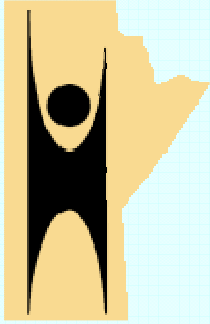


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Manitoba Humanist



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Editor & Librarian:
Donna L. Harris

ham_librarian@yahoo.ca

Humanist Association of Manitoba

Upcoming events

Monthly Meeting / Launch Party Saturday, June 13, 2009

Meet and Greet: 5:30 pm
Meeting / Presentation: 6:15 pm
Dinner (may be ordered from the Coffee Shop menu): 7:00 pm

Location: Mondragon Bookstore & Coffeehouse
91 Albert Street

Dinner: Order from Mondragon's menu (Vegan)

Guest Speaker: Jeff Olsson

Topic: Official Launch of Jeff's Book, "Leaving Faith Behind"

PLUS
Planetarium Outing (see page 3 for details)

Mark Your Calendars – It Should be Great!

Summer Party Friday, August 21, 2009

Degrees Diner
University of Manitoba

More Details in the August Newsletter

Dan Falk Talks Time

At our last meeting (May 9) the guest speaker was Toronto based science writer Dan Falk. He was in town to promote his second book "In Search of Time: Journeys Along a Curious Dimension". Mr. Falk has authored numerous articles and radio documentaries, mostly on topics in physics and astronomy, and is a recipient of several media awards.

The book (which I have not read) deals with the ways humans have tried to understand the notion of time. The idea that there are features of time that are extremely counterintuitive is a central theme.

He started with descriptions of some of the earliest known instances where humans demonstrate an interest in measurement of time intervals. There are several impressive ancient man-made structures in which a pair of small openings are aligned in such a way that a sunbeam passes through both openings only twice each year, typically at the sunrise or sunset of one of the equinoxes. Some of these structures -- Stonehenge being the most well known -- after suitable refurbishment in modern times to repair damages suffered over millennia, continue to track these biannual events. Such structures clearly demonstrate that some early civilizations were seriously engaged with the temporal patterns of celestial motions.

Mr. Falk went on to describe later advances in time measurement. He showed photos of ornate and sophisticated mechanical clocks prized by churches across Europe and used for determining the precise times for prayers and other daily events.

As the Renaissance gave way to the age of scientific discovery, the conventional and intuitive notion of time was not in dispute. Mr. Falk illustrated this by pointing to the Principia Mathematica, the major scientific work of Isaac Newton, which set out the

hugely important laws of motion and gravitational attraction. In the Principia, the nature of time and its reliably continuous flow, is described in a single paragraph. There was no reason for Newton or his readers to doubt time's straightforward arrow.

Over the next two centuries many astounding scientific discoveries were made -- the laws of electricity and magnetism (culminating in Maxwell's equations), the chemical composition of matter, laws governing chemical reactions, properties of the atomic elements, thermodynamics -- but still there was no pressure for a revision of the conventional notion of time.

Then, Einstein. From his notion of the constancy of the speed of light emerges relativity, in which both space and time undergo a dramatic change in status; they are shown to have a flexible and variable nature. A body can experience an unequal advance of time depending on the body's motion -- its accelerations and speed.

It is significant that that these reformulations are not mere tricks of perception. Numerous devious experiments have demonstrated agreement with the theory, and none have contradicted it. One of the best known demonstrations is the slight but predicted disagreement between the reading of a precise clock which has undergone an airplane trip in comparison to the reading of one that stayed home.

So if time is not something that always flows continuously onward, what is it? Well, we're not sure.

Mr. Falk briefly described some ideas proposed as bearers of order to the house of space-time and its relation to the universe. Cosmological theories on the table include the one that posits universal cycles of inflation and contraction -- the periodic birth and
(continued next page)



Dan Falk with HAM member Marlene Woligroski

Dan Falk Talks Time (Cont'd)

death of the universe. In another, our universe is just one node in a complex network of universes coming into and out of existence. In yet another, there is an infinity of simultaneous universes, each one including every possible event. (I think this one's called the multiverse theory, but that would also be a good name for the one just before).

And then there's the one in which time is an illusion: there is no true "now"... all that has ever happened, and all that ever will happen are somehow simultaneous. Strange enough?

