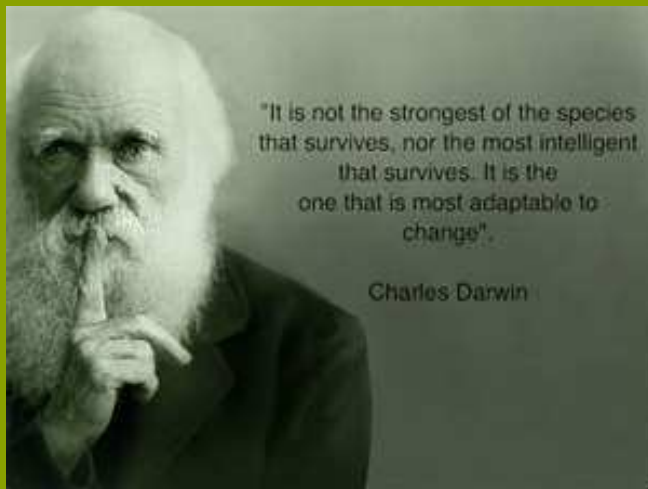


Manitoba Humanist



Happy Darwin Day!

Published by and for the Humanist Association of Manitoba

"We are beyond belief"



www.mb.humanists.ca

HAPPY BIRTHDAY CHARLES & DARWIN!

Darwin Day, which is celebrated on February 12th, is when people all around the world honor the life and works of Charles Darwin.

We all know that Darwin's "Dangerous Idea" was the theory of evolution by means of natural selection. If Darwin were here today, he'd probably be completely overwhelmed by all that we've learned since he published *On the Origin of Species* back in 1859.

Yet, Darwin may still have a contribution to make to science.

Just a couple of weeks ago, Dr. Howard Falcon-Lang at the University of London stumbled upon glass slides containing fossils in an old wooden cabinet. When the

Doctor checked closer, the specimen he had picked up was labeled "C Darwin Esq." What he had found was a collection of 314 slides of specimens collected by both Darwin and others in his circle.

There may still be something significant in this collection of fossils, which have been lost for 165 years.

In the meantime, though, we are ready to celebrate this annual event in HAM style. Our February meeting will include a celebration of Darwin's accomplishments, complete with cake.

We will also be having an extremely interesting Open Forum. We'll have an opportunity for discussion on a number of topics, everything

UPCOMING EVENTS

All of our upcoming events can be found on page 5 of this newsletter.



Join us for cake at our meeting on February 11th!

from meeting ideas to the very name of the group itself.

So be sure to join us on Saturday, February 11th, 5:30 pm at the Canad Inn Polo Park.

And if you're wondering about the title of this piece, at our first Darwin Day celebration, when I opened the box, the cake that I had ordered said on it "Happy Birthday Charles & Darwin".

Let's spread the word about Darwin and his influence on our modern world.

- Donna Harris



C. Darwin, Esq.

AGM ELECTION ROUND-UP

This year's Annual General Meeting was a cozy affair, with only a few non-executive members in attendance for the business portion of the day.

As a consequence, the elections were fairly uneventful. All of the Executive who were willing to remain on board have kept their posts, with just a couple of changes.

Allison Nelson is now Secretary, and Heather McDonell is now a member at large. Helen Friesen remains Treasurer (yay – Helen is our treasure). Myrna Donald has stepped down, hopefully only temporarily, due to personal reasons. Instead, we have elected Pat Morrow as our only new addition to the group. (Welcome Pat!)

Greg Christensen has also accepted our

invitation to take on the duties of Communication Coordinator. Greg will ensure that all of our event notices and such reach the intended audience in a timely manner.

WE'RE ON MEETUP

HAM is getting with the times. We now have a Meetup page on Meetup.com. If you're on the web, head over to Meetup and join our group. We're at www.meetup.com/the-humanist-association-of-manitoba/. Or just search for atheism or secular humanism in Manitoba.

Why is this important, you ask?

First, Meetup is another way for like-minded people to find our group. Hopefully, being on there will generate more local interest and help our group expand.

The other great advantage with Meetup will be keeping track of meetings. We can post all our meetings on the website, members can RSVP to meetings, attendees will get email reminders before the event, and then an opportunity to rate the meeting afterward.

We can have members suggest different types of meetups, so if you'd like to start a book club or have a movie night, you can let us know. There's also room for photos, news and a message board. So head on over there and sign up today!

NEW LOCAL PODCAST

The Winnipeg Skeptics and members of HAM have joined up to create a new weekly, hour-long podcast, called "Life, The Universe and Everything Else".

The podcast can be downloaded from Itunes, or you can also check it out at <http://lueepodcast.wordpress.com/>

NEW SECULAR CELEBRANT

We have recently been contacted by a local secular officiant.

