



HOUSTON HUMANIST ALLIANCE

The Newsletter for Houston's Humanist and Freethought Community

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Calendar of Events:

Sunday, August 7 | 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 August 7 | 12:30 pm - 2:00 pm | *Humanists of Houston (HOH) Brunch* | Randall's 11041 Westheimer Road at Wilcrest (S.E. corner) | Topics chosen by the group are discussed on first Sundays monthly | Contact: Tom Brucia*

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

Wednesday, August 3 | 6:30 pm | *Drug Policy Forum of Texas* | TV 26 or 95 | Drug policy reform discussed every other Wednesday | Contact: G Alan Robison*

Saturday, August 6 | 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, August 7 | 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*

Monday August 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: Jim Knierien*

Wednesday, August 17 | 6:30 pm | *Drug Policy Forum of Texas* | TV 26 or 95 | Drug policy reform discussed every other Wednesday | Contact: G Alan Robison*

Saturday, August 20 | 2:30 pm - 4:30 pm | *Humanists of Houston (HOH) Regular meeting* | in the Unitarian Fellowship hall at 1504 Wirt Rd | Contact: Tom Brucia*

Sunday, August 21 | 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 August 28 | 10:30 am - 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*

Wednesday, August 31 | 6:30 pm | *Drug Policy Forum of Texas* | TV 26 or 95 | Drug policy reform discussed every other Wednesday | Contact: G Alan Robison*

Wednesday, August 31 | 6:00 pm | *Houston Atheist Society (HAS)* | at Ziggy's, corner of West Alabama and Greenbriar. Meetings are held on the last Wednesday of each month. | Contact: Keith McCaffety*

Sunday, August 7 | 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 August 7 | 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*

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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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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 notwithstanding. 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:

HOH

The July Monthly Meeting of Humanists of Houston was held in the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship at 1504 Wirt Road on Sat, Jul 16 at 2:30 pm.

Jimmy Dunne spoke about his 17-day trip to India in January. Jimmy, past president of Humanists of Houston and currently coordinator for Amnesty International's Houston's "Denounce Torture" campaign, showed photos he took during his journeys. His talk was entitled: "Visiting Incredible India".

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HCOF

The monthly service of The Houston Church of Freethought was held Sunday, July 10, at the Courtyard By Marriott 3131 West Loop S (Just North of Richmond)

Opening.....Jim Ashmore
Music: "Free Will".....Rush
"The Greatest Gift".....Jim Ashmore
Freethinker of the Month: Thomas Paine.....Ed Uthman
History Lesson.....Nancy Fay
Closing.....Anthony Stott

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

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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.

Through the efforts of Gipson Arnold, President of the Houston Atheist Society, this show has become a reality. And 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

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

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Essay:

The Promise Of Humanism

By Frederick Edwords

Managing Editor *The Humanist*

<http://www.americanhumanist.org/humanism/promise.html>

Every religion has its promise, the special reward it offers to the faithful. Such a promise is often the main feature that attracts outsiders in. As such, it can become a primary selling point and motivator.

The ancient promise of Christianity is eternal life in heaven. I can remember a number of years ago listening to one radio preacher describing it in detail with vivid word pictures as he rhapsodized over how wonderful it would feel to be there. I can remember as a child learning about the streets paved with gold and rivers flowing with milk and honey.

Different denominations also offer secondary promises, such as wealth and happiness in this life, God's helping hand in times of trouble, and even physical healings.

In Buddhism, the promise is somewhat different. If you follow the Noble Eightfold Path of conduct, you will experience inner peace and eventually, through a series of rebirths, the state of Nirvana. This state is the blowing out of all craving, attachment, and desire.

New Age religions tend to promise increased powers of mind that will bring about inner peace, happiness, power over external events, cosmic knowledge, and ultimate union with God.

Like in politics, so in religion: the key is PROMISE BIG.

