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**10:00 a.m.– Noon
 Saturday
 November 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

“The Problem of Evil: The Top 15 Excuses Religious People Give for the Horrible Behavior of Their God”

August Berkshire

Saturday, November 21

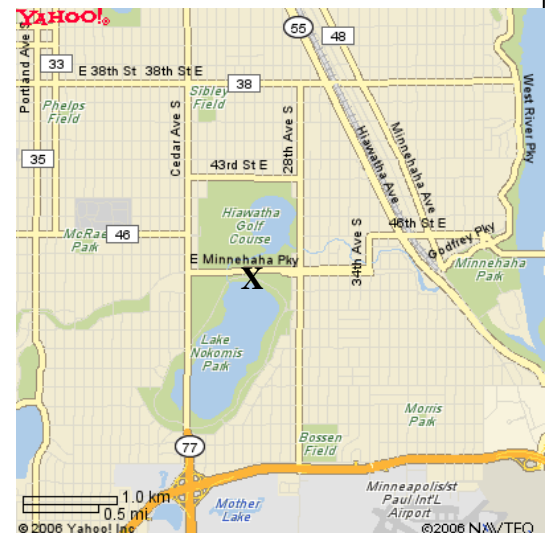
If a god exists that is all powerful and all loving, why is there evil in the world – particularly natural evils such as genetic and acquired diseases, birth defects, predators and natural disasters?



August Berkshire, Minnesota's leading "Friendly Atheist," has spent the past 25 years discussing these issues with religious people and has compiled a list of their top 15 responses. Come judge for yourself if these explanations hold water, or if they are 15 more holes in the boat of religion.

August is a past member of the Humanists of Minnesota board of directors, past president of Minnesota Atheists and past vice president of Atheist Alliance International. He was the recipient of our 2009 Outstanding Humanist award. His website is AugustBerkshire.com.

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

I'm struck by how we humans can sometimes communicate well with one another, while at other times we can't. As a parent, I found teaching my son language and concepts to be a lot of fun but at times frustrating as I tried to get him to grasp a big concept with the basic words and ideas of a young child. As he's gotten older, it has become much easier. The experience of seeing my child grow and learn has left me bewildered by the way some religious types and we humanists seem to be totally incapable of understanding each other.

Two recent columns, one by Ray Comfort and another by R. Albert Mohler, show that there is a vast difference in communication styles. Ray Comfort is

an evangelist who has quite a following among free-thinkers, but not for the reasons he thinks. Comfort may be best known to some as the guy who, with Kirk Cameron, tried to show that a banana is a perfect illustration of "creationism." What Comfort was oblivious about until we freethinkers pointed it out was that bananas are a human-cultivated crop. The bananas he is used to have been modified by humans to grow in their modern shape. Due to this rather large misunderstanding, some refer to Comfort as "Banana Man." In a recent column online, Comfort again shows a misunderstanding of evolution. He complains that evolutionists' use of "transitional forms" is misleading, as the examples are never perfectly in-between different types of animals. Comfort misses the point as all life is a transitional form. We Homo sapiens are probably not the stopping point for the great apes on the planet, provided we don't kill ourselves off. We may not even be the version of intelligent life that survives to the point where the sun goes nova. Life is not static. Comfort errs by considering humans and other life to be "final" versions of various species. In this case, perspective on what is being discussed is everything.

R. Albert Mohler, President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, in a piece for Focus on the Family's "Boundless" website, writes about the "pervasive plague of pornography." Now this is a

(President, Continued on page 6)

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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 or visit our web site: 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 at criticalthinkingclub@gmail.com (\$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.

4th Saturday, 10:00 a.m.-noon, West Metro Critical Thinking Club, Ridge Point Apts. Bldg. meeting room, Minnetonka. Contact Mark Paquette at mark@markpaquette.com. (Contributions accepted.)

OTHER EVENTS

2nd Wednesday, 7:00 p.m., Board of Directors meeting. Open to all members. Contact Scott Lohman at scottl2605@aol.com.

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.



Fall Highway Cleanup Foiled by Accident

Despite a good turnout, our fall highway cleanup had to be cancelled when a multi-car pileup closed Highway 35W right at our section of road for most of the day. An early frost had made the roadway treacherous. Thanks to those who turned out and we will try again in the spring.

Revival of The Humanist Center Lecture Series on November 22

The Humanist Center—a joint project of Humanists of Minnesota, the First Unitarian Society (FUS), and the Humanist Institute—is restarting after a two-year hiatus.

The first lecture will take place on Sunday, November 22, at 6:30 p.m. at FUS and will feature Kendyl Gibbons, FUS pastor, speaking on **"The Purpose Driven Life: Whose Purpose?"** FUS is at 900 Mount Curve Ave, Minneapolis.

'Humanist Views' Goes on the Net!

"Humanist Views," the TV interview program produced by Humanists of Minnesota, is converting to podcasts and videos available on our website: humanistsofmn.org. However, to maintain our production capability at MSN studios, it can still be seen in Minneapolis on Channel 17 at 9:30 p.m. Fridays.

Is Your Membership Up to Date?

If you are receiving a paper copy of this newsletter, check your address label for the expiration date on your subscription.

Please renew when due, using the form on the back. Or, if you prefer, go online at humanistsofmn.org and renew via PayPal.



Why I Am a Humanist

By Ron Scribner

In Shakespeare's play *Romero and Juliet*, Juliet asked, "What's in a name?" She found out that there was a great deal since it cost her her life. What's in the word humanism? Not so much, of course, but still quite a lot. The changing of its fortunes is interesting and instructive, and can be both amusing and annoying. It has included a variety of adjectives before it, e.g., scientific, religious, literary, naturalistic, ethical, and secular, just to name a few. In his book *Living Without Religion*, Paul Kurtz even proposed the term eupraxphy to explain humanism. Eupra-what? It comes from the Greek and means "good practical wisdom." (I can just hear someone say, How fulfilling is it to be a eupraxphist!?) Words, like books, can be wild things.

The words humanist and humanism first appeared five (in Italy) and two (in Germany) centuries ago respectively, not so much as titles of ideological systems but rather as labels in scholarly discourse and educational debate. They first merged and then they metamorphosed into the freethought ideology which combines rationalist, secularist, ethicist, atheist and naturalist views of the universe and human species.

I started my adolescence as an evangelic Christian in the Pentecostal movement. That means I was involved in glossolalia, or "speaking in tongues," and I was a premillennial dispensationalist believer. That means that I once thought that Christ will come in the clouds before the millennium begins (not after). The millennium is the thousand years of peace after a great suffering on earth. There is disagreement, however, as to whether God will raise his saints into the clouds before, during or after the time of tribulation.

The people who are believers in what I described above are not some crazies. Some had declined to go to Harvard and Yale to study for the ministry at the college I attended. The professors had advanced degrees in respected colleges and one in particular had an IQ that nearly went off the charts. He could speak several languages and was able to read Cuneiform and Hieroglyphics. And the believers are good, caring and honorable people.

Then in my late teens and early twenties I started to read the contradictions in the Bible and asked how a perfect God could allow such glaring errors to be in what was supposed to be his authoritative word. Once I decided that the Bible was just a collection of myths, the doubt of God's existence started to grow. Then there was the problem of evil that I never can reconcile with the goodness of God.

I first joined the Minnesota Atheists after moving into the metro area in 1991 and in attending meetings I became acquainted with members of the humanist community and decided that it was a better fit for me. I felt that atheism would talk only to the God question and I wanted to go further.

So what does humanism mean to me? The first thing that appeals to me is that humankind takes the center place in the universe: there is no higher form of life than human in the universe. The ethical concern for human beings and their work and welfare is the most important interest to me. I am a humanitarian in both social and individual terms. I believe that a theory of value does not come from a supernatural being but rather it is found within human life. Second, there is commitment to the use of critical thinking in the analysis, decision making and assessment of value judgments. Third, I reject any supernatural conception of the universe.

In short, humanism can look to the ennoblement and enrichment of human life as an end in itself. There are no absolute values or norms independent of what humankind both individually and socially chooses. ■

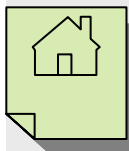


The Freethought Follies Are Coming (December 20): Actors and Singers Wanted!

We have some great wacky comedy skits and opportunities to sing with a vocal ensemble and professional backup band. We are looking for actors and singers of any skill level who are members of the freethought community. Please contact Jerry Rauser at jrauser@comcast.net or (763) 535-7637.

Volunteering:

Humanists Working with Habitat for Humanity



By Juliet Branca

Like to build? Always had a knack for organization? Want to get involved with your community in a fun, hands-on setting? Then Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity may be just the program for you.

In August of 2009 my husband, Jerry, and I volunteered with Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity through the Saint Paul Regional Water Service Department. Though my husband has done his fair share of carpentry and handyman work over the years, aside from the odd household repair every now and then, I don't have any formal construction experience. But with Twin Cities Habitat, that doesn't matter. Lack of previous experience simply translates into more opportunity for growth and learning. Volunteers of all ages, from all backgrounds, and all levels of experience are welcome at Habitat for Humanity.

Though our group decided to work under the "Home Building" program when we volunteered in August, Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity offers three different group programs to best suit your personal goals and preferences.

Home Building

With this program, volunteers dedicate their time and efforts in constructing a new house from the bottom up, or aiding in serious renovations of an already existing structure. Projects may range from a single-family home in the city to a suburban townhouse of up to eight units. The results of this program are rewarding and real-life. A new home for a needy family is built at your hand and before your eyes!

A Brush with Kindness

In an effort to help stop the decline of urban neighborhoods, H.H. developed the Brush with Kindness program to aid in home renovation and maintenance for those in need. Most homeowners served by this program are elderly, disabled or cannot afford the money necessary for the upkeep of their homes. Restoration services often include painting, repairs and some basic landscaping.

ReStore

The ReStore is a retail outlet established and operated by Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity that focuses on selling construction or building-related materials at a heavy discount. All revenue from the store goes back into aiding Habitat's mission. Volunteers are always needed to help with counting, sorting, pricing and displaying the inventory. Though the rewards of this program are less readily apparent than the other two, the work done by ReStore volunteers is absolutely essential to the success of the Habitat for Humanity organization.

If you're interested in learning more about these programs and the Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity mission, you can visit their Web site online at www.tchabitat.org.

For more information about my own experience, or to inquire about future volunteer opportunities with Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity through Humanists of Minnesota, you can email me at smithbranca@gmail.com. ■

Emergency Food Shelf Network

Humanists of Minnesota also supports the Emergency Food Shelf Network. By now, you should have received a letter soliciting a donation. Please be as generous as you can.

We will also be organizing a volunteer opportunity this winter to help a food shelf stock its shelves and prepare lunch meals for kids. Be on the lookout for the announcement and sign up!



*Winter Solstice Celebration
featuring the Freethought Follies*

Sunday, December 20

The most fun you'll have all year!

See Flyer for Details



Book Review:

The Reason for God

By Timothy Keller

Reviewed by Scott Lohman

There has been a spate of books that try to counter the recent atheist bestsellers. Each promises to destroy the arguments of these nefarious religion-hating people. Timothy Keller is a conservative Presbyterian pastor in New York who tries in this book to show that his version of Christianity is the true one. He, at least from my point of view, fails.

One of my complaints about many books seeking to convert us poor nonbelievers is that the authors invariably jump to conclusions on just why someone doesn't believe in God. It seems impossible for them to see that most atheists look upon the existence of the Christian God the same way they look at the existence of Zeus or Aphrodite or Hercules; we just don't believe that God exists. Keller proceeds to roll out a bunch of questions he thinks stop people from believing like: "There can't be just one true religion." "How could a good God allow suffering?" "How can a loving God send people to hell?" "The problem of sin." Keller uses each of those questions as chapter starting points. However he generally goes over ground that anyone who has read more than one book of Christian apologetics has seen a number of times.

Keller does attempt to define sin, which he says is "anything that keeps you from centering your life on God." As an atheist I find that less than useful as there is nothing that helps makes that concept concrete and understandable. Keller also dodges questions on the historicity of the Bible and its events, feeling he doesn't really need to address such things.

I recently heard someone express the idea that religion is the only product in which user error is always the problem. With books like this, it seems only we nonbelievers get that. ■

"Great Intellectuals Are Skeptical"

Friedrich Nietzsche, The Antichrist, 1888

(President, *Continued from page 2*)

complex subject. There are not easy answers and there are even big differences of opinions among humanists. However my issue with Mohler is his lack of clarity in what he is discussing. The crux of the problem is that the definition of just what pornography is, is quite broad. Mohler says that "mainstream" imagery has become so relaxed that "what would have been illegal just a few decades ago is now taken as common dress, common entertainment and unremarkable sensuality." He then goes on to write that the mere existence of pornography can destroy marriages. Now that is probably taking it a bit far, but when it comes to sexuality and religion, there is no such thing as too much control, guilt or demonizing that religion can do to sexuality. With a complex issue like sex and pornography, we need to start with the basics, defining what it is we're to be talking about. However, Mohler seems more interested in continuing to use the Potter Stewart definition of "I know it when I see it."

Both columns show that, from my perspective, there seems to be a wide gulf in what some religious believers perceive and what at least one humanist sees. Let's see what we can do to try and bridge those gulfs and show that rationality can at least help to define the problem. ■

Upcoming Critical Thinking Club Meetings

West Metro Chapter. Saturday, November 28, 10:00 a.m. to noon: "The Utility of God," by Greg Peterson. Ridge Point Apts. Meeting Room, 12800 Marion Ln. W., Minnetonka. Contributions appreciated. RSVP mark@markpaquete.com.

St. Paul Chapter. Sunday, November 8, 10:00 a.m. to noon: "Atmospheric Physics" by Mark Hugo. Kelly Inn, Hwy. I-94, St. Paul. Breakfast \$10, lecture only \$3. RSVP George Kane at criticalthinkingclub@gmail.com

Stillwater Chapter. Monday, November 9, 7:00 p.m. "Health Care Directives, Elder Care, and how the Death Panel Menace Originated," by Janet O'Connell. Family Means Bldg., 1875 Northwestern Ave, Stillwater. RSVP leesal7@hotmail.com

For additional information, visit CriticalThinkingClub.org.



October Chapter Meeting

Maximizing Humanist Effects

Summarized by Paul Heffron
and Nathan Curland

On October 17, we met at the Nokomis Community Center and began with our usual social hour with coffee and rolls and other “health” foods. Once again there were a number of new faces among the 37 in attendance.

Our speaker was Bob Tapp, Professor Emeritus of the University of Minnesota, Dean Emeritus of The Humanist Institute, Distinguished Fellow of the Center for Inquiry, and recipient of the AHA 2005 Horace Mann Education Award.

Tapp started by noting that words were important. Some will be celebrating “Blasphemy Day” and some will be celebrating “Ingersoll Day.” Words mean what the audience thinks they mean and we need to be mindful of that. He then gave a short history of humanism and noted the key characteristic of the Humanist Manifesto was that it talked to *values* and not *beliefs*. We have to ask: how do we share our values? What alliances should we make? He noted that democracy itself is not the answer: just look at Hitler, who was elected democratically.

Tapp then moved to what he thought the humanist movement should be focused on doing in today's world. He suggested that we focus on education and democracy to advance the humanistic culture created by the American Enlightenment. In our educational efforts he suggested concentrating on issues such as economic inequality, the role of violence and women's rights. With regard to democracy, we need to emphasize human rights and other values of our secular nation. Efforts along these lines are taking place at every level from local groups to the work of our international organization (IHEU) at the UN Human Rights Council. In today's world sexism is the new racism. American imperialism is an issue.

Humanists are a rather pluralistic lot, but most of us share overriding concerns. The more we act on our values in response to current issues through education and political action, the more effective we will be and the more we will be known as those non-theistic people who engage in cutting-edge inquiry and advocacy for a better world.

After the meeting, a number of us had lunch at Carbone's and continued the discussion. ■

Maple Grove Discussion Group

Saturday, November 14, 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.: “True Happiness Has No Cause,” by Rod Greder. Champps Americana, 13521 80th Circle No., Maple Grove. Breakfast \$16.50, coffee only \$5. Register at landforsale@visi.com or call Laurie at 763-420-4757.



Bob Tapp addresses members at October chapter meeting

HUMANIST NEWS & VIEWS

Editor, Nathan Curland

Editorial Committee - Brad Bolin, Gwen Scribner, Matt Labo, Suzanne Perry

Photographer - Richard Trombly

Articles, letters, event notices and other writings are welcome. Send to: editor@humanistsofminn.org 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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November 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:
www.humanistsofmn.org

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www.humanist.net

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

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

Second Member at same address: _____