Towards the end of the talk we heard a few remarks about time travel, which theory renders possible if impractical, and which leads to the paradox that if you go back in time and visit your grandfather to dissuade him, perhaps fatally, from participating in baby-

making activity, how is it that you ever came to be? Also strange.

Clearly, this was a talk which sought to whet one's appetite for further study and contemplation. Mr. Falk is an engaging speaker who enjoys helping his audience appreciate the "magic" in his stories. His desire to cover all the ground he had set out in advance did result in a rate of delivery that sometimes felt too high. The talk was supported by an attractive slide presentation -- neither textually overbearing nor distracting from attention from the speaker.

Several audience members purchased Mr. Falk's book at the event, and so one hopes that we can look forward to a review by one of our members.

- Neil Schipper

Field Trip to the Planetarium

Since we'll be out and about on June 13th, a couple of us thought we'd add a planetarium visit to our June meeting at Mondragon, especially since 2009 is the International Year of Astronomy. Those in the area are welcome to join us! Here's what's on at the planetarium that day:

2 pm Super Sky Show

Meet Queen Cassiopeia, tour the constellation zoo, and explore the Earth and Sun in this planetarium talk show

3 pm Manitoba Skies

A new live show celebrating 2009 as the [International Year of Astronomy](#). It highlights current sky events and features current constellations and planets; the planet Venus; the Orion nebula; northern lights.

4 pm To Worlds Beyond

From the sun-baked surface of Mercury to the icy curiosities of the dwarf planet Pluto, our solar system is home to worlds of remarkable variety and beauty. But, is our planetary system alone? Join us on a fascinating voyage of discovery to the mysterious worlds of outer space, and to the exciting world of the future where immense starships may venture outward..."to worlds beyond". ***Narrated by renowned actor Patrick Stewart.***

The adult price for each show is \$6.50. We're planning to be at all 3 shows, so come on down! The more the merrier. If you plan on attending, let us know at ham_librarian@yahoo.ca. If there's sufficient interest, we might be able to get a group rate, so let us know soon.

Getting to Know... Neil Schipper

This is part of a continuing series focusing on the members of HAM's executive. Neil Schipper joined HAM just a couple of years ago. This year he was elected to the post of Vice President.



What is your favourite color? *It depends on context. I can enjoy yellow, but if I'm in a snow-eating mood, that would be a colour I'd avoid. But I can name two colours I consistently like: dark orange-brown and milk blue. There's a province in Mexico whose pottery is painted with a combination of these, and I find the effect earthy and vibrant.*

If you had one word to describe yourself, what would you choose? *That "one word" tends to vary considerably day to day, even hour to hour. Call it a cop-out, but I'm going to go with this: nonuniwordablyselfdescribable.*

What is your middle name? *Elliott. I'm strangely proud of all those redundant consonants.*

Do you have a hero? If so, who and why. *In a way, everyone who routinely cooks with more than three ingredients, irons their shirts, and gets their tax forms filled on time is kind of a hero to me.*

More seriously, there are really far too many to name, even within categories

like political history, science and music -- so many astounding people have walked this planet. Still, I'll try to give you a taste.

American lawyer and civil libertarian Clarence Darrow was able to make his listeners laugh and cry, but in service of guiding them to rediscover their better instincts. I submit that if there were more like him, there would be much less cynicism about the legal profession.

Singer and guitarist Robert Cray makes music that's highly unlikely: it's respectful of traditions while at the same time reaching for a fresh and authentically personal direction, and, it doesn't pander to fashion and short attention spans.

Ultimately, however, it's in times of great stress -- most notably, in war -- where the dazzling greatness of a very small proportion of people is revealed. In the context of World War II, people like Raoul Wallenberg, Oskar Schindler come to mind. Another name, and one I never heard until just a few years ago, is Georg Elser; if you're unfamiliar with his story, I urge you to look him up. Surely there are thousands more, from many times and places, people who would have been considered ordinary until events unfolded in such a way as to draw this greatness out. A central question of the human condition: what are the "ingredients" of such people?

Do you have a favourite meal or dessert? *My mother made a spaghetti sauce so flavourful that I almost never order spaghetti in a restaurant since it always tastes like something that ought to go by a different name, perhaps "economy tomato sauce and noodles".*

I'm fond of a variety of foods -- Chinese, Thai, and Indian among others -- and Winnipeg is great for finding places that
(continued next page)

Getting to Know Neil Schipper (Cont'd)

prepare them (the Viscount Gort not being an example). I also have chocaholic tendencies.