In the past, Humanists have sometimes thought of themselves as too noble and honest to stoop to such strategies for gaining converts. So, instead of offering our own "campaign promises," we used to prefer to run down the promises of all the other groups. Instead of focusing on a better way of our own, we kept the spotlight on those ideas we disagreed with. Only we didn't seem able to do it with the captivating music of Omar Khayyam:

Of threats of Hell and Hopes of Paradise!
One thing at least is certain—This Life flies;
One thing is certain and the rest is Lies;
The Flower that once has blown for ever dies.

This seemed to be our message, and to some it still is. But, if this is our message, are Humanists merely the consumer crusaders of the metaphysical world, the Ralph Naders of the religious realm? Is our only role that of protecting the gullible from the purveyors of spiritual Florida swamp land?

This is, of course, a noble calling, worthy of the best efforts of talented individuals. But is it ALL we should be about? From much of our older rhetoric, you would think so. On the other hand, today many Humanists are directing their focus on what HUMANISM has to offer.

And when that is done, the relevant question becomes "What is the promise of Humanism?"

Well, we already know what we can't promise. As sober realists and no-nonsense straight-shooters, we're experts in throwing the wet blanket of rationalism over the fondest hopes of our fellows. We know the "bad news," but what's our "good news," what is the gospel of Humanism?

One way to find out is to ask ourselves how we would present Humanism to someone who has never been exposed to traditional religion. Here would be a person in no need of disillusionment and possessing no idols in need of smashing. We could now go directly to the goal of offering the "good news" of Humanism.

If some Humanists would find themselves speechless in a situation like this, it could be because they believe Humanism is simply the "default" condition of humanity, the "natural state" that prevails when no brainwash is present. And I've known a number of Humanists who have put it to me in exactly those terms.

But, if that's the case, then the solemn duty of every Humanist when confronting a person unexposed to religion is to immediately teach him or her all about it! In this way, the person will learn what to watch out for, will be prepared, and will be put on guard.

But I don't accept that Humanism is the default condition of humanity. And I am indeed confronted with individuals unexposed to traditional religion. I confront them every day. They are my children.

How do I teach my children Humanism? Well, I don't do it by running down religions they have never heard about. I don't do it by exposing them to the varieties of religious experience. Instead, I expose them to the varieties of worldly experience. My children, ages 4 and 5, already enjoy travel, pictures, movies, music, people, animals, flowers, daydreams, stories, words, numbers, shapes, colors, and the joy of learning. I want them to live the good life envisioned by Humanism, to experience the promise first hand. That's why, when I asked my eldest daughter, Livia, what the praying hands in front of the Oral Roberts medical complex were doing, she exclaimed, "They're clapping!"

Are my children Humanists yet? Time will tell, but other Humanist parents I know who have used a similar approach have been pleased with the results. And the implication is clear. The promise of Humanism is a good life here and now.

So, let's discuss it in detail. What IS the "good life?" Can it be pursued directly? Can EVERYONE have it (that is, do we have a promise we can keep; can Humanism deliver the goods)? And finally, will it play in Peoria?

Lloyd and Mary Morain talked about the good life in their 1954 Beacon Press book, *Humanism as the Next Step*, when they wrote:

As a starting point let us take the idea that this life should be experienced deeply, lived fully, with sensitive awareness and appreciation of that which is around us.

This was the first of their seven key ideas of Humanism. They elaborated further, saying:

Back through the centuries whenever people have enjoyed keenly the sights and sounds and other sensations of the world about them, and enjoyed these for what they were—not because they stood for something else—they were experiencing life humanistically. Whenever they felt keen interest in the drama of human life about them and ardently desired to take part in it they felt as humanists.

Referring to this attitude as "zest for living," they were following the lead of Bertrand Russell who, in his book *The Conquest of Happiness*, referred to "zest" as "the most universal and distinctive mark" of the happy individual. People with this

quality, Russell argued, are those who come at life with a sound appetite, are glad to have what is before them, partake of things until they have enough, and know when to stop.

