Texas, there is "community property" ownership.

If Marx believed that the whole world would one day embrace communism, I would say that he was an idealistic dreamer. But then again he would be joining other naive people who dream of a "drug-free America", of a "war to end all wars", etc, etc.

POVERTY & WEALTH

When religious people take the "Vow of Poverty", they voluntarily renounce the use of their "God-given" (natural) right to ownership. For their sustenance, they now depend on the religious community which they joined. In return for this sustenance, the community expects and gets service (work) from their novice and professed members. Thus freed from the burdens of possessions, the community is free to do their good works.

Religious communities make their vows to "God", and expect in return the deity itself ("The Lord himself is my portion and my cup") and everything that the deity owns ("The meek shall inherit the earth"). The entire earth and all that the earth contains is not a bad return from one's initial investment. From this perspective, "poverty" is morphed into "wealth".

In religious communities, how free to leave the security of this wealth are the persons who consider risking possible poverty "on the outside" in a dog-eat-dog world?

CONCLUSION

If capital is owned property, I am a capitalist, because I own property. Too much property, according to my housemate who continually pushes me to downsize my stuff. I am not inclined to join a communist community, because I like my stuff too much. When my housemate &

I bought our first house, I saw it as an albatross. "Gone are our carefree days, to go about where we please! Now we have to stay put, and take care of this monstrosity!"

I love Karl Marx, because of his efforts to humanize, to free people, from themselves and their possessions. Long after I have put down my copy of Marx, I will probably always remember him as the guy who planted in my head the question: Do I own my property? Or does my property own me?

POST NOTE

I myself do not know in all of its fine details how to devise a truly civil society or to pull off world peace. But I am quite certain that it will NOT happen because of but rather in spite of inhuman behavior, eg, exploitation, injustice, secrecy, dishonesty, disinformation, misinformation, no information cover-ups, lies, threats, insults, violence, bombings, war, etc, etc, etc.

Where gods never have and never will pull off a reign of truth and justice on earth, people, with their wiring from birth to become human, at least CAN. And my idealistic optimism, without wisely holding its breath, believes we people WILL.

Everyone please stand for a chorus of "We shall overcome". Ha!

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Food for thought and/or thought for indigestion:

By Ron Titus

[1] Hatred is preceded by fear, which is preceded by ignorance, which is lessened by education.

[2] Shit is good; exploitation is not.

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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 / rosshenny@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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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 not withstanding. 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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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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Calendar of Events:

Sunday, December 7 / 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, December 7 / 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, December 13 / 1:30 pm / *HAMCIAC Regular Meeting* / Montgomery Co. Library in the Woodlands (2nd floor) [From I-45 go west on Woodland Pkwy to 2nd traffic light; turn north (right) on Six Pines Dr; cross bridge & watch for wavy sculptures in the median; turn west (left) to Lake Robbins Rd; pass Woodlands Pavilion; turn left into Library parking lot] / Regular meetings are held on second Saturdays monthly / Contact: Ross Henry*

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

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

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

Saturday, December 20 / 2:30 - 4:30 pm / *Humanists of Houston (HOH) Winter Solstice Party* / in the home of Bob & Sheila Finch at 211 Lombardy Sugar Land TX (instead of the usual *Regular meeting* in the Unitarian Fellowship hall at 1504 Wirt Rd) / Contact: Jimmy Dunne*

Sunday, December 21 / 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, December 28 / 10:30 - 12:00 noon / *Ideas Club* / in Borders Books & Music on 9633 Westheimer (at Gessner) / Book reviews by members are held on fourth Sundays monthly, Contact: Bob Finch*

Sunday, December 28 / 1:00 - 3:00 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, January 4 / 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, January 4 / 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*

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