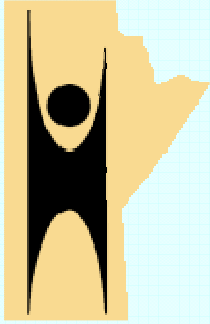


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Humanist Association of Manitoba

Upcoming events

Monthly Meeting
Saturday, October 10, 2009
Park West Inn
525 Dale Boulevard • Charleswood



Meet and Greet: 5:30 pm
Meeting / Film: 6:15 pm
Dinner (may be ordered from the Dining Room menu): 7:15 pm

Film: Break The Science Barrier
Hosted by Richard Dawkins

SCIENCE is useful but that is not all it is. Science can be uplifting, thrilling, life-enhancing. Originally broadcast on Britain's Channel 4 in 1996, Break the Science Barrier follows the Oxford Biologist Richard Dawkins as he meets with people who have experienced the wonders of science first-hand. We meet the astronomer who first discovered pulsars, the geneticist who invented DNA fingerprinting, a scientist who discovered a protein that causes cancer, and others. Dawkins interviews famous admirers of science such as Douglas Adams and David Attenborough, and asks them why science means so much to them. We also see how dangerous ignorance of science can be in classrooms, courts, and beyond.

Monthly Meeting
Saturday, November 14, 2009
Park West Inn
525 Dale Boulevard • Charleswood

Winter Solstice Party
Saturday, December 21, 2009
Degrees Diner
3rd Floor, University Centre

EARTH – A Report on the Health of the Biosphere

HAM's Fall/Winter season of meetings got off to a lively start with our September meeting. Dr. Hank Venema, a Director with the International Institute for Sustainable Development, addressed an attentive group of HAM members and newer visitors. I believe that Dr. Venema was intending to speak for around 25 minutes. He was still there 2 hours later.

Much of the information he presented can also be found in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Findings. The can be found on the web at millenniumassessment.org. While many numbers and charts were discussed and shown, the summary is basically as follows.

In general, while food production has increased, most other sectors of note have decreased or been negatively impacted.

The discussion was wide-ranging. We covered topics such as habitat loss, deforestation, genetically modified crops, the state of resources such as clean water and air, the rate of species extinction, etc.

Many of these issues, unfortunately, don't have easy answers. For example, here in Manitoba Lake Winnipeg is suffering from large blooms of blue-green algae, largely due to increased levels of nitrogen and phosphorus that find their way into the lake. But the Lake Winnipeg watershed is vast, involving several neighbouring provinces and states, and the source cannot be blamed on one sector, such as farming. As well, even the experts don't agree on a specific course of action.

The one area that I did notice that was not discussed, in fact, was world population.

It just recently came to my attention that the global human population is now at 6.8 billion. It certainly seems like only yesterday that the newspapers were announcing that the world was close to reaching 6 billion people. Now, we're approaching 7 billion.

For the record, estimates record the date we reached 6 billion as 12-Oct-1999, which is only 10 years ago. At current rates, we'll reach 7 billion sometime in 2012, and 8 billion by around 2025.

We'd like to extend our thanks to Dr. Venema for an interesting and thought-provoking presentation.

- Donna Harris



Dr. Henry "Hank" Venema

Red River Road Trip – The Summary

On September 24th, four of us journeyed to Fargo, North Dakota to watch Julia Sweeney's movie "Letting Go of God", listen to a lecture by biologist/atheist PZ Myers, and meet members of the Red River Freethinkers. Oh, and we also may have visited a mall or two. Believe me, a good time was had by all!

In her one-woman show, Julia Sweeney recounts her somewhat difficult journey from a devout Catholic to an agnostic/atheist. As part of the show, she recounted several of the stories and quotations that I, too, have questioned about the Bible. (Seriously, Lot protects his two "angelic" visitors and refuses to throw them to the angry mob, but instead, he's willing to turn over his own virginal daughters? Yikes!)

I think this is an important movie to watch for believers who may be questioning their faith, because Sweeney certainly doesn't come across as one of those "evil atheists", all superior and smug and knowing-it-all. She was a good Catholic, who gradually starts to question ideas that she finds in her religion and in the bible, and really wants to explain them away, but just cannot.

She agonizes over her transformation, yet the show itself is packed with Julia's brand of humour.

The evening's venue – the Fargo Theatre – was exciting, because it was packed! The theatre seats around 120, and it was standing room only. We almost didn't get a seat for the movie, until I played the

"distance" card and openly whined "but we drove all the way from Winnipeg!"

After the movie, PZ Myers spoke briefly. His talk was based on the premise that our "monkey brains" are behind the development of our earlier ancestors' urge to generate a reason for events we didn't understand (hence, the development of gods). He then went on to encourage all of us to tell our stories, to improve the job that we do in reminding others that we're people, with hopes and emotions and faults, just like everyone else.

I'm assuming the event's popularity was due to a combination of PZ Myers fans (and the attendees there because they'd seen him speak at the university the day before, and those who heard of it on his blog, Pharyngula), Red River Freethinker members and friends, non-believers who saw the event advertised locally, and those who simply heard the words "movie" and "free".

Any way, it was a success for the Red River Freethinkers. We had an opportunity to meet a few members of their executive after the talk, and they were as nice a group of people as you would imagine.

Of course, they've now set the bar for a free public "freethinkers" evening. We'll have our work cut out for us should be decide to host a similar type of event.

- Donna H

Film about Charles Darwin Too “Hot” for the U.S.

For those of you fellow movie lovers, there's a new movie just being released on the life of Charles Darwin. The film is titled "Creation". It was chosen to open the Toronto International Film Festival, and it's already received some very positive feedback and reviews.

The movie stars Paul Bettany as Darwin, and Jennifer Connelly as his religious wife Emma. It's a United Kingdom production. While there's no official release date in Canada yet, be sure that we'll be planning another field trip for this movie!

Here is the movie's synopsis from it's official website (creationthemovie.com):

CREATION is the powerful and true-life tale of Charles Darwin and the most explosive idea in history. A world-renowned scientist, and a dedicated family man struggling to accept his daughter's death, Darwin is torn between his love for his deeply religious wife and his own growing belief in a world where God has no place. He finds himself caught in a battle between faith and reason, love and truth. This is the extraordinary story of Charles Darwin and how his master-work "The Origin of Species" came to light. It tells of a global revolution played out in the confines of a small English village; a passionate marriage torn apart by the most provocative idea in history – evolution; and a theory saved from extinction by the logic of a child.

What I really find quite remarkable (especially considering the story on NOVA and PBS on page 6), is that,

while this movie is going to be seen in almost every other market, it has not been able to secure a distributor in the United States! According to the movie's producer, the theory of evolution is too controversial for 'religious America'.

In a way it's not surprising that film distributors don't want to take a chance on a movie that deals with evolution – since, according to a recent Gallup poll, only 39% of Americans believe in it. But it's certainly a discouraging statement on the condition of both belief and education south of the border.

- Donna H

"It is unbelievable to us that this is still a really hot potato in America. There's still a great belief that He made the world in six days. It's quite difficult for we in the UK to imagine religion in America. We live in a country which is no longer so religious. But in the US, outside of New York and LA, religion rules."

- Jeremy Thomas,
producer of
Creation

HAM Member Heads To the Far East



Marlene

One day this summer, we received an email from one of our Executive members that basically read: I'm in Taiwan for the foreseeable future.

Wow! I had to follow up with Marlene Woligroski and get a bit more information. Following is Marlene's account of her eventful summer.

I've always had a passion for astronomy. I've dreamed of seeing the July 22nd 2009 total solar eclipse, for the past few years. The eclipse was visible along a narrow path that snaked over Asia and the Pacific Ocean.

I found a cheap ticket to Shanghai and arrived there 2 days before the eclipse. I viewed the eclipse with a bunch of Australians on the coast south of Shanghai.

I was in no rush to head back to Canada, so I decided to send out some resumes and look for employment in Asia.

I wandered around Shanghai and the surrounding towns for a couple weeks and then headed over to Beijing, where I did some more sightseeing and hiked the Great Wall of China.

I decided to travel to Taiwan in mid-August to accept a job here as a science teacher. I teach at a beautiful private school a few km from a small town in central Taiwan. There are courtyards, orchards of tropical fruit, palm trees everywhere, and even a small zoo behind the school with parrots and monkeys and snakes.

I'm living near the interior mountains, where there are incredible bamboo forests and exotic jungles and hotsprings.

I bought myself a mountain bike and I have a small apartment, everything I need. My balcony overlooks an orchard of oranges and bananas. I have great co-workers, some of them are from Canada or the USA.

I'll probably stay here the entire winter. The weather here is hot and humid. I'm looking forward to December when the temperatures drop down to 25!

We certainly wish Marlene all the best during her stay! Good luck and take care. We'll certainly be thinking of you, especially when the snow falls and the temperature hits minus 30.



In the city of Taichung in central Taiwan (Stock Photo)



Taiwan is separated from the mainland by the Taiwan Strait

PBS and NOVA Spotlight Charles Darwin this Fall

This fall, NOVA is celebrating the 200th anniversary year of Darwin's birth and the 150th anniversary of the publication of his famous book the Origin of Species with three evolution-themed programs.

Each film will approach the topic of evolution in a different way. To kick off NOVA's fall season on **October 6**, Henry Ian Cusick (Lost) and Frances O'Connor (Mansfield Park) star in **Darwin's Darkest Hour**, a two-hour scripted drama that presents the remarkable story behind the birth of Darwin's radically controversial theory of evolution and reveals his deeply personal crisis: whether to publish his earthshaking ideas, or to keep quiet to avoid potential backlash from the Church.

On **November 3, 10 and 17**, NOVA premieres **Becoming Human**, a three-part special on human evolution. The series combines interviews with world-renowned anthropologists and paleoanthropologists and the most recent, groundbreaking discoveries with vivid images of our earliest ancestors to present a comprehensive picture of our human past.

Then, on **December 29**, **What Darwin Never Knew** reveals answers to evolutionary questions that even Darwin couldn't explain. Scientists are beginning to expose nature's biggest secrets on the genetic level, with the hope of one day answering the crucial question: How does evolution *really* work?

Executive:
 Jeff Olsson
 Neil Schipper
 Helen Friesen
 Heather McDonell

Members at Large:
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 Barry Hammond
 Donna Harris
 Katie Higham
 Jake Peters
 Grant Rogerson
 Sophie Shulman
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New Member Renewal

Membership Category:

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

Name: _____

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

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

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I would like to make a donation to HAM of:

- \$10 \$20 \$30 \$50 \$100
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PAYMENT: Cheque Money Order
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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.