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Humanists of Minnesota Chapter Meeting

***“Religion: Salvation or Symbiosis?**”**

*by Dr. Mark Welter
 Saturday, April 17*

For our April meeting we are proud to welcome Dr. Mark Welter, World History/Religion teacher and HofM member. Mark has degrees from St. John’s University, Mankato State and the University of Minnesota and has taught in this field since 1963. He is retired from St. Cloud University but is currently teaching in an Olli program (for senior citizens) at the U of M. Here, in his own words, is a summary of the talk:



“Can anything be understood unless the first cause is known?” — Thomas Hooker, 16th century Anglican Bishop

“Traditional religions contend that their beliefs are exclusive truths revealed by Supreme Beings. History tells a very different story. ‘Sacred’ dogma and/or ‘truths’ are, in reality, the outcomes of universal and ecumenical interchanges. They are a symbiosis of ideas from across the world community. Not only have all religions taken part in this mutual borrowing; they have molded attractive ideas into rationalization for class differences and preservation of cultural values. *I am indebted to Rebecca Curland and her excellent February presentation for inspiration for this interpretation of religious history.”

**10:00 a.m.– Noon
 Saturday
 April 17, 2010**

**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.

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



Opinion:

Humanism and Libertarianism

By Nathan Curland

(Nathan Curland is currently Vice President of Humanists of Minnesota and Editor of Humanists News & Views. Opinions expressed in this piece are entirely his own and not the official views of Humanists of Minnesota.)

I have always been, in my heart, a libertarian (being defined as someone who believes in “the right of the individual to live his or her life as they choose as long as they do not violate the rights of others”) and what attracted me to humanism was the basic creed of living your life “through education, democracy, free speech, reason and science, without reliance on arbitrary dogmas, revelations and faith.” The two seemed a perfect match ... after all, once you strip away arbitrary dogmas and faith, what is left if not individual rights and basic agreed-to Rules of Engagement so that people treat each other fairly?

But what I found instead is the most humanists I

have met have “escaped” from oppressive religion-based social structures and that their view of basic human rights is generally constructed in opposition to those cultures. Their support of individual rights is therefore dependent on how well it fits their opposition. Take, for example, the right for an individual to “choose.” To a libertarian, this right is basic (subject to the “do not violate ...” provision). Therefore, a woman’s right to choose to have an abortion, the right to vote, the right to marry or associate with whom you wish, the right to bear arms, the right to engage in open and free trade are all part of the libertarian credo. But to a humanist, the access to these rights appears to depend on whether there may be a link to the culture he/she is escaping from. So “straw men” are created to deny that the rights exist. Take the right to bear arms (self-defense): this right is associated with the right wing, which has taken up this cause with vigor. It would appear that many humanists favor gun control just because of this and we hear all types of excuses that this promotes violence or a powerful military, or private armies etc. Or how about opposition to a free market? Evidence against supporting a free market seems tied to failures in our economy and control of major resources by the obscenely rich and powerful (a libertarian response would be that we do not have anything close to a free market since the power and climate to create this obscene wealth resides entirely in the unfree-market policies of the obscenely huge government).

(Humanism, 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, 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.

4th 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. (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.



Spring Highway Cleanup

May 8

The spring highway cleanup will begin at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, May 8. We meet at the gas station located in the southeast corner at the intersection of Interstate 35W and Highway 23 (right turn from 35W northbound). This is the last exit on 35W going north before it joins 35E, and is about nine miles north of 35W and I-694. I will bring the trash bags and orange vests, so all you need is appropriate clothing and shoes and possibly sunscreen and insect repellent. We are usually finished by noon and most of us get together for lunch and good conversation at a nearby restaurant.

A big turnout means we finish sooner and have more chance to socialize, so I hope many of you will be able to join us. This is a great opportunity to show Humanists at work on behalf of the community. If you have questions, call me at (952) 927-4193 or email me at dbeardsley@belleplaine.k12.mn.us.

David Beardsley

Go Green!

Get your Newsletter via e-mail

Are you still getting your newsletter on paper via snail-mail? If so, you are missing out on a number of advantages of going digital:

- *The newsletter is e-mailed in (living!) color*
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- *You save HofM the cost of printing and mailing*
- *You help save the planet*

So give it a try! E-mail us at editor@humanistsofmn.org

Maple Grove Discussion Group

Saturday, April 10, 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.: "Demystifying Arab Muslim Culture," by author Mary Coons. 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.