This vision reminds us again of Omar Khayyam:

A Book of Verses underneath the Bough, A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou Beside me singing in the Wilderness— Oh, Wilderness were Paradise now!

Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend, Before we too into the Dust descend; Dust into Dust, and under Dust to lie, Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer, and—sans End!

Which sounds like the hedonistic doctrine Humanists are accused of advocating:

Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.

Or, as Mad magazine once put it —

A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread, and Thou— Pretty soon I'll be drunk, fat, and in trouble.

But there is much more involved in the Humanist notion of the good life. The physical pleasures are only a part of it, not to be denied of course, but far from representing the whole. For the Humanist there are also the pleasures of an unfettered mind making new discoveries, solving problems, and creating. There is the enjoyment of art, music, dance, and drama. There is the joy of helping others and the challenge of working to make the world a better and more peaceful place. And, of course, there are the joys associated with love and family. The Humanist seeks the enjoyment of as many of these as possible.

In this, we are clearly at one with the ancient Greek ideal of wholeness and the integration of life. For example, in the ancient Olympic games, competition included not only athletics but drama, music, poetry, and philosophy. And the whole combination was viewed as a religious event. The Greeks put it together and did it all. So can we.

In having zest for living, we join with the ancient Chinese who, in following Confucius, saw much of life as play—which accounted for their enjoyment of ceremony and especially their love of toys.

This worldly and good-natured view of life that claims no ultimate knowledge, stands out when contrasted with Hinduism. Whereas the Yogi is often seen as renouncing desire, living an ascetic life-style, and acquiring eternal knowledge, Socrates, the sage of the ancient Greeks, deliberately provoked certain appetites in himself, lived a social and active life, and professed to have no knowledge whatever!

It is also radically different from traditional Christianity, which has sometimes called this world a vale of tears, has seen pleasures as vanity, and seems to find the goal of human life beyond the grave. Such believers might quote Ecclesiastes—

Better to go to the house of mourning
than to the house of feasting;
for to this end all men come,
let the living take this to heart.
Better sadness than laughter,
a severe face confers some benefit.
Jerusalem Bible

As an antidote, Robert Louis Stevenson offered these words in his Christmas Sermon:

Gentleness and cheerfulness, these come before all morality: they are the perfect duties. If your morals make you dreary, depend on it they are wrong. I do not say, "give them up," for they may be all you have; but conceal them like a vice, lest they should spoil the lives of better men."

Edwin H. Wilson, the grand old man of religious Humanism who, for 90 plus years, lived the promise, summed it up when he wrote:

The Humanist lives as if this world were all and enough. He is not otherworldly. He holds that the time spent on the contemplation of a possible afterlife is time wasted. He fears no hell and seeks no heaven, save that which he and others created on earth. He willingly accepts the world that exists on this side of the grave as the place for moral struggle and creative living. He seeks the life abundant for his neighbor as for himself. He is content to live one world at a time and let the next life—if such there may be—take care of itself. He need not deny immortality; he simply is not interested. His interests are here.

The way those interests should be carried out here is described by Havelock Ellis in his book, *The Dance of Life*. There he presents living as an art, one best characterized as a dance. In this, he follows the ancient Greeks who chose the image of dancing because, unlike walking or running, dancing is not generally viewed as a goal-oriented activity leading from point A to B. One dances for the sheer joy of the activity. It is the process more than the product that counts. And this is how the Humanist good life is to be lived.

So, when someone asks a Humanist, "What is the purpose of life?" the Humanist should answer, "Life is not purpose, life is art." The meaning is found in the doing.

This is a revolutionary and truly unique way of looking at the world. It is a way that finds the question of cosmic purpose irrelevant, one that is unmoved by the author of Ecclesiastes who, in contemplating the question of ultimate value, writes—

I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and what vanity it all is, what chasing of the wind!

