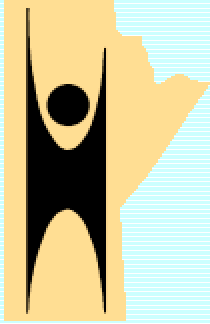


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Manitoba Humanist



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Humanist Association of Manitoba

Upcoming events

Humanist Association of Manitoba

Monthly Meeting Saturday, March 8, 2008

Viscount Gort Hotel 1670 Portage Ave. at Route 90

*** NEW MEETING SCHEDULE ***
SEE PAGE 3 FOR DETAILS

Meet and Greet 5:30 p.m.

Meeting / Presentation 6:15 p.m.

Dinner (may be ordered from Coffee Shop menu) 7:00 p.m.

Group Discussion: "Skepticism and Rational Thinking"

In light of our recent presentation from Jim Clark, we will continue the topic of "Cultural Threats to a Rational Worldview". We will ask the question 'what part of these threats to rational thinking are relevant to us, and what can we do about them'.

Another great evening!

Brunch with Sophie

Sunday, March 30, 2008 11:30 a.m.

Lindenwood Manor – 475 Lindenwood Drive East

Fixed Menu – with a couple of choices

RSVP to Sophie by Wed. March 26th at

489-8622 or by email at sbshulman@shaw.ca

Next Monthly Meeting

Saturday, April 12, 2008

Viscount Gort Hotel 1670 Portage Ave. at Route 90

Guest Speaker: TBA

Report from TAM 5.5: Skepticism & Activism

At our February meeting, HAM members Grant Rogerson and Donna Harris (yours truly) gave a report on a recent conference they attended, hosted by the James Randi Education Foundation (JREF).

The Amaz!ng Meeting 5.5 (TAM 5.5) was held in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, just minutes away from the headquarters of the JREF. James Randi is a well-known magician and escape artist, but he's probably best known as a debunker of all things paranormal.

The meeting's theme was "Skepticism and Activism". In contrast to earlier TAMs, which boasted such famous names as Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens, Michael Shermer, Penn & Teller and the Mythbusters, this TAM featured several presenters who are not so well known.

They are all regular folks who have their own "day jobs". What they also have in common is that they got mad about some thing or someone, and decided to take action. Among them, they've created websites and podcasts, written articles and flyers, hosted debates and addressed the media, all with the goal of raising awareness and educating people about various irrational beliefs, or warning them about outright scams.

The JREF is all about skepticism. While skepticism is closely related to humanism and atheism, they are not exactly the same. A skeptical world view promotes the active practice of questioning and challenging popular claims, wanting to see evidence and proof before believing. While humanists and atheists are certainly skeptical about religion, not all

skeptics are agnostics or atheists. Just as there are skeptics who happen to be religious, there are certainly also humanists and atheists who believe in astrology, ESP or homeopathy.

TAM 5.5 itself was interesting and inspiring. It was a reminder that we can always take action against irrational claims. It can be as simple as voting in a poll, writing a letter to the editor, or even directing a friend to a website that debunks the latest email scam.

And just in case you're interested, the next "deluxe" Amaz!ng Meeting is not too far away. TAM 6 is set for June 19 – 22, 2008 in Las Vegas. Once again, it boasts a terrific lineup of speakers and entertainers. Dr. Neil DeGrasse Tyson is the keynote speaker, while Christopher Hitchens, Michael Shermer and Richard Wiseman are among those returning. A few HAM members are planning on attending, so why don't you join us! Registration information for TAM 6 can be found at www.randi.org.

- Donna Harris



James Randi and Donna Harris



The TAM 5.5 panelists (l to r): Rebecca Watson, Mark Roberts, Brian Dunning, Michael Stackpole and Robert Lancaster

New Meeting Schedule for March 2008

While HAM's monthly meetings are always a pleasure, it is possible that they could be made even better.

Our current format has us order dinner first, then wait for our meals, and then have the presentation and questions afterwards. A suggestion has been made to switch the presentation and the meal – have the presentation before dinner. This will accomplish a couple of things: it will give the kitchen staff at the Viscount Gort more time to prepare our meals (especially when there are greater numbers of us), and it will give us the leisure to linger over our meals, to socialize and have further conversation about the evening's presentation.

We've decided to give this format a try at the March meeting, so the

schedule of events will be approximately as follows:

- Meet and Greet: 5:30 p.m.
- Order meals: 5:45 p.m. to 6:15 p.m.
- Meeting/
Discussion: From 6:15 p.m. until 7:00 p.m.
- Dinner: 7:00 p.m.

Since this is a trial offering of a new schedule, we're really hoping you'll let us know what you think. We're relying on your feedback, and your opinions are important to us. Feel free to contact any member of the Executive to give the change in schedule a thumbs up or a thumbs down.

Spiritual Care at the Health Sciences Centre

On February 13, representatives from HAM were invited to speak to a class of volunteers from the HSC's Spiritual Care department.

HAM has been in continuing contact with the Spiritual Care department at HSC. The department head, Patricia Frain, was the invited speaker at HAM's November 2006 meeting, while members of HAM have addressed at least two previous classes of HSC volunteers.

During the current course, representatives from different faith groups – as well as those with no

religious affiliation - were invited to address the class. Barrie Webster gave the students a short presentation on the basics of humanism, then Barrie and Donna Harris (yours truly!) answered questions from the students.

It was a really great experience, especially knowing that because of our presence, these individuals will be much better prepared to offer care and support to a wide range of individuals.

Thanks go to Susan Van Dreser and Karen Toole for the invitation.

"May hope flourish in this place."

- Guiding Principle of HSC's Spiritual Care department

“All religions are the same: religion is basically guilt, with different holidays.”

- Cathy Ladman

The American Atheists' 34th National Conference

Minneapolis, Minnesota

March 21 – 23, 2008

Minneapolis Marriott City Center Hotel

Information and registration at:
www.atheists.org/conference/

Humanism and a Healthy Society

HAM President Barrie Webster and Vice-President Barry Hammond are once again teaching a course about Humanism at the University of Winnipeg.

The course is called “**Humanism and a Healthy Society**”. It is one of the course offerings in the Community Programs – 55 Plus area, and runs for 12 weeks.

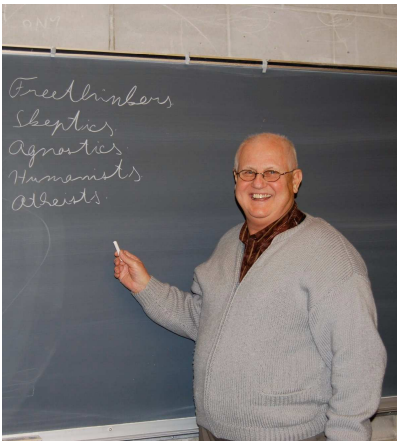
Some of the questions that the class is exploring include:

- How should Humanists interact effectively with people of religion?
- How does Humanism relate to science and its philosophy?

- Can secular Humanists have spiritual lives?

As part of a series of guest speakers in the class, HAM member Ivan Pokus was the featured guest at the January 30th class. He was there to provide insight into the humanist mindset, as a “living example”.

Ivan spoke eloquently about his journey from faith to disbelief, and used the definition of terms such as freethinker, skeptic, agnostic, humanist and atheist as a starting point for a very personal discussion of his experiences. It was good to see that the students were interested and engaged, and asked a number of thoughtful questions.



Ivan Pokus, HAM member

Hitler and Humanism – A Response

Letter to the Editor

HAM member Len Evans forwarded the following letter to us. It is an abbreviated version of the letter that he sent to Rabbi Pinsker

In his December 11th Winnipeg Free Press article entitled “Hitchens lays holiday egg” Rabbi Lawrence M. Pinsker criticizes Hitchens’ advocacy of humanism. He refers to the Nazi party in the mid-20th century as being “a prime example of a purely humanistic society...dedicated to the dream of a God-free world where human beings could conduct themselves without the restraints imposed by the tyrannical father-figure God of western monotheism”. The Rabbi goes on to state: “Surely Hitchens would hardly want Adolph Hitler to be the poster child for his vision of a world freed of God?”