Humanist Center Presents:**‘The Humanity of Humanism’****August Berkshire***By Paul Heffron*

August Berkshire, President of Minnesota Atheists, spoke at the First Unitarian Society on Sunday, March 21. The occasion was another in the Humanist Center speaker series, which is sponsored jointly by FUS, HofM, and the Humanist Institute.

August startled the audience of 42 people with his first sentence by saying that it’s more important to be a humanist than an atheist. He explained that for him being an atheist simply means being without belief in God. Being a humanist for him means living a good life without God. The title of his talk was “The Humanity of Atheism.” He sees the atheist position as clearing the way for good human values and practices. Compassion, he said, is the humanity of atheism.

August said atheists need to get beyond anger and frustration and relate to others in a friendly way. They need to practice good human relations in their contacts with believers. He said Minnesota Atheists has adopted this approach as a matter of policy. The policy also includes seeking to educate people in what atheism is and gaining respect for it and supporting separation of church and state.

At the end of the talk, the moderator, Debby Magnuson, conducted a period of questions and comments, which was lively and probing and reflected a general appreciation of August’s presentation and, it seemed to me, a sense of a community of people who share many views and values. ■

Upcoming Critical Thinking Club Meetings

St. Paul Chapter. Sunday, April 11, 10:00 a.m. to noon: “The Military– Industrial-Congressional Complex,” by Bob Schmitz. Kelly Inn, Hwy. I-94, St. Paul. Breakfast \$10, lecture only \$3. RSVP criticalthinkingclub@gmail.com

West Metro Chapter. Saturday, April 24, 10:00 a.m. to noon: “The Confederate Flag: Symbol of Hate or Heritage?,” by Todd Torkelson. Ridge Point Apts. Meeting Room, 12800 Marion Ln. W., Minnetonka.

Stillwater Chapter. Monday, April 12, 7:00 p.m.: “The Day the Universe Changed,” by Don Empson. Family Means Bldg., 1875 Northwestern Ave, Stillwater.

**March Chapter Meeting****“A History of Disbelief - Part I”***Summarized by Paul Heffron*

On Saturday, March 20, the Humanists of Minnesota chapter meeting took place at Nokomis Community Center. There were 32 people in attendance and many were newcomers at the meeting. People continue to find out about us on Meetup and come to our meetings. We started with our usual half-hour social time with coffee and rolls on hand and materials available at the literature table. That time provided a good opportunity to get acquainted with the new people. A business meeting was held at which nominations for officers and board members were presented. Nominations were closed at the end of the meeting in accord with the bylaws. Voting will take place at the next meeting.

The program was a video of the BBC documentary “A Brief History of Disbelief” by Jonathan Miller (part one of a three-part series). The four national U.S. humanist organizations sponsored the broadcasting of this program on American public television. However, it was carried locally at a rather late hour, so many of us missed it. The quality of the documentary was first rate, as you would expect.

Miller discussed the phenomenon of disbelief and covered its early history. He did interviews with prominent scholars in philosophy, anthropology and history and with dramatist Arthur Miller. Various points were made that were good for discussion, and we took some of them up in our small-group discussions that followed the viewing of the video.

After the meeting a group of about 10 of us had lunch and table talk at nearby Carbone’s. ■

Report of the Humanists of Minnesota Nominating Committee

Committee members: Paul Heffron, Cathy Prody, Jim Barri. The Humanists of Minnesota bylaws require that all candidates for the board be members in good standing for at least one year.

Terms:

Officers (President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer): One year

Seven at-large board members: Two years with four

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Candidates for the Humanists of Minnesota Board of Directors

Officers

President:

Scott Lohman

Scott Lohman has been active with HofM since 1991 and is our current President. "I have been a Board member and Vice President over the years. I was part of the group that began the cable TV program and I continue to produce and host it. I will continue to work on ways to grow our group and promote Humanism." Scott represents HofM on the Humanist Center steering committee and presented a program on "Humanism and Pop Culture" during its 2010 season.



Vice President:

Nathan Curland

"I have been a member of HofM for the past nine years and editor of its newsletter for the past six. I came to Humanism through years of trying to understand what gives meaning to our lives and, eventually, rejecting the dogmatism that humans seem to thrive on. I believe the drive to add meaning to our lives, salted with a healthy skepticism, is the way to the solutions of the world and the educational mission of HofM is a key and noble contribution to that goal."