The Humanist response is that Solomon missed the point. The people, ideas, things, and actions we love do not depend for their worth on how long they last or their supposed cosmic significance. They are things in themselves to be enjoyed for their own sakes. Life is an art, not a task. Life is for us, not for the universe. And life is for now, not for eternity.

But there's more. We can take Edwin Wilson's statement that this life is all and enough and beef it up a bit to declare that this life is more than enough. Then it will express the Humanist optimism of Robert Louis Stevenson when he wrote:

The world is so full of a number of things, I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.

(We ought to get some rosary beads and repeat this every day.)
There is more in this world than I could experience in a thousand different lifetimes. There is a richness here, a cornucopia of choices, a wealth of opportunities. There is so much to see, to do, to read, to learn. The question is not, "What shall I do with my life?" but "What shall I do next?!"

Different people choose different things. Most Humanists will choose a life oriented outward, not only to enjoying the good life, but sharing the good life through helping others. Yet other people

may choose the inner life of meditation. By making such a choice, each one misses something the other is enjoying. But that can't be helped. Any time one makes a choice in the use of one's time, one fails to engage in all the other possible uses for that time, including having other experiences.

So, if a monk or celibate priest speaks to me about the ecstasies of spiritual contemplation, I respond by sharing how thrilled I was in the birthing room watching my children being born. If a young fundamentalist describes to me the experience of being "born again," I can't wait to talk about the exciting moment when I first appreciated geometry. If heaven is described to me in graphic detail, I immediately want to show my slides of sunsets, seascapes, and mountain ranges.

I'm in love with life, and too busy with it to find time for things allegedly outside it.

But now we can ask, if this is the promise of Humanism—if this is the promise of liberal religion—is it a promise limited only to the affluent, the intelligent, the educated? If so, then are we making a promise we can't always keep? This is the criticism leveled against us by the otherworldly religions. While we say that they can't keep their otherworldly promises, they explain that they turned to this other world because we Humanists didn't keep our worldly promises.

Otherworldly faiths offer the "joys of the spirit" to those who have been denied "the pleasures of the flesh." And the claim is that such spiritual joys are more permanent and universal than is our pleasure. But why give up so easily, denying oneself worldly pleasure to feed on a mirage in its stead? Isn't this settling for less, and retreating into an unwarranted resignation? Bertrand Russell thought so when, in chapter 2 of *The Conquest of Happiness*, he took the author of *Ecclesiastes* to task for denouncing the very things that make happiness possible and give life meaning.

Nonetheless, I must admit that I benefit from growing up in a middle-class environment in a wealthy country where I have access to such variety. But all is not lost in more impoverished environments in less wealthy countries. At the Atheist Centre in Vijayawada, India, an extended family of Humanists teach the poor the joys of traditional folk dance, music, athletics (especially acrobatics), science, animal husbandry, occupational skills, and, most important of all, the vast world made possible only through reading. Many of the beneficiaries of this effort are not only poor and uneducated, but are often crippled and abandoned. Yet in a country steeped in an ancient tradition of other-worldliness due to just such harsh realities, the promise of Humanism is offered and met. The International Association for Religious Freedom, the world organization of liberal religions, has similar projects in India and is getting similar results. The promise is no illusion.

And I look at my own life, asking myself how useful the promise of the good life would be to me if I suddenly went deaf, or blind, or couldn't walk. And yet I can answer with Robert Louis Stevenson that the world is indeed so full of things that can make me happy. A calamity is a limitation, but if I were limited only to reading, I would find the world is so full of a number of books that I could not read them all in this lifetime. If I were limited only to seeing, I could not see all I want to see in this lifetime. If I were limited only to hearing, I could not hear all I want to hear in this lifetime. I have not tested all the thoughts I want to test, or worked out all the ideas I have started but don't have time to

develop. I haven't written all the speeches I want to write. I haven't met all the people I could meet or faced all the challenges I could face. Calamities destroy the promise usually because we concentrate on what we have lost instead of letting the misfortune simply focus our pursuits in a new direction.