The Rabbi is totally wrong in his assertion that Hitler and the Nazi Party rejected religion. Hitler always made it clear that he was a Roman Catholic. In 1941 Hitler told one of his generals “I am now as before a Catholic and will always remain so.”

The Nazis mixed government with religion and had the support of both Protestant and Catholic churches in Germany. In fact the anti-Semitism of the Nazi Party was fostered by the main churches. Historical records reveal the close ties between Hitler and the Vatican as well as the involvement of Nazis with Christian churches including religious ceremonies. Hitler’s soldiers wore belt buckles with the insignia “Gott Mit Uns” meaning “God With Us”. The Nazis got married in churches and had Christian crosses on the graves of their dead soldiers.

Rabbi Pinsker needs to do some historical research and he will learn that a “purely humanistic society” did not exist under the Nazis.

L.S. Evans

In his original letter to Rabbi Pinsker, Len also sent eight pages of photos to back up his assertions. However, so far, he has not received a reply from the good Rabbi.

“Hitler’s soldiers wore belt buckles with the insignia “Gott Mit Uns” meaning “God With Us.”

A RESPONSE TO DEADLY U.S. TORNADO OUTBREAK

The Centre for Inquiry has launched a fundraising drive through S.H.A.R.E. (the Secular Humanist Aid and Relief Effort) to raise funds to assist displaced families in Tennessee, Alabama, Arkansas, and Kentucky.

These areas were hard hit by tornados that struck in early February. There were at least 57 known dead, and one county alone estimated that

they had suffered at least \$47 million in property damage.

If you are interested in making a contribution, or just wish to find out more the address for SHARE is PO Box 664, Amherst, NY 14226.

All funds sent to SHARE are tax exempt in the United States.

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**

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MASH'S LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The members of MASH collaborated on the following letter, which was printed in the Winnipeg Free Press on February 20, 2008:

Re: Who's against prayer, Feb. 16

Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty is correct to wish to "move beyond" the opening of the Ontario legislature with a recitation of the Lord's Prayer. The act of official prayer in a provincial legislature is exclusionary to non-Christians and contrary to important Canadian values such as multiculturalism and secularism.

The support of one religion over another is a form of discrimination. The only way to have religious equality and freedom is to abstain from supporting any one religion over another at the government level. Our courts have interpreted Sec. 2(a) of the charter to imply freedom from religion and a separation of church and state – that separation is the only way to protect whatever religion our citizens choose to practice.

We find it disturbing that our legislators in Manitoba believe that "all power and wisdom" comes from an "Eternal and Almighty God." The vast majority of our knowledge and wisdom comes from observation, scientific inquiry and rational thought. As Manitoba is a democracy and not a theocracy, our representatives should understand that their power is supposed to come from the will of their constituents, not a supernatural being. The influence of religion on politics often leads to discriminatory policies in areas of our lives which the government has no reason to be involved in, as we have seen during the same-sex marriage debate.

Letter writer David Hagborg clearly does not have any understanding of the

beliefs of "humanist-atheists" or any other non-Christians.

Although there are some similarities between the Lord's Prayer and some Jewish prayers, to claim that it is "congruent" with Buddhism and Hinduism is laughable. The Lord's Prayer implies that there is only one all-providing God. Buddhism is a complicated set of philosophies influenced by the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, many of which do not advocate belief in any kind of supernatural being. Hinduism is similarly hard to generalize; Hindu beliefs span monotheism, polytheism, pantheism, monism, and atheism. The fundamental tenets of these religions are not reflected in the Lord's Prayer.

Atheists do not believe in any supernatural master, whether she lives in Heaven or Sheol. More importantly, we do not believe in condemning good deeds or encouraging evil. Humanists believe that we should strive to do good not because of the threat of damnation or a 2,000-year-old-book, but because we are all in this world together and should strive to make life better for all of us. That is a far better reason to be good than fear of punishment in the afterlife.

- Brian Latour