Were you named after someone?

My hebrew name Nathan is after my paternal grandfather who passed away long before I was born.

Who is your favourite author and/or book?

No one favourite, but some memorable ones are: Darrow for the Defense by Stone, A Fine Balance by Mistry, several by Kingsley Amis and Graham Greene, and Dawkins' The Ancestor's Tale.

Pets. Do you have any? If so, what kind?

While I had great affection for a dog, a few guinea pigs and a turtle as a child, I don't presently have pets. However, from time to time, crawling or flying things will make an appearance in my apartment. I greet them, "Hello, cousin!", and sometimes I trap them and release them outdoors, and sometimes I just squish them.

If you could travel to anywhere in the world, where would it be?

One place? Well, some of my other answers have been kind of long, so as a gift to our cherished newsletter editor Donna, I'll skip this one.

What is one thing that really irritates you?

Black or white thinking, by which I mean the tendency to treat statements about the real world as having a truth probability of either 0 or 1. This is not to say I'm never guilty of it.

Are you a morning person or a night owl?

Finally, a very easy question. Stepping outside at the crack of dawn can provide a very pleasant feeling of serenity, but experiencing it two or three times a year is plenty for me: the night time is the right time.

What's the last thing you bought yourself, just for fun.

Honestly, I find shopping generally unpleasant, so I'm having a hard time with this one. Last fall, I went to the Liquor Commission in Madison Square (near Polo Park), which I'd never been to. I noticed a large open area with spigots on the walls and some large sinks. It reminded me of a kind of lab. I was surprised to learn that it was set up for customers to bottle wine that MLCC offers in bulk. I bought a case of a few varieties of red. The quality was good, if not stunning, and for several months I had no worries about what to bring when invited to the homes of friends and family.

Do you like to dress up for Halloween? If so, what was your most memorable costume?

These days that urge is satisfied vicariously through my sweet fun-loving daughter. I'm much more about dressing down.

I do have a most memorable costume, but it wasn't for Halloween. As a teenager, I acted in the musical Pippi Longstocking. Myself and another fellow played the horse. We had a great horse costume, and had much fun learning to coordinate our steps to make the horse trot and dance. The specific role I played? It's a fair question, but, uh, I'm done.

"If the Bible has taught us nothing else, and it hasn't, it's that girls should stick to GIRLS sports, such as hot oil wrestling, foxy boxing, and such and such."

- Homer Simpson

Upcoming Events

National Aboriginal Day Events and Celebrations

Time2Celebrate

June 21, 2009
Indian & Metis Friendship Centre
45 Robinson Street 10:00 am – 3:00 pm

The Forks

June 20 through June 21
8:00 pm (telecast live on APTN)

The Aboriginal Express Featuring Ray St. Germain

McPhillips Street Station
June 21, 2009, 8:00 pm
Free Show

PUBLISHING BREAK

There will be no July newsletter. We'll be back in August, full of energy and renewed from our summer vacation. Your Editor and Webmaster will be travelling to the very best skeptic's conference – TAM 7 in Las Vegas in July, so we'll be sure to let you know all the goings on when we return.

Cheers. Happy Summer Solstice!

- Donna Harris

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Yes, I would like to BECOME A MEMBER of the Humanist Association of Manitoba

New Member Renewal

Membership Category:

- Individual Membership \$25.00
- Individual Limited Income \$10.00
- Household Membership* \$45.00
- Household Limited Income \$15.00

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Province: _____

Postal Code _____

Telephone#: _____ Cell #: _____

Email address: _____

*Household Memberships: Please give the names of all additional Humanists in your household 18 years or over:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

DONATION (Tax receipts issued for all donations of \$10 or more)

I would like to make a donation to HAM of:

- \$10 \$20 \$30 \$50 \$100
- Other: _____

PAYMENT: Cheque Money Order
 Visa Mastercard Amex

Please complete the following if paying by credit card:

Account No. _____

Expiry Date: ____/____

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Signature: _____

Please make cheque or money order payable to: **Humanist Association of Manitoba** and mail to: *Humanist Association of Manitoba, 7 Pinehurst Lane, Mitchell, MB, R5G 2J3.*

Or bring your form and the fees to any HAM meeting and give it to Helen Friesen, or any member of the executive.