The Stoic remedy for misfortune is as much a part of this promise as is the Cyrenaic enjoyment of good fortune. When misfortune limits you, shift your focus and move on. I would argue that we can, in most cases, keep the promise of joy in the here and now. And even when all cannot be joy—for life indeed includes a large share of obligations, struggles, sorrows, and pain—the larger context can still be that of an artful life.

And when, in those rare instances, we find that the realization of the promise is futile, as in the case of an agonizing terminal illness, Humanism offers the freedom to exit this life at will and with dignity. This is voluntary euthanasia, an area of great importance to Humanists

So, in the end, the promise is not a perfect one. But we admit that. Others may seem to offer more perfect promises, but can they deliver? I have no evidence that anyone has ever gotten to heaven, realized Nirvana, or merged with God. But I see evidence every day that the promise of the good life is no mirage.

So, I'll stick with the honesty of Humanism, that this life is all there is, and with the promise of Humanism, that this can be more than enough. And this promise will serve as my motivation to make life better when all is not as it should be. For I can better enjoy the promise on a clean rather than a dirty planet. And I can enjoy it better when I am helping others to participate in it.

This is a philosophy I can be proud of. And, being proud of it, I can confidently share it with others. I can offer the "good news" of its promise and know I am doing something valuable for others.

As a result, Humanism need no longer be a philosophy exclusively for those bold enough to face an uncaring cosmos with defiance, for those fearless enough "to go where no one has gone before," and for those impudent enough to call the majority of humanity cowards for fleeing to a sweeter tale. Most people are moved by exciting promises. They are captivated by thrilling visions. And this philosophy can be for them to.

There's nothing wrong with offering a zesty promise if we have one. And have one we do. So let us Humanists stress it, publicize it, and present it as our entry in the religious/ philosophical sweepstakes. I submit to you that this one shift in our focus will do more to counter the harmful effects of otherworldly belief than all the rationalistic arguments of history's greatest freethinkers. So let's give it a shot.

We have nothing to lose but our minority status.

This is the text of a talk presented to various audiences over the years. It was first published in 1968

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Humanists Launch Groundbreaking Public Relations Campaign

By Roy Speckhardt

<http://www.americanhumanist.org/>

(Washington, DC) The American Humanist Association just launched an unprecedented advertising campaign to promote Humanism. Advertisements running in several national publications aim to educate the public on the strong ethical underpinnings of the Humanist lifescape and the relevance of Humanist values to American society.

"The AHA is uniquely positioned to show the nation a better option than the intolerant and dogmatic views promoted by the Religious Right," said Mel Lipman, president of the AHA. "The Religious Right claims to have a monopoly on values, but most people know better—there are millions of ethical nontheistic Americans."

One advertisement running in this month's Progressive and American Prospect magazines depicts a young, professional woman accompanied by the message: "My values? I'm a Humanist." Another depicts a father and daughter looking through a telescope and asks: "Children are our future: are we pointing them in the right direction?" The accompanying text accuses the Religious Right of intolerance and compares that to the humanistic value of compassion.

"Humanists are strong advocates of religious pluralism, and we have historically avoided promoting our values over that of other traditions," Lipman said. "But the pervasive influence of religious political extremists has forced us to actively engage in the struggle of ideas. We believe Humanism offers a positive alternative to the intolerant rhetoric of the Religious Right."

This campaign will run nationally through the summer and fall of 2005, and may be extended as the AHA evaluates the need to communicate Humanism's focus on reason and compassionate ethics. "Humanism is a lifescape that is well-equipped to move society forward and to deal with the pressing ethical challenges that confront us," said Lipman. "This is demonstrated by the impressive list of people who have accepted the AHA's annual awards." Each year the AHA presents awards to individuals who exemplify Humanist values. The 2005 recipients include Nobel laureate Murray Gell-Mann and journalist Amy Goodman. Past recipients include Isaac Asimov, Richard Dawkins, Betty Friedan, Jonas Salk, Margaret Sanger, Alice Walker, and Kurt Vonnegut.

