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**10:00 a.m.– Noon  
 Saturday  
 January 17, 2009**

**Monthly  
 Chapter Meeting**

**Nokomis Recreation  
 Center  
 2401 E. Minnehaha Pkwy.  
 Minneapolis**

***HUMANISM:***

*A better life for all through  
 education, democracy, free  
 speech, reason and science,  
 without reliance on arbitrary  
 dogmas, revelations and  
 faith.*

***Humanists of Minnesota Chapter Meeting***

***“The Looting of the Iraq National Museum  
 and Protecting Cultural Property at War”***

***Presentation by Corine Wegener***

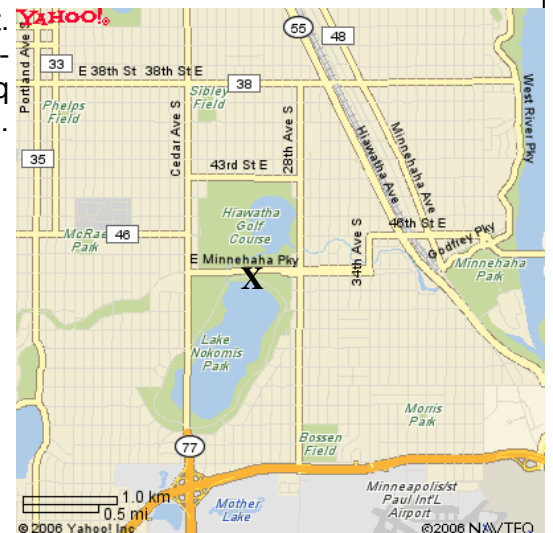
***Saturday, January 17***

Corine Wegener is founder and president of the U.S. Committee of the Blue Shield, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the protection of cultural property during armed conflict. Because of her civilian expertise as a curator at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Wegener, an Army Reservist, was deployed to Iraq in 2003-2004 to assist the Iraq National Museum and other Iraqi cultural institutions.



The looting of the Iraq Museum increased international awareness about the plight of cultural property during armed conflict. Upon her return in 2004, Wegener immediately began to take advantage of this situation, bringing together cultural-heritage professionals, military organizations and government leaders in an effort to prevent such tragedies in the future. Since then, the U.S. Committee of the Blue Shield has provided cultural-property awareness training for more than 600 deploying U.S. soldiers and helped lead a coalition of organizations that influenced the U.S. Senate to ratify the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. Wegener will provide a slide presentation about her experiences in Iraq and her ongoing work with the U.S. Committee of the Blue Shield.

***Chapter meeting location: Here is a map to the Nokomis Recreation Center. Easiest access is north on 77 (Cedar Ave.) from Hwy. 62.***



## PRESIDENT'S



## C O R N E R

It's the time of year when we take a moment to look backwards and forwards at the same time. It's been an exciting year at Humanists of Minnesota. We've seen growth in our membership, been part of a new radio program with Minnesota Atheists and done some important community-service fundraising for food shelves. In the new year we hope to upgrade our website and work to increase our presence in the community. The American Humanist Association's new ad campaign is helping increase the visibility of Humanists and Humanism. They are also working on an education program on Humanism. We will be exploring options to increase our impact locally as well.

We have a number of exciting things to look forward to in 2009. There will be a new President as well as changes in Congress. We are part of a committee that is watching First Amendment issues here in Minnesota. The committee, under the leadership of board member Bob Schmitz, is investigating a number of issues related to state-church separation.

There are also exciting changes at the Council for Secular Humanism: Tom Flynn, who was a banquet speaker for us a few years ago, will be taking over as the new Executive Director.

We can also look around and see the forces of fundamentalism growing in many parts of the world, as well as here in Minnesota. As individuals, you can make a difference by writing, calling and emailing your legislators and letting them know about issues that you care about. We can make an impact by just speaking up. Let your legislators at both the state and federal level hear from you regularly. We may not be large in numbers, but we can make sure that we are not left out of the process. Make it a goal this year to contact your legislative representatives about issues that affect us all.

Let's do what we can to change the world for the better. I, for one, am getting tired of apologizing to my son for the state of the world that his generation is going to live in. Let's work to make it better.

— Scott Lohman

### Humanists of Minnesota Officers

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E-mail us at [president@humanistsofmn.org](mailto:president@humanistsofmn.org) or visit our web site: [www.humanistsofmn.org](http://www.humanistsofmn.org)

# Announcements

## DISCUSSION GROUPS

**Mondays, 5:00-7:00 p.m.**, Richard Dick Memorial Happy Hours, Ol' Mexico Restaurant, 1754 Lexington Ave., Roseville (just north of Larpenteur). Tables on terrace level. Call Paul Craven, (763) 788-8918.

**1st and 3rd Mondays, 6:00 p.m.**, Freethought Toastmasters Club, Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1280 Larpenteur Ave. W., St. Paul. Call George Kane, (651) 488-8225.

**1st Sunday, 9:00 a.m.-noon**, Lake Superior Freethinkers monthly meeting. Radisson Hotel Duluth, Viking Room. For information contact Bill van Druten, (218-724-4176.)

**2nd Sunday, 10:00 a.m.-noon**, Critical Thinking Club St. Paul, Kelly Inn, Hwy. I-94. Contact George Kane, lhutt@comcast.net. (\$10 brunch, \$3 coffee/speaker only)

**2nd & 4th Mondays, 5:00-7:00 p.m.**, Happy Hour South, Davanni's, 66th St. & Penn Ave. S., Richfield. Call Bob/Marilyn Nienkerk, (612) 866-6200.

**2nd Thursday, evening**, Rochester Area Freethinkers. Downtown Rochester Public Library, Meeting Room A. Contact Bill Kass, wjkhahk@charter.net or (507) 259-4237.

**3rd Wednesday, 11:30 a.m.**, Freethought Lunch, Dragon House, 3950 Central Avenue NE, Columbia Heights. Call Bill Volna, (612) 781-4273.

**3rd Saturday, 10:00 a.m.-noon**, West Metro Critical Thinking Club, Ridge Point Apts. Bldg. meeting room, Minnetonka. Contact Mark Paquette at think-rsvp@markpaquette.com. (\$7 brunch, \$4 speaker only)

**4th Sunday, 10:30 a.m.**, 4th Sunday Brunch!, Q Cumbers Restaurant, 7465 France Ave S., Edina.

## OTHER EVENTS

**2nd Wednesday, 7:00 p.m.**, Board of Directors meeting. Open to all members. Contact Scott Lohman.

**Thursdays, 7:00 p.m.**, Campus Atheists, Skeptics and Humanists (CASH) general meeting. 3rd floor Coffman Memorial Union, 300 Washington Ave. SE, Minneapolis. Contact cash@cashumn.org.

"Humanist Perspectives," a weekly program produced by the Council for Secular Humanism, airs at **8:30 p.m. Wednesdays** on MTN Channel 16.



## Thanks to Our Renewing and New Members

*We want to take this opportunity to thank all of our members who have recently renewed and joined.*

*Nearly one third of our membership has a renewal date of December. Are you one of those? (Check your newsletter label for the date.)*

*If you haven't renewed yet or your renewal date is approaching please use the form on the back of the newsletter to renew now!*

## Remember to Tune into Radio 950 Sundays at 9:00 AM!

*Humanists of Minnesota is a sponsor of "Atheists Talk", a one hour program on KTNF radio AM 950 produced by Minnesota Atheists. We also produce a number of shows during the year hosted by our president, Scott Lohman.*

*MA has recently renewed their contract for another 6 months, so tune-in for more interesting freethought discussion and chatter.*

"Humanist Views," the TV interview program produced by Humanists of Minnesota, could be showing on your local cable channel! "Humanist Views" is currently showing in:

Minneapolis Channel 17 9:30 p.m. Fridays

Arden Hills	}	Channel 98
Falcon Heights		7:00 p.m. Sundays
Lauderdale		3:00 a.m. Mondays
Little Canada		11:00 a.m. Mondays
Mounds View		
New Brighton		
North Oaks		
Roseville		

St Louis Park Channel 16 TWTh 12:00 a.m.,  
8:00 a.m., 4:00 p.m.

If you would like to help distribute "Humanist Views" to your local public access cable channel, contact Scott Lohman.

# Pictures from the 2008 Freethought Solstice Celebration & Follies

Pictures by Richard Trombly





## *December Chapter Meeting Summary Karl Marx and Religion*

*By Jerry Smith, Dale Heffron  
& Nathan Curland*

The December 20 meeting, held at the Nokomis Community Center, was highlighted by our viewing of a Teaching Company video in which Professor Charles B. Jones discussed Karl Marx's views on religion in an instructive and easy-to-understand fashion. Despite the morning snowfall, the meeting attracted 23 people.

Professor Jones reviewed the historical background of Marx's views on religion, highlighting the idealism of Hegel, who asserted that history progresses through the dialectical struggle between conflicting thoughts, ideals or world views. Following Feuerbach, who inverted traditional religious beliefs by proposing that, rather than god creating man, man created god as an idealization of human aspirations, Marx turned Hegelianism on its head when he claimed that historical progress is driven by material reality, and especially socio-economic relationships between classes, rather than by the intellectual products Hegel had favored. Thus, in his famous superstructure-substructure distinction, Marx proposed that economic systems like feudalism and capitalism were the substructure that determined superstructural cultural products like art, philosophy and religion, and the latter were not needed for survival. Accordingly, religion was not really a problem for Marx since he believed it would disappear once humankind adopted the socialistic political and economic systems toward which history inevitably tended. Of course, until then, religion served, in Marx's famous phrase, as "the opiate of the masses," a device used by the powers-that-be to keep exploited workers content with their dismal lot and overawed by authorities who supposedly were divinely ordained. Professor Jones concluded by discussing some ways in which religion has been reconciled with and, indeed, used to support Marxist social policies.

After the video presentation, participants split up into discussion groups that addressed various issues, most of them related to the secularization hypothesis—the claim, based on Marxist thought, that religion would die out in advanced industrialized societies.

Question: If Marxist thought suggests that religion will fade away in advanced industrialized societies, why hasn't this happened? It was pointed out that,

actually, it has happened in most such societies other than the U.S. And the recent political influence of the religious right notwithstanding, there is evidence that the United States is becoming more secular. Arguably, the U.S. is still more religious than Europe because we didn't have the horrendous historical experience with Christianity—the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the Thirty Years War, for instance—that Europe had. Another factor discussed is education. Whereas most advanced societies have centralized educational systems with a common, secularized curriculum, in the U.S., K-12 education is decentralized to local school districts where religious pressure limits the teaching of the Darwinian worldview. It should also be recognized that religions are powerful institutions that have adapted to fight the threat of secularization, as by forming coalitions of religious entities that were historically in conflict.

Question: Was it still the case that the owners of corporations used religion to keep the workers in line? Some of us thought that some industrial and business owners still attempt to do so. Certainly the evangelical portion of the religious right has equated success in business with being chosen by God. On the other hand, religion can be used by any power group to control its members once they can be convinced that faith rather than reason is the way to truth

*(Meeting, Continued on page 7)*



## *Humanists of Minnesota Completes Successful Food Drive*

On December 17, Ron Scribner, HofM Treasurer, took a check for \$3,540 to the main office of the Emergency Foodshelf Network in New Hope and met with Tim Barnes, Executive Director, who profusely thanked our organization. Ron told him that we were a small group of appropriately 160 members who wanted to do something for our community.

In the scheme of things the money handed over puts us in the "Big Cheese" level, which runs from \$1,000-\$4,999. For perspective, the "Cream of the Crop" level goes from \$5,000-\$9,999, while donors who give \$10,000 and up—big organizations like the General Mills Foundation—are in the "Apple of Our Eye" category.

The Foodshelf's fiscal year runs from October 1-September 30. When its annual report comes out we will be listed as "Big Cheese" donors.

Thanks to all the "Big Cheese" members who made this possible! ■



## Book Review

# Your Inner Fish

By Neil Shubin, PhD  
(Pantheon Books)

Reviewed by Nathan Curland

I have to admit that I came to this book via the back door. I give an annual donation to the National Center for Science Education and this year they gave me a choice for a free gift. I chose this book based entirely on the title ... it tickled by imagination. What I got was a true gem.

Neil Shubin is a leading paleontologist, a professor of anatomy and assistant dean at the University of Chicago, and provost of The Field Museum. Moreover, he is from that rare breed: a combination of scientist and entertaining writer.

Though the book's title rightly hints at an exposition of the relationship between our anatomy and that of our fishy cousins, it is much more than that. Shubin expertly takes us through the detailed story of how by studying the anatomy of humans, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and back to fish—both today's species and the fossil record—we can see how the principal aspects of our bodies, skeletons and organs evolved from simpler forms to more complex ones in response to environmental factors. He makes it perfectly clear how “descent with modification” really works. He shows how modern DNA evidence has really solidified the evolutionary record, pointing out that we share the most gene sequences with mammals, less with reptiles, and yet less with fish. Not only that, but science has been able to identify certain DNA sequences that are associated with specific species traits and shown how they have been handed down in some lines and not others. There are even specific sequences that go all the way back to bacteria and he gives explanations as to why we would share these sequences.

The telling of this tale is not as dry as I may make it seem. Shubin led an expedition that discovered *Tiktoolik*—the “missing link” between fish and amphibians—and made headlines in 2006. He intersperses stories of this and other expeditions into the narrative, giving you a real feel for what is involved in field work, the drudgery of the work and the exhilaration when you make a find. He lays out the story as a combination of detective story, lecture and journey

of discovery that makes you want to get to the next chapter. (I would frequently refuse to stop at a chapter ending, just to realize, once I continued, that I had to stop and get some sleep!)

Did you know that you can follow the formation of our limbs and hands back through the ages to fins and small bones in fish? Did you know the importance of the development of teeth and how they arose from overlapping layers of skin? How the head developed from four arches that can be traced back to mammals, reptiles and fish? Did you know that all these stages can be seen in the development of the human fetus? Can you trace the development of our body structure through the animal family tree? How about the development of the sense of smell? Of eyes? (After reading this chapter you will have an answer for how unique eyes are. Hint: there are dozens of variations and the evolutionary thread can be followed!). Or ears?

Shubin ends his book with a chapter entitled “The Meaning of it All.” Here he shows us how only a flawed process such as evolution could have resulted in an obviously poorly designed human with susceptibility to certain diseases, afflictions and misplaced organs. (He even takes on hiccups!) He also gets passionate about how only *descent with modification* can explain the obvious “tree of life” and our relationship to the rest of the animal kingdom.

This book is a tour de force for Dr. Shubin and a great read for you and your family (inspire your teenagers!) ■

### Upcoming Critical Thinking Club Meetings

**West Metro Chapter.** Saturday, January 17, 10:00 a.m. to noon: “9/11: Conspiracy, Complicity, or Coincidence,” by Dr. Michael Andregg, Professor, University of St. Thomas. Ridge Point Apts. Meeting Room, 12800 Marion Ln. W., Minnetonka. \$7 for light lunch, \$4 for coffee/speaker. RSVP [think-rsvp@mark-paquete.com](mailto:think-rsvp@mark-paquete.com).

**St. Paul Chapter.** Sunday, January 11, 10:00 a.m. to noon: “A Critical Examination of the 2008 Presidential Campaign,” by George Kane. Kelly Inn, Hwy. I-94, St. Paul. Breakfast \$10, lecture only \$3. RSVP [lhutt@comcast.net](mailto:lhutt@comcast.net).

**Stillwater Chapter.** Monday, January 12, 7:00 p.m.: “9/11: Conspiracy, Complicity or Coincidence,” by Dr. Michael Andregg, Professor, University of St. Thomas. Family Means Bldg., 1875 Northwestern Ave, Stillwater.



## Mailbox

After reading the October Chapter Meeting summary, I began to wonder what a Humanist take would be on animal rights. The tenets provided by Paul Kurtz deal only with human beings; the first two are more about a scientific worldview, the third is about ethics relating to humans and the fourth is about the social policies of humans.

I live in California, and on November 4, there was a proposition on the ballot (that passed) that requires that calves raised for veal, egg-laying hens and pregnant pigs be confined only in ways that allow these animals to lie down, stand up, fully extend their limbs and turn around freely, with exceptions made for transportation, rodeos, fairs, 4-H programs, lawful slaughter, research and veterinary purposes. My boyfriend and I would both consider ourselves Humanists, but we fall on opposite sides of this issue. He believes that with any issue, one should always consider the impact on human beings first, and that human concerns should take precedence over animals. Because this proposition could cost meat and egg producers huge amounts of money to provide space for each animal to move about, may reduce the number of animals they are able to raise and possibly bankrupt many California businesses, he is voting no on the proposition. He says this is the Humanist thing to do, because it coincides with the third tenet, that the ethics of Humanism are based on human needs and interests and pursue human well being.

I, on the other hand, believe that one of the best things about being human is our ability to empathize with other beings, and we have evolved to a point where we are able to think beyond our own survival and happiness to consider the well-being of other species and our planet as a whole. Were our survival dependent on cruel animal conditions—for example, if we lived in an area of extremely limited space and very small food supply—I would not support this proposition, because I believe we should first address human survival and well-being. However, when the issue is weighing financial concerns against the most basic needs of a living being, I believe advocating for the *humane* treatment of animals is the Humanist thing to do. I see this as an issue of human progress in the ethical and social realms, and so coincides with the fourth tenet of humanism, adopting social policies

that serve human welfare and progress. I was wondering what my fellow Humanists thought of this issue, and what they believe to be the Humanist stance.

Naomi Curland  
Santa Monica, CA

*(Meeting, Continued from page 5)*

and enlightenment ... think communal religious cult groups. (Perhaps the Soviet Union would still be around if they had embraced religion rather than plowed it underground!)

Finally, it was pointed out, contra Marx, that religion serves important individual and social functions. Beyond making workers docile, religion provides a source of community and social support to many people, giving their lives meaning in the face of death. Looking forward, if we want to reduce the influence of religion in our society, we must find ways of addressing the very real human needs it satisfies. Humanism may be uniquely positioned to do this. ■

### HUMANIST NEWS & VIEWS

**Editor**, Nathan Curland  
**Editorial Committee** - Hiero Russell, Gwen Scribner,  
Arthur Schunk, Suzanne Perry  
**Photographer** - Richard Trombly

Articles, letters, event notices and other writings are welcome. Send to: [natcurland@gmail.com](mailto:natcurland@gmail.com) with the word "newsletter" in the subject line, or to P.O. Box 582997, Minneapolis, MN 55458-2997. (E-mail submissions are preferred.) All submissions must include the writer's full name, postal address, telephone number and e-mail address. All submissions become the property of this newsletter and cannot be returned. Submission deadline is the 22nd of the prior month.

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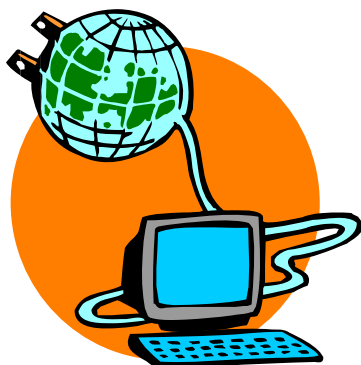
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(for special announcements, blogs etc. Keeps you in touch!)

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