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Summary

**10:00 a.m.– Noon  
 Saturday  
 February 21, 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  
 In Honor of Charles Darwin***

***“Evolutionary Theory”***

***A DVD Presentation and Discussion  
 Featuring Prof. Robert M. Hazen***

***Saturday, February 21***

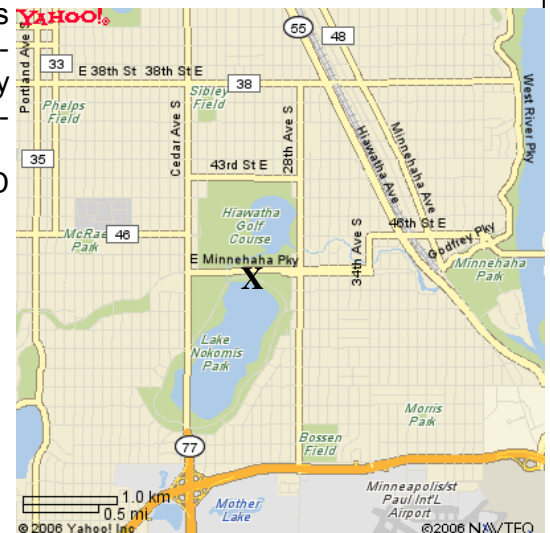
February marks the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of British naturalist Charles Darwin’s birth as well as the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of his revolutionary work, *On the Origins of Species*. Darwin (1809-1882) observed the surprising similarities among different species of tortoises and birds while serving aboard the HMS *Beagle* on its five-year expedition to South America and the Pacific Islands. Shortly after his return in 1836, he formulated his theory of evolution by natural selection, but did not publish his findings until 1859. Our understanding of the evolutionary process is largely the result of Darwin’s work.



At our February chapter meeting, Professor Robert M. Hazen will be explaining that theory in depth in a DVD presentation. Hazen is a scientist at the Carnegie Institution of Washington’s Geophysical Laboratory where he researches the origins of life and the emergence of prebiotic chemical complexity. He is also Clarence Robinson Professor of Earth Science at George Mason University. Prof. Hazen has received many awards for his teaching and is the author of 15 books, including the bestselling *Science Matters: Achieving Scientific Literacy*. He received his B.S. and S.M. in geology at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1971), and his Ph.D. at Harvard University in earth science (1975).

A discussion will follow the DVD presentation.

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



**Commentary*****On the Origins of Secularism in Europe******By Ron Scribner***

We secularists have long looked at Europe—excluding Poland, where religious belief is high—and wished that this country could be as secular. The question we should be asking is: Did the religious wars make Europe secular, or was Europe really all that Christian to begin with? The answer that Rodney Stark comes up with is that the religious wars did play a part in secularizing Europe, but that it was never as Christian as was commonly thought.

I won't recount the religious wars fought throughout the centuries in Europe for we all are familiar with that history. I am going to give a couple of other interesting theories to suggest why Europe is secular, both of which will say that Europe was never as Christian as we assume.

The "Theory of Secularization" had its start in the early 1800s, when Auguste Comte theorized that as a result of modernization, human society was outgrowing the "theological stage" of social evolution and a new age would dawn in which the science of sociology would replace religion as the basis for

moral judgment. Religion itself would be consigned to the back alley or—better yet—the ash heap of civilization. In recent times Peter Berger and Max Weber were two of the main champions of that view. It still has its proponents, but Berger dropped out in 1968, saying in effect that religion is in this country to remain vibrant.

Rodney Stark, who has been studying religious movements for over four decades and has a number of books written by him and in collaboration with other scholars, has theorized that northern Europe had faced a far different set of circumstances. In his book, *The Rise of Christianity*, he demonstrated that it was personal contact that gave rise to Christianity in and around the Mediterranean basin. He contends that the Christian faith was spread through word of mouth in various venues, such as among acquaintances and people speaking in commercial situations such as market places. It was a mass social movement in a highly competitive environment. At the start of the fourth century, Christianity was an immense mass movement.