Jeannette Brigit was previously a clergyperson with the United Church of Canada. Last year, she left the church and decided to develop her own business of offering non-religious wedding or commitment ceremonies and funeral services.

The company is called Turning Points: Ceremonies Celebrating Life and she can be reached at 204-898-5227 or jcb Brigit (at) mymts.net.

JANUARY MEETING SUMMARY

Our January meeting was entertaining and educational thanks, largely, to August Berkshire's excellent presentation on "Morality with and without God".

August used a combination of reasons to illustrate his point that morality based on rational thinking, without a belief in a creator, is actually superior to, and more mature than, unquestioning obedience to doctrine.

According to Lawrence Kohlberg's six stages of moral development, the lowest level of reasoning, as a basis for ethical behavior, involves the avoidance of punishment, as well as self-interest (What's in it for me?). The higher levels involve social contracts which could be changed when necessary to ensure the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

The highest level involve abstract reasoning and universal ethical principles, which involves the recognition that laws are only valid insofar as they're grounded in justice, and one can recognize that a commitment to justice carries with it an obligation to disobey unjust laws.

August then solidified his argument with expanding his reasoning to non-human animals. Research has now shown evidence of morality

and altruism in animals, as well as the presence of mirror neurons, which enable a creature to "feel" what is happening to another living being. There's no real difference in kind between us and animals, just a matter of degree.

Here are a couple of examples:

- A rat in a cage refused to push a lever for food when it saw that another rat received an electric shock as a result.
- A female monkey, who couldn't figure out how to put a token in a slot to get food, was helped by a male monkey, who put the token in the slot for her and let her eat the food rather than eating it himself.
- A group of chimpanzees in a zoo punished a chimp who arrived late for dinner because the rules were that no one eats until everyone is present.

There are lots of excellent books on the topic. You can always ask our librarian, Diana Goods, for some titles.

- DH

HEY PARENTS AND FUTURE PARENTS

Raising children without the influence of god belief or organized religion often presents unique challenges. There may be pressure from spouses and other relatives about incorporating religious practice into the child's life, or insistence on their participation in certain religious rituals. There is the fear of judgment and isolation from neighbours and friends who are fearful of having their families exposed to a family that does not believe in a god. And many families may feel adrift from their former religious communities, or perhaps are struggling with finding the proper place in their community in which they were raised.

It is with this in mind that I believe the Atheist and Secular Humanist community can benefit from an organization whose goal is to serve the

specific needs of parents and families within this community.

Firstly, we can serve as a support for parents and families who are struggling with raising children as free thinkers in a religious world. Second, as a group we can better advocate for the rights of atheists and nonreligious persons with respect to freedom from prayer and specific religious education. Third, we can serve as a social group for freethinking parents and children to meet and have fun without the fear of judgment from non-understanding peers. Last, we can use this community as a focal point for participation in acts of charity and community service, demonstrating our ability and desire to do good without God.

We have recently had our inaugural parents' meetup, and will be having our next meeting in March (date TBA). If you are interested in being involved, feel free to check out our Facebook page (Secular Humanist Families of Winnipeg), and look for upcoming events on the Winnipeg Skeptics Meetup Page <http://www.meetup.com/WinnipegSkeptics/> or the Humanist Association of Manitoba webpage. Alternatively, feel free to send me an email at [targowni \(at\) cc.umanitoba.ca](mailto:targowni@cc.umanitoba.ca) to be kept up to date to our goings on. Whether you're a parent now, or hope to be in the future, I hope that you'll be involved!

- Laura Targownik
Secular Humanist Families of Winnipeg

JESUS THE UNIMPRESSIVE

As atheists, we often find ourselves criticizing God and his actions as portrayed in the bible. Old Testament God is an easy target and we can come up with many reasons why we find this character not worthy of worship. It's almost too easy, as the Old Testament is filled with his despicable actions as he gallivants along, ordering genocide, condoning slavery and getting disproportionately angry when his chosen people neglect to tell him how great he is. He's just not an easy character to defend,

and I think even most Christians realize this. But then they have their fallback position as they try to distract and deflect with their new and improved version, Jesus.

Boy, do they love Jesus! Don't you know, he died for you?! And so on... he healed the sick, he raised the dead, he turned water into wine and he taught the golden rule. And hey, don't forget the Sermon on the Mount, (Best. Speech. Ever.)

At this point, I think we tend to back off, conceding that yes, Jesus was a pretty good guy. Truthfully, I think most of us would be happy if all we had to contend with were followers of Jesus, who left all of the bad Old Testament stuff behind. But I've recently been reconsidering this position.

Why do we give Jesus such a pass? I started looking around to find out, not what would Jesus do, but what did Jesus do? Is it possible that in actