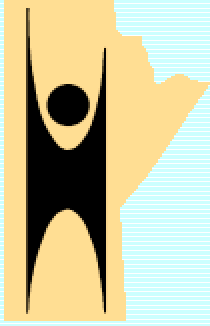


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Manitoba Humanist



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Contents:

HAM AGM	2
Cultural Threats to a Rational Worldview	3
Thank You	4
Letter: Moral Beings	4
BS Party details	4
Book Review	5
Happy Birthday Charles Darwin	6

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Humanist Association of Manitoba

Upcoming events

Humanist Association of Manitoba

Monthly Meeting Saturday, February 9, 2008

Viscount Gort Hotel 1670 Portage Ave. at Route 90

Meet and Greet 5:30 p.m.

Dinner (may be ordered from coffee shop menu) 6:00 p.m.

Meeting 7:00 p.m.

Guest Speakers: Donna Harris and Grant Rogerson

Discussion Title: "Skepticism and Activism: A report from TAM 5.5"

These two HAM members have just returned from "The Amazing Meeting 5.5", held by the James Randi Educational Foundation. Be ready for an introduction to James Randi, a description of skepticism and how it differs from Humanism and Atheism, and some great grassroots stories of some people who decided to make a difference.

Don't Miss It!

Bullshit Party

Saturday, February 16, 2008

77 Edmonton Street @ 7:00 PM

At the Olsson residence (Details on page 4)

Next Monthly Meeting Saturday, March 8, 2008

Viscount Gort Hotel 1670 Portage Ave. at Route 90

Discussion Topic: Irrational Worldviews – What Can We Do?

Report from HAM's Annual General Meeting

On January 12, 2008, the Humanist Association of Manitoba held its Annual General Meeting, at the Viscount Gort hotel. The meeting opened with a "Cec Muldrew moment" in honor of past members Cec Muldrew and Dennis Ousey.

Reports from various members of the executive were delivered, including Membership, Financial, Outreach, Library, Newsletter and Website. Overall, the organization had a very good year. The organization continues to grow and, in general financial terms, revenues were up, while expenses were down. This was partly due to the fact that the number of members has grown, and also because of a change in the donation format this past year. HAM now encourages members to make an occasional donation to cover expenses, rather than passing the hat at every meeting. This means that members also now receive a

charitable tax receipt for their donations.

A motion was made during the Library report to begin charging a nominal fee of \$1 to sign out books. This suggestion was passed by the membership. So, starting with the next meeting, signing out books will cost a loonie.

The results of the election of executives is as follows: Continuing as President: Barrie Webster; Vice President: Barry Hammond; Treasurer and Membership: Helen Friesen, and Secretary: Heather McDonell. Grant Rogerson, Donna Harris, Sophie Shulman and Jeff Olsson are continuing as Members-at-Large. New Executive Members are Neil Schipper, Randy Gibson and Brian Latour.

- Donna Harris

34th Annual National Conference of American Atheists

The American Atheists' 34th National Conference is being held March 21 – 23, 2008 in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

The venue for the conference is going to be the Minneapolis Marriott City Center Hotel, in downtown Minneapolis.

The list of speakers for the Conference is truly impressive. It includes:

- **Ellen Johnson**, President, American Atheists

- **Robert Lanham** – author of *The Sinner's Guide To The Evangelical Right*
- **Dr. Jack David Eller**, Anthropologist from Denver, Colorado
- **Richard Dawkins**, Charles Simonyi Professor of the Public Understanding of Science at the University of Oxford, and author of "The God Delusion"

For more information, check out www.atheists.org/conference/

Cultural Threats to a Rational Worldview

At the January meeting, HAM was pleased to have guest speaker, Jim Clark from the University of Winnipeg discussing Cultural Threats to a Rational Worldview. Generally speaking, Professor Clark's message is that the growth – and perhaps even the very survival – of reason and rational thinking is far from certain.

The first threat to a rational worldview, which generally means beliefs and actions based on reason and science, is (obviously) religion. Consider that over 50% of Americans surveyed don't believe in evolution. And there are many other countries where religion is even more important – even more so than the U.S.A. While increased immigration is generally a positive occurrence, and enriches our multicultural society, it also means more individuals from more religious countries. And, according to research, the level of religious importance for these individuals tends to be retained, even in their new country.

We've already seen the conflict generated in Canadian society. Consider the recent debates over whether or not Sikhs should be able to wear kirpans (ceremonial daggers) to schools or courts of law, or if young Muslim women can participate in certain sports while wearing a headscarf.

Other threats may lie within beliefs related to culture and/or ethnicity. Critics have tried to assert that all knowledge is relative, meaning that every group's ways of knowing and understanding the world are equally valid. They also claim that modern science is Eurocentric and reliant on culture. For instance, East Indian beliefs that led to its strict caste

system (e.g., origin of untouchables from the feet of god and Brahmins from the head) have traditionally been defended through appeals to tradition and culture. However, modern science, through the findings of molecular biology, has demonstrated the unity of all life, meaning that there is really no scientific basis for the caste system.

Clark also highlighted homeopathy and herbal medicines as examples of practices that, while traditionally popular, have either not been tested thoroughly, or have no scientific basis whatsoever. The popularity of these and various other practices often appears to be related to the culture where they're found.

When some activity or belief is accepted by almost an entire population (for example, cargo cults, or female genital mutilation), it may be difficult for members of that society to imagine any other way of doing things. When something is entrenched within a culture, it takes a great deal of effort to defy prevailing opinion.

Professor Clark's presentation was very interesting and thorough. He presented a compelling case, supported by data and evidence. Unfortunately, the conclusion appears to be that irrational beliefs are firmly entrenched all over the world.

Now, we should ask ourselves what can be done to promote rational thinking, and combat a host of irrational beliefs. In particular, what types of these threats to rational thinking are relevant to our own lives. A further discussion of this topic is on the agenda for our March meeting.

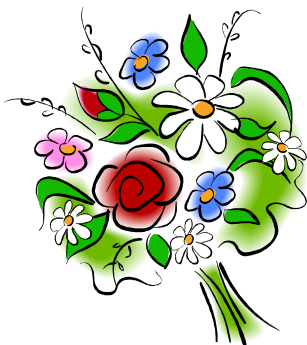


HAM member Jeff Olsson (left) and Jim Clark

"Time after time, properly conducted scientific studies have proved that homeopathic remedies work no better than simple placebos. So why do so many sensible people swear by them? And why do homeopaths believe they are victims of a smear campaign?"

- Ben Goldacre,
M.D.

Thank You



HAM member Miep van Raalte fell ill suddenly back in December, so we wanted to ensure that Miep knew that we were thinking about her.

Following is Miep's thank you, since she wanted to make sure everyone who signed the card, etc. was acknowledged:

*"Dear HAM Friends,
What a delightful basket with European garden flowers and plants arrived yesterday! It has brought a*

touch of spring to our living room. Above all, thank you for the well-wishes.

With each passing day I am doing a little better and kind gestures such as the one you sent my way are not only appreciated but actually help to make me feel more positive (and, therefore, stronger).

Thank you again!"

Miep van Raalte

Miep – get well soon!

LETTER OF THE DAY: Moral Beings

"After the sermon was ended ... I revolted at the recollection of what I had heard.... I moreover believe that any system of religion that has anything in it that shocks the mind of a child, cannot be a true system."

-- Thomas Paine,
The Age of Reason

The following was the Letter of the Day in the Winnipeg Sun on Monday, January 7, 2008:

MORAL BEINGS

Lately there have been some letters to the editor alluding to the use of the Bible as a moral guide. The general consensus seems to be that the Bible is useful as a moral compass.

The Bible contains some good moral teachings. It also contains harmful moral teachings. The Bible promotes degrading women, discriminating against homosexuals and those of

different religions, slavery, killing and genocide. Hence, most Christians only follow some of the Bible's teachings.

Caring for fellow human beings is a far better reason to be moral than fear of divine punishment. We are more than capable of deciding what is moral by ourselves.

THE MEMBERS OF MANITOBA
ATHEISTS, SKEPTICS, AND
HUMANISTS (MASH) AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Well done MASH!

Details: Bullshit Party

Here are the details for February's Bullshit Party:

WHEN: **Saturday, February 16th**
Starting at 7:00 p.m.

WHERE: **77 Edmonton Street**
Rec Room, Main Floor

HOW: Buzz code 147 for entry to the building
BYOB

Please RSVP. Jeff's email address is Jdolson@shaw dot ca. (just replace dot with a .)

Darwin's Origin of Species: A Biography

Book Review

Darwin's Origin of Species: A Biography, by Janet Browne, Atlantic Books, 192 pp

Reviewed by Barry Hammond

This book by Janet Browne is called Darwin's Origin of the Species. Janet Browne has helped to launch a new series called "Books that Shook the World" by resuming and updating Darwin's book. Her 2006 work begins in Darwin's youth. It notes his illnesses, which continued throughout his life. She also notes his religious wife, Emma Wedgwood, who may have been part of his reason for postponing "The Origin" for over a decade after it was conceived.

Evolution was in the air in the 1800s with Robert Chamber's publication, Herbert Spencer's work and concern by Malthus about population needing to be controlled if the food supply was to be adequate. Malthus had warned that famine might be one of the reasons for the extinction or reduction of some species.

Darwin studiously avoided man in The Origin of the Species, dealing with people only in his later book, The Descent of Man. In fact he spent the eight years from 1844 to 1852 studying barnacles. His daughter, Annie, died in 1851. She was listed as the apple of Darwin's eye. Perhaps this helped to tip Darwin into a disbelief in religion. Why would God cause such a harmless individual to die?

In 1858 Alfred Russel Wallace mailed his manuscript on evolution to Darwin, who in 1858 noted the similarity between Wallace's views and his own. This perhaps prompted Darwin's

publication of "The Origin" in 1859. Darwin weighed his words very carefully. In fact the term "survival of the fittest" was borrowed from the conservative philosopher Herbert Spencer. This phrase was only inserted in the fifth edition of "The Origin" and was unfortunately co-opted by the Nazis as well as various corporate barons, who used it to justify their pursuits.

Interestingly the main attacks on Darwin in the nineteenth century were not from churches. Janet Browne notes that biblical fundamentalism is mostly a modern concern, not a Victorian one.

In later writings Darwin expanded natural selection, which mainly explained species diversity to sexual selection which better explained racial and ethnic diversity. Darwin welcomed Peter Kropotkin's book Mutual Aid and he linked with Karl Marx who was writing at this same time. He agreed with Kropotkin that cooperation was more important than competition.

Darwin anticipated the work of Gregor Mendel who also knew little about genes. However, both knew about heredity and the origin of species. Mendel had more specific knowledge about inheritance, but Darwin had a broader idea about evolution of species.

Darwin knew that the essence of modern science was to seek answers in the world of evidence and proof, and not to call on divine or supernatural factors. With Humanists, Darwin felt that the human race was capable of moving onward from biology to make a better world based on more altruistic social policies.

Executive

**Barrie Webster
Barry Hammond
Helen Friesen
Heather McDonell**

Members at Large:

**Randy Gibson
Donna Harris
Brian Latour
Jeff Olsson
Grant Rogerson
Neil Schipper
Sophie Shulman**

**We're on the
Web!**

See us at:

mb.humanists.ca

Happy Birthday Charles Darwin!

A Global Celebration

February 12th will mark the 199th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin. Darwin has arguably been cited as the most influential individual in science for his "Origin of the Species". His theory of natural selection is considered to form the basis for modern evolutionary theory.

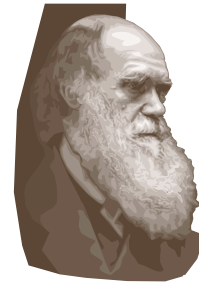
The celebration of Darwin Day is considered a celebration of science and humanity.

The stated aim of the Darwin Day organization in promoting the celebration of Darwin's birthday, is to evolve a truly international Celebration to express gratitude for the enormous benefits that scientific knowledge, acquired through human curiosity and ingenuity, has contributed to the advancement of humanity

And be sure to mark your calendar for next year! 2009 will be the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth, as well as the 150th anniversary of the publication of "On the Origin of Species".

To learn more, here are some books about Darwin:

- Reluctant Mr. Darwin, by David Quammen



- The Cambridge Companion to Darwin, edited by Jonathan Hodge and Gregory Radick
- Darwinism and its Discontents, by Michael Ruse
- Charles Darwin: Voyaging, by Janet Browne
- Charles Darwin: The Power of Place, by E. Janet Browne
- Charles Darwin: The Man and his Influence, by Peter J. Bowler
- Darwin, by Tim Lewens

The following publications by Darwin are currently available in print::

The Voyage of the Beagle
The Origin of Species
The Descent of Man
The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals
The Autobiography of Charles Darwin

As well, the complete text of several Darwin works, including On the Origin of Species, are available on-line at <http://pages.britishlibrary.net/charles.darwin>

Be sure to check out the list of events planned for this celebration at www.darwinday.org