We know from history that vast religious movements can be started by one person and grow by means of personal contact. All we have to do is look at Islam, Mormonism and Christian Science to see that does occur.

Stark theorizes in his essay, "Secularization,

*(Comment, Continued on page 4)*

### **Humanists of Minnesota Officers**

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Humanists of Minnesota is a nonprofit educational corporation and has been granted a 501(c)(3) tax exemption as an educational, scientific and charitable organization. Donations to Humanists of Minnesota are tax deductible. HofM is a chapter of the American Humanist Association (AHA) and an affiliate of the Alliance of Secular Humanist Societies of the Council for Secular Humanism (CSH). Address inquiries to the Humanists of Minnesota, P.O. Box 582997, Minneapolis, MN 55458-2997, or call (651) 335-3800.

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, wjkhak@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)

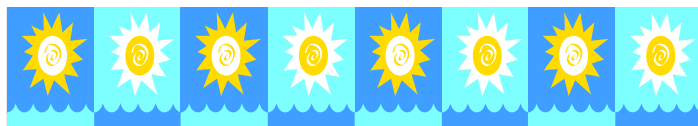
**4th Sunday, 10:30 a.m.**, 4th Sunday Brunch!, Q Cumbers Restaurant, 7465 France Ave S., Edina.

## 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.



## Dates for Summer Freethought Picnics Set!

*Sunday, June 14 - Hosted by CASH*

*Sunday, July 19 - Hosted by Humanists of Minnesota*

*Sunday, August 16 - Hosted by Minnesota Atheists*

## Remember to Tune In to 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 its contract for another six 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.

## Charles Darwin on the Role of Suffering in the World

(Charles Darwin completed his autobiography in 1876, six years before his death. The original version was heavily edited by his son, Francis Darwin, removing passages relating to his critical views of God and Christianity. These, amounting to over 10,000 words, were reinstated by his granddaughter, Nora Barlow, in 1958. Among them was the following passage in which Darwin eloquently addresses the absurd assertion by the Church that suffering was introduced by God to infuse morality into the world.—Ed.)



Every one who believes, as I do, that all the corporeal and mental organs (excepting those which are neither advantageous nor disadvantageous to the possessor) of all beings have been developed through natural selection, or the survival of the fittest, together with use or habit, will admit that these organs have been formed so that their possessors may compete successfully with other beings, and thus increase in number. Now an animal may be led to pursue that course of action which is most beneficial to the species by suffering, such as pain, hunger, thirst and fear; or by pleasure, as in eating and drinking, and in the propagation of the species, etc.; or by both means combined, as in the search for food. But pain or suffering of any kind, if long continued, causes depression and lessens the power of action, yet is well adapted to make a creature guard itself against any great or sudden evil. Pleasurable sensations, on the other hand, may be long continued without any depressing effect; on the contrary, they stimulate the whole system to increased action. Hence it has come to pass that most or all sentient beings have been developed in such a manner, through natural selection, that pleasurable sensations serve as their habitual guides. We see this in the pleasure from exertion, even occasionally from great exertion of the body or mind, - in the pleasure of our daily meals and especially in the pleasure derived from sociability, and from loving our families. The sum of such pleasures as these, which are habitual or frequently recurrent, give, as I can hardly doubt, to most sentient beings as excess of happiness over misery, although many occasionally suffer much. Such suffering is quite compatible with the belief in Natural Selection, which is not perfect in its action, but tends only to render each species as suc-

cessful as possible in the battle for life with other species, in wonderfully complex and changing circumstances.

That there is much suffering in the world no one disputes. Some have attempted to explain this with reference to man by imagining that it serves for his moral improvement. But the number of men in the world is as nothing compared with that of all other sentient beings, and they often suffer greatly without any moral improvement. This very old argument from the existence of suffering against the existence of an intelligent First Cause seems to be a strong one; whereas, as just remarked, the presence of much suffering agrees well with the view that all organic beings have been developed through variation and natural selection. ■

(Comment, Continued from page 2)

R.I.P.," that northern Europe faced a far different situation because Christian conversion did not come about through personal contact, but rather by baptizing monarchs who then forced their faith on their subjects through violent means. The result was that the subjects demonstrated Christian faith when the sovereigns were around by attending Christian festivals and the like, but once left alone they went back home to their pagan gods. Christianity never took hold as it did in the Mediterranean area because it never captured the true allegiance of the locals. Interesting enough, he even claims that once Christianity became the official religion it lost its thrust in the Mediterranean area because corruption and sloth, as well as power struggles and enforced conformity, set in.

Peter Berger theorizes that Christianity was hindered in France by the Enlightenment. Today, education is controlled by the national government, which sends its corps of teachers throughout the country. Those teachers are aspiring intellectuals, who bring their notion of Enlightenment to the students. Unless there is a Catholic school nearby, parents have little choice but to send their children to state schools. As a result the children are exposed to the influence of teachers who are very anti-clerical and even to some extent anti-Christian.

No doubt violence played a part in secularization, but it's not the entire story. If that were the case, Rwanda should be one of the world's most atheistic countries. Although the violence there was tribal, the people there had to ask how any god could permit such slaughter. But today the reports that I am reading tell of the church and the clergy playing a major

(Comment, Continued on page 6)

## *Don't Let the Religious Right Define Who You Are. Support Our Radio Ads!*

*By Arthur Schunk, Secretary, HofM*

You know what the Religious Right has said about Humanism—and about you—is not true. But what can you do? After all, you are but one voice, and the voice of the Religious Right is vigorous, and it takes no prisoners. But, you have an advocate in Humanists of Minnesota.

As stated in our bylaws, the purpose of Humanists of Minnesota is to “educate the public on Humanist philosophy and ethics, on the value of democracy, on science and the scientific method, on the application of critical thinking, and to promote public respect for Humanism and Humanists.”

As your advocate, we take seriously our mission to educate the public on Humanist philosophy and ethics. Our monthly meetings and our newsletter are two examples of educational opportunities we make available to the public. But being your advocate does not mean just waiting for someone to come to us. It also means actively reaching out to anyone who is willing to listen to a discussion on Humanism from the perspective of someone who is actually a Humanist. Radio and the Internet are two examples of media that we are using to do just that.

In 2008, for instance, Humanists of Minnesota became one of the sponsors of “Atheists Talk” (a radio interview program produced by Minnesota Atheists). The program—which airs Sundays from 9 to 10 a.m. on AM 950—provides positive, friendly dialogue with local and national Humanists and atheists. In return for being a sponsor, two one-minute ads promoting Humanists of Minnesota run during each program. Moreover, because we are a sponsor, Scott Lohman, our president, was invited to be the interviewer on 10 of the programs that aired last year.

On a program that aired on December 14, Scott engaged in a discussion with Maggie Ardiente of the American Humanist Association. Among the topics that they discussed was the AHA’s recent advertising campaign. The campaign uses billboards with messages such as: “Why believe in God? Be good for goodness’ sake.” This simple message says volumes about the values and the ethics of being a Humanist. The Religious Right has responded with outrage against the proposition that a person could or even would be good without God. Their outrage says vol-

umes about the values and the ethics of the Religious Right.

The board is excited about the opportunities that the radio program is providing in our efforts to educate the public. But to be effective at being your advocate, we need more than a good message. To be an effective advocate, we also need to have people who listen to that message. And, people are listening! While we do not know how many people listen to the program as it is broadcast live, we do know that people are listening to the program via a podcast downloaded from the Internet. More specifically, on average, each of the 10 programs that featured Scott as interviewer attracted over 2,000 listeners. Think of it, that’s over 2,000 people who, when provided with an opportunity to learn more about Humanism, were willing to at least listen to what Humanists have to say about Humanism. Actively reaching out to anyone who is willing to listen is vital to promoting public respect for Humanism and Humanists.

The board is asking you to make a financial contribution to enable Humanists of Minnesota to continue our sponsorship of “Atheists Talk.” We hope that you agree that the ads and programs offer a good value. Thank you so much for your generous contribution! ■

### *Upcoming Critical Thinking Club Meetings*

**West Metro Chapter.** Saturday, February 21, 10:00 a.m. to noon: “Does Pay-for-Performance Work?” by Cynthia Schield. Ridge Point Apts. Meeting Room, 12800 Marion Ln. W., Minnetonka. \$7 for light lunch, \$4 for coffee/speaker. RSVP [think-rsvp@mark-paquette.com](mailto:think-rsvp@mark-paquette.com).

**St. Paul Chapter.** Sunday, February 8, 10:00 a.m. to noon: “9/11: Conspiracy, Complicity, or Coincidence?” by Dr. Michael Andregg, Professor, University of St. Thomas. Kelly Inn, Hwy. I-94, St. Paul. Breakfast \$10, lecture only \$3. RSVP [lhutt@comcast.net](mailto:lhutt@comcast.net).

**Stillwater Chapter.** Monday, February 9, 7:00 p.m.: “Does Pay-for-Performance Work?” by Cynthia Schield. Family Means Bldg., 1875 Northwestern Ave, Stillwater.

For additional information, visit [CriticalThinkingClub.org](http://CriticalThinkingClub.org).

**Maple Grove Critical Thinking Discussion Group.** Saturday, February 14, 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.: “Basics of Islam”, by Naiyer Usmani and Dr Irshad Jafri, Muslim American Society of Minnesota. Champps Americana, 13521 80th Circle No., Maple Grove. Breakfast \$16.60, Coffee only \$5. RSVP [landforsale@visi.com](mailto:landforsale@visi.com) or call Laurie at 763-420-4757



## Mailbox

To the Editor:

I was interested to read Naomi Curland's letter in the January issue of Humanist News & Views regarding a Humanist perspective on animal rights. I've been wondering for some time why freethinkers are not more outspoken and unified on animal rights issues. It seems to me that once you eliminate the superior position of being the only creature to possess a soul, humans and animals have similar standing in the universe. Humane treatment of animals becomes, in my view, a moral imperative on par with humane treatment of humans. Of course there are times when the needs of humans need to be ethically weighed against the needs of nonhumans, but those balancing acts should be considered when the need is important, for example medical research, and not when the need is vanity or appetite, for example the extreme cruelty that is large-scale animal farming and butchering.

I hope to see more dialog in our community on this important issue.

Erica Klein  
Richfield

### **FOND FAREWELL from Lori L. Brown**

Dear Scott,

In 2005, I had the honor of leading the effort to lobby Congress on behalf of nontheistic Americans. While my love for policy and the work of the Secular Coalition for America has grown, so has the organization. In fact, what was expected to remain a lobbying organization with a staff consisting solely of one lobbyist (me), has also grown. This growth is exciting and it is growth that I have pushed for. The Secular Coalition for America now has a staff of six individuals, is involved in many larger coalition efforts, takes the lead on issues of special interest, and is recognized by members of Congress and consulted by the media and legislative personnel regularly.

In short, the Secular Coalition for America has grown to be a powerful and complex organization in

fewer than four years. With that growth come new needs. The Secular Coalition for America now needs an executive director, an individual whose expertise is running a major national organization. While I am extremely proud of having birthed this baby, it is time for both me and the Secular Coalition for America to continue to grow. For the organization, this means finding an exceptional leader whose passion is continuing to grow the non-theist movement. For me personally, that growth includes reconnecting to my skill sets in the legal and policy realms, and stepping down as director of this wonderful national organization.

As I embark on a search for my next exciting venture, my wish is that the many wonderful individuals who have supported the Secular Coalition for America will not only continue that support, but increase it as the movement grows. I am forever grateful to this organization for the tremendous experiences it has allowed me to enjoy. I continue to support the Secular Coalition for America and the nontheist movement in the broader sense.

I have thoroughly enjoyed working for the Secular Coalition for America. And I look forward to the future - for me outside the organization, and for the continued success of the organization I helped develop.

Best wishes,  
Lori Lipman Brown  
Director, Secular Coalition for America

*(Comment, Continued from page 4)*

part in the psychological healing and in bringing the tribes back together.

I am intrigued by both theories that Stark and Berger present as to why Europe is secular and that violence was not the only reason. ■

***“If it turns out there is a God, I don’t think he is evil. The worst you can say about him is that basically he’s an under-achiever.”***

***Woody Allen***



**January Chapter Meeting Summary:  
The Looting of the Iraq National  
Museum and Protecting Cultural  
Property at War**

*By Becky Schunk & Nathan Curland*

On January 17 Humanists of Minnesota hosted Corine Wegener, who spoke about her work in Iraq to restore the National Museum of Iraq and its antiquities and how she formed the U.S. Committee of the Blue Shield following her return. The USBC works to protect and restore works of art that have been damaged or stolen in areas where armed conflict is going on. Ms. Wegener likened the Blue Shield to the Red Cross and believes they are equally vital to citizens of the world.

Assyria and Mesopotamia were ancient civilizations located where Iraq is today, and much of the art in the National Museum of Iraq and the thousands of dig sites in the country represents a universal cultural history, not of just local or regional importance.

It has been said that Humanists are at their best when espousing values, rather than focusing on what they're against (e.g. religion, dogmas). Wegener's presentation shared that attribute in that she advocated *for* protection and restoration of art, *for* working with professionals of other countries to achieve goals, and *for* building consensus of the value of the Blue Shield's work among members of the political and military communities.

In this respect Wegener's focus is congruent with Humanism. She articulated the value of cultural history shared by all of mankind, and described how she has taken on this work and moved forward with different audiences.

Ms. Wegener alluded to, but did not elaborate on, obstacles she and her colleagues have encountered, conflicts in priorities she faced when working with military or political groups, and the difficulty of recovering artifacts once they've been taken from their original location. (She did give examples of how many of the artifacts, had in fact, been taken by locals who kept them from harm and then returned them once the museum restoration was under way.)

These and many other topics could have been used for discussion after the presentation, but the poor accommodations were not conducive to small group discussions this month. (*The Board is taking action to prevent this issue in the future – Ed.*) ■



**Nominations for Humanists of Minnesota  
Board of Directors are Open**

Humanists of Minnesota elections are coming in April. All four officer positions and three at-large positions are open. In particular, our long-serving secretary, Arthur Schunk, has indicated that he will not be running for the post. The secretary is HofM's recorder: minutes of board meetings and the annual chapter meeting. He/she also keeps track of the by-laws and rules. (Arthur has indicated his willingness and desire to assist and advise the new secretary.) If you are interesting in serving on the board in this capacity (or any other!) please contact any officer.

**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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February 2009

**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION OR RENEWAL**

Your membership is vital to the growth of Humanism and the Humanist community. Married couples or domestic partners will be considered as one membership, if you so indicate. Our membership categories are:

- (B) Budget, \$20.00
- (R) Regular, \$35.00
- (S) Sustaining, \$50.00
- (P) Patron, \$100.00 or more
- (G) Gift Newsletter, \$20.00 (not counted as membership)
- (T) Trial subscription for 3 months, just ask

\*Full time students at an accredited institution can receive a complimentary subscription

Please check the appropriate box, complete the information and mail with your check to Humanists of Minnesota, P.O. Box 582997, Minneapolis, MN 55458-2997.



Visit our website at:  
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For national or international membership write to:

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[www.humanist.net](http://www.humanist.net)

Council for Secular Humanism  
PO Box 664  
Amherst, NY 14226  
[www.secularhumanism.org](http://www.secularhumanism.org)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

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

I would like my newsletter sent via email (  ) (in color!)

Second Member at same address: \_\_\_\_\_