Treasurer:

Brad Bolin

"My name is Brad Bolin and I feel I have always been a humanist (although growing up the son of a Protestant minister had its awkward moments). It feels nice to have found a home in this organization. I have enjoyed my first two-year term on the board. I feel like I am finally feeling comfortable and hope to expand my role through my recent acceptance of the Treasurer position. Working for the last year or so on the cable television show has also been an interesting and educational endeavor. I am all about learning new skills and having new experiences, so I hope you will confirm me as Treasurer and we can carry Humanists of Minnesota into the near future with a continuance of our positive philosophy and on solid financial footing."



Secretary:

Juliet Branca

"I grew up in Philadelphia and was raised as a Catholic. I left Catholic school and my religion at age 14 and never looked back. I majored in Art History at Temple University, became a Minnesotan in 1984 and raised five children in St Paul. I am currently an advocate for green roof technology and have been meeting with our city leaders.



"I've been a board member for a year now and am looking forward to beginning my new role as Secretary."

Directors at Large:

Mark Thoson

"After finding the Humanist Association to be a stimulating place to share views and life experiences I am glad to have a chance to participate in sustaining the same. I hope to bring some association expertise, and social network building efforts to the group. I'm a former business owner and past president of the Nokomis Village Association (now defunct but that wasn't my fault!). I am in a personally transitional phase of life with an eye toward creative, meaningful and pleasurable work and social interaction. I write a little and have most recently been reading books on neurological function, consciousness's origins, objectivism of Ayn Rand and the fiction of Stephen King and others."



Dale Handeen

Dale Handeen is a member of Class 13 of the Humanist Institute, a three-year graduate-level certificate program in leadership, and she took her B.A. at Macalester College, in art and philosophy. She's a product of the Willmar Unitarian Universalist congregation, and served at the Michael Servetus Unitarian Society in Fridley for seven years as Director of Religious Education. Dale will be able to consult with families wanting humanist education for chil-



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dren. She is also a qualified celebrant, certified by the Humanist Society of the American Humanist Association, and can perform marriage, child dedication, and memorial services. With her presence on the board, she can help it to achieve gender balance. She has access to a good collection of resources to share in various ways, and, again, is perhaps especially qualified to assist with meetings needs of young families in the Humanists of Minnesota.

Cathy Prody

“I have been a member of Humanists of Minnesota for approximately one year, and have been interested in secular humanist ideas for many years. I have previously served on the board of Minnesota Atheists. I am a scientist by training, with a Ph.D. in biochemistry, and I worked as a research scientist for many years. I am currently a patent lawyer. I am from Minnesota and grew up in the Twin Cities. If elected, I will focus on any legal issues that may arise. I am also interested in maintaining high ethical standards both on the board and with our representation of humanism to the public. I would also like to reach out to new members and am interested in organizing meetups aimed at both new and established members alike.”



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members elected in even-numbered years and three in odd-numbered years.

During the past year Brad Bolin was named interim Treasurer replacing retired Ron Scribner and Dale Handeen replaced Gwen Scribner, who also retired. Bob Schmitz has finished his first year and continues on the board for another year. Juliet Branca has finished her first year and is running for Secretary. This year we have three candidates for the four open even-year at-large positions. In addition, there are two open positions for the odd-year positions (which have one more year to run).

According to the bylaws, the Board can fill the open positions at its discretion.

The Board of Directors would like to thank the Nominating Committee for its hard work. If you would like to serve on the board, please send a message explaining why you would like to serve to: president@humanistsofmn.org.

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So I took some heart in the Dec. 2009/Jan. 2010 issue of Free Inquiry, the magazine of the Council of Secular Humanism, which featured a number of articles where libertarian ideals were discussed (and even promoted). Paul Kurtz, in his column “Celebrating Thirty Years of Free Inquiry,” stated, “Neoliberals, neoconservatives, libertarians, and social democrats all share the need to defend the free society: they recognize that in order to achieve it we need to be committed to both political democracy and economic freedom. Many democrats now appreciate the fact that where there is a monopoly of state power there is neither political nor economic freedom.”

As many know, school vouchers are a tough problem for a (humanist) libertarian. Fundamentally, libertarians really don’t want the government running schools very much and point to the high cost, common-denominator aspect that lack of competition brings. But given the fact that public schools are now a given, the argument shifts to how we can hold them accountable. Well, vouchers clearly offer the parents a choice and hold the promise to open up the education “business” to competition. Now Ed Doerr has been the humanist poster child for the anti-voucher movement. The argument has been that a voucher program would funnel public money into private religious schools and thereby violate the sanctity of separation of church and state, *and* this money would be used to indoctrinate the students in religion and anti-scientific views. So it was with some surprise (and glee!) that I read his latest piece in FI on how the Heritage Foundation is proposing using the (very successful) Swedish voucher system as a model for a U.S. system. Doerr does not hesitate to point out how the Swedes have successfully made the system very secular and requires specific items to participate such as: cannot discriminate in hiring, cannot charge extra fees or tuition, must cover Sweden’s national curriculum, must participate in national testing and be open to governmental inspection. The very things that libertarians would demand of vouchers in this country! In the end, however, Doerr rejects vouchers here because “what is politically acceptable in Sweden is not in U.S.” In other words, since we can’t have the good voucher system in the U.S., we shouldn’t even try.

In the Letters part of the magazine, a reader took Paul Kurtz to task for his “Health Care Is a Human Right” statement in a previous issue, reminding him that Ramsey Clark (hardly a right winger) said: “A

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right is not what someone gives you; it's what no one can take from you." The point being that anything that requires someone to do something for you cannot be a right, since it essentially makes the provider a slave. Hence health care cannot be a "right."

Tibor Machan's column, when he has one, is always a fresh breath of (libertarian) rationality. In this issue, he takes those environmentalists to task who frame humans outside of and anti nature, thereby ignoring the fact that mankind is, by definition, part of nature. To assert that humans are "intruding" on nature is therefore nonsense, which leads to efforts to protect species that are going extinct for all types of environmental reasons independent of man's influence i.e., extinction is part of the natural process. Now since the human population is growing at an exponential rate and is eating up resources at a pace that threatens to endanger all of us, does this not require that we work together in enlightened self interest to assure the survival of our species? And in the process we need to harness our intelligence and science to the task. Preaching that any human interference is harmful (as extreme environmentalists do) is as irrational as any religion.

And then finally there was Frank Pasquale's piece, "The Quintessential Secular Institution," which turns out to be the corporation. He (rightly) points out that the large majority of U.S. corporations are run as tightly secular enterprises (which they must do to be competitive and be able to hire the best and the brightest and appeal to the largest number of customers). He then notes that this most secular institution in the world is reviled by most humanists about as much as they revile religiousness. The common argument is that many (most? Well, at least the bad ones) corporations are driven by greed and their executives are quick to exploit ethical loopholes and adopt quasi-legal methods (or lobby to make them legal!) in search of wealth and power. In other words, selfish self-interest too often overcomes enlightened self-interest. He notes several ironies: One is that religious political conservatives are the most active apologists for free-market capitalism incorporating the "Adam Smith model" in which faith in the "invisible hand" of the marketplace supported by enlightened self-interest and strengthened by religion makes for free and just society. The other is that secular liberals who do not have any such faith "grapple with what they view as ethically objectionable outcomes of the most secular of human institutions." Pasquale is clearly a libertarian

who, with a velvet glove, is trying to wake up humanists to the need to marry (maybe champion is a better word) libertarian free market economics with humanist enlightenment values.

I cannot end without referring to Richard Dawkins's latest (and greatest!) book on evolution, *The Greatest Show on Earth*. In it he likens the results of evolution similar to the Adam Smith "invisible hand" wherein natural selection (e.g., free-market competition) in its inexorable mechanism of "rewarding" the most successful replicators (e.g. competitors) in their environment, results in "endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful" and best suited for that environment. Change the environment and the "invisible hand" will cause the market to optimally adapt to it. Create a skewed environment (via government interference) and you will get a skewed result (and not necessarily the one that was expected!).

In natural selection there are no morals except what each species adopts toward making themselves successful. Likewise, humanists understand that human morals arise from what we, as a species, adopt to promote our individual and societal welfare. A humanist libertarian philosophy teaches (preaches?) that enlightened secular self-interest is the most moral man-made system that can exist. ■

HUMANIST NEWS & VIEWS

Editor, Nathan Curland

Editorial Committee - Brad Bolin, Matt Labo, Suzanne Perry

Photographer - Richard Trombly

Articles, letters, event notices and other writings are welcome. Send to: editor@humanistsofmn.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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April 2010

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- (R) Regular, \$35.00
- (S) Sustaining, \$50.00
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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.



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www.humanistsofmn.org

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