Never before has a nontheistic organization run a sustained national advertising campaign. "The swing toward religious extremism has reached a point of crisis," said Lipman. "We feel it is our duty to act."

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Humanists Suspect Use of Religious Litmus Test

By Roy Speckhardt

<http://www.americanhumanist.org/>

(Washington, DC) "The nomination of a conservative Christian to the Supreme Court is no surprise," stated Tony Hileman, executive director of the American Humanist Association.

President Bush said in 2002 that he intended to use a religious litmus test for judicial nominations despite Article VI of the U.S. Constitution's clear wording on the subject—"No religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States."

In response to the June 26, 2002, ruling by the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco that the words "under God," added in 1954 to the Pledge of Allegiance, violated the constitutional principle of separation of church and state, President Bush said, "The decision points up the fact that we need common-sense judges who understand that our rights were derived from God. Those are the kind of judges I intend to put on the bench."

"The President's intention to use a religious litmus test and pander to partisanship was as obvious then as it is now," said Mel Lipman, AHA president. "Supreme Court nominee John G. Roberts' opinions and beliefs put him in the same category as Justice Antonin Scalia, who is known for his ultra-conservative views on abortion and opposition to church-state separation."

"Justice O'Connor was the deciding vote in some of the most important cases of our time," Hileman said. O'Connor was a protector of privacy rights and a woman's right to choose, as shown by the cases *Stenberg v. Carhart* and *Casey v. Planned Parenthood*. The strict Roman Catholic conservative Roberts could lead the Supreme Court to decisions that put these rights at risk.

Before her retirement, O'Connor said, "we do not count heads before enforcing the First Amendment." "Sadly, in today's polarized political atmosphere, her message could very well be forgotten by those who want to impose their conservative positions," added Lipman.

"In the coming weeks, as we express our concerns for religious liberty and equal rights, the secular left and the religiously liberal will undoubtedly be demonized by religious right activists. But we cannot stand idly by while nominees that rise to President Bush's unconstitutional religious litmus test are considered for our nation's highest court. We urge the Senate to take our concerns into account when considering this nomination," Hileman concluded.

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Ron's Ramblings

By Ron Titus

[1] At the July brunch meeting of the HOH (Humanists of Houston), David Neumann reported on a scientific experiment in which two infants, a male and a female, were connected to equipment to determine their primary interest or orientation.

When both infants were shown pictures of a human face and an inanimate machine, the female showed interest in the human face and the male showed interest in the inanimate machine.

[2] London experienced several explosions, understandably attributed to "terrorists".

This sort of thing probably will never end, but I believe it can be minimized somewhat. How so? 'By beginning immediately to change our image abroad, by changing what was coined years ago: "The Ugly American".

[3] The Vatican Church taught (and still teaches) weird things, like people are born in a state of sin. How stupid is that? Before answering, consider what many Americans believe: Foreigners, people not born American citizens, ARE INFERIOR to people who ARE born American citizens!

[4] Howard Dean recently was said to have "put his foot in his mouth" because he said that the Republican Party is made up mostly of "white Christians".

I do not disagree with his assessment, but my personal description is the Republicans are mostly people with real or imagined money, ie, those who really have money and those who want to believe that they have money, the wannabees who don't want to be identified with the poor, the riffraff.

[5] I would rather have my government use my tax money to help the poor, even the ungrateful and undeserving poor, than to bomb people, even mean and undeserving people.

[6] I saw two movies of late: "Enron" and "Batman Begins".

Both are similar because they deal with "good guys" applying justice to "bad guys". They differ in the amount of time it takes to do that.

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Food for thought and/or thought for indigestion

By Ron Titus

[1] Q - What is the first thing to do when day breaks?
A - Fix it!

[2] Love conquers all things except poverty and toothache.
[Attributed to Mae West (1892 - 1980), MSN, 2005 0628]

[3] Love does not consist in gazing at each other but in looking together in the same direction.
[Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900-1944), MSN, 2005 0628]

[4] The real reason that we can't have the Ten Commandments in a Courthouse? You cannot post "Thou Shalt Not Steal," "Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery", and "Thou Shall Not Lie" , in a building full of lawyers, judges and politicians! It creates a hostile work environment.
[George Carlin, quoted in emails from Jimmy Dunne (2005 0713) and Gene Cooper (HCOF-Talk, 2005 0707, Digest 2157 Message 4)]

I would think, that at times, the same would hold true for churches!

[Glen Ellen Chandler, HCOF-Talk, 2005 0707, Digest 2157 Message 5]

[5] "Those who would renegotiate the boundaries between church and state must therefore answer a difficult question: Why would we trade a system that has served us so well for one that has served others so poorly?"

[Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, quoted in a La Crosse Tribune (Wisconsin) editorial ("Our view: Separation of church, state keeps religion alive and well"), forwarded by the AU (Americans United for Separation of Church & State) Houston Chapter via a 2005 0704 email from Jimmy Dunne]

[6] "There is a problem here. God does not express himself to everyone. God is very specific about who he talks to. God only speaks to pompous, authoritarian, megalomaniac, sanctimonious assholes. Everybody knows that."

[Devin Sexson (commentator on www.rottontomatoes.com), quoted by Erikc Sadler, HCOF-Talk, 2006 0614, Digest 2146 Message 2]

[7] "As much as I'm a staunch defender of editorial independence, I don't believe there's anything in the Constitution that says journalists are above the law. The alternative to complying would be a kind of anarchy."

[Time Editor in Chief Norman Pearlstine, on the magazine's decision to obey a court order and hand over a reporter's notes, including his confidential sources, to a prosecutor investigating the Valerie Plame leak, Newsweek, 2005 0711, P 23]

[8] Why, people ask, should one like me, who stands inside the Christian Faith but specifically outside the Roman Catholic Church, bother to participate in evaluating their leader? The reason is that just as a Republican president affects Democrats, so the papal office affects all Christians. Our lives intertwine, so we have not just a right, but also a duty to join the debate.

... Naiveté is no substitute for competence.

... Ignorance does not become less destructive when it is wrapped inside religion's embrace!

[John Shelby Spong, "Assessing the Pontificate of John Paul II" (2005 0427), handout from John McGee to Lexington Group, 2005 0429]

[9] "Other than telling us how to live, think, marry, pray, vote, invest, educate our children and, now, die, I think the Republicans have done a fine job of getting government out of our personal lives."

[Sunday Portland Oregonian, quoted in a 2005 0619 email from Jimmy Dunne]

[10] Rules for people who never follow rules: (1) Never mind the stares. (2) Never let reality get in the way of imagination. (3) Never bite off less than you can chew. (4) Never be afraid to take a hit.

[Audi commercial, Special Advertising Section, Wired, 2004 05]

[11] "I honestly believe that this insurgency is going to be defeated by the Iraqi people and not by coalition countries and not by the United States."

[US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld at a Pentagon news conference, National Catholic Reporter, 2005 0715, P 3]

[12] Advisory Report on Global Climate Change:

Global warming is a real and growing phenomenon. There is no lack of data indicating this is a big problem with which the world must deal.

Some have attacked the data and have a differing opinion. While it would be nice to dismiss the science, experts agree this is a dilemma we must confront some day soon.

[cartoon depicting President G Dubya Bush editing a memo on his desk, Time, 2005 0620, P 21]

[13] "I don't mind taking care of your kids if you don't mind my sleeping with your wife."

[Tony Messina, on community responsibility, 2005 0702]

[14] "People sleep peaceably in their beds at night only because rough men stand ready to do violence on their behalf."

[George Orwell, quoted by Jim Ashmore, HCOF-Talk, 2005 0704, Digest 2154 Message 2]

[15] By now, most Americans know what Andy Rooney thinks about nearly everything. Or do we? Is there anything that he hasn't revealed about himself? He pauses. "I do hide my atheism," he says slowly.

It's a belief Rooney has held for more than six decades, sealed perhaps by the random violence of war. But being an atheist hasn't kept him from pondering life's mysteries. He's awed by the intricacy of the cosmos and has questions about the origin of the universe. But as a good newsman, he won't inject his personal feelings and wants to pin down the source of the story. "I can't imagine how all this happened, but I'm not about to invent a reason for it. Besides, if God created all this, then who created God?"

Why not come out of the cosmic closet and talk more openly about his atheism?

"I think it would damage what I do, and fewer people would hear what I have to say about other things," he says quickly. For a moment, the late afternoon light seems to soften his features as he settles back in his chair. "Every writer dreams of having some good effect on the world, and I don't want to destroy that ability by announcing things that don't matter."

[Jean-Noel Bassior, writing about his interview with Andy Rooney, AARP Magazine, 2005 05&06, P 22]

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Cartoon

The cartoon on the right is by the Arizona Republic and nationally syndicated cartoonist Steve Benson. He is a freethinker and ex Mormon (yes; that Benson family).

Editor

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jimmydunne [jimmydunne@sbcglobal.net]

Sent: Monday, July 25, 2005 8:24 AM

To: Knierien, Jim

Subject: HOH newsletter

Cows, Constitution, Commandments & Carlin

Courtesy of Jimmy Dunne

COWS

Is it just me, or does anyone else find it amazing that our government can track a cow born in Canada almost three years ago, right to the stall where she sleeps in the state of Washington. And they tracked her calves to their stalls. But they are unable to locate 11 million illegal aliens wandering around our country. Maybe we should give them all a cow.

CONSTITUTION

They keep talking about drafting a Constitution for Iraq. Why don't we just give them ours? It was written by a lot of really smart guys, it's worked for over 200 years and we're not using it anymore.

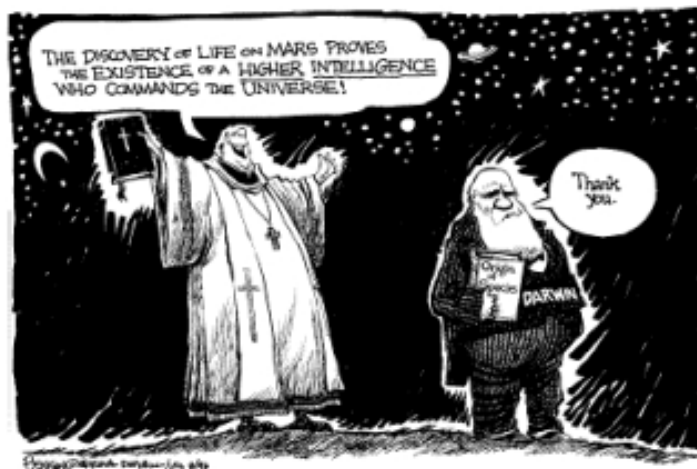
TEN COMMANDMENTS

The real reason that we can't have the Ten Commandments in a Courthouse? You cannot post "Thou Shalt Not Steal," "Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery" and "Thou Shall Not Lie" in a building full of lawyers, judges and politicians. It creates a hostile work environment.

And Last but not least.....

George CARLIN said it best about Martha Stewart .. "Boy, I feel a lot safer now that she's behind bars. O.J. Simpson, Kobe Bryant and Michael Jackson are still walking around; Osama Bin Laden, too. But they take the one woman in America willing to cook, clean, and work in the yard, and haul her butt off to jail."

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Membership and Contact Information:

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

Humanists of Houston (HOH): Houston chapter of the American Humanist Association (AHA) / Founded 1978 / Tom Brucia(281-273-9030) <mailto:tbrucia@houston.rr.com>

Humanist Association of Montgomery County, Isaac Asimov Chapter (HAMCIAC): Montgomery County chapter of the American Humanist Association / 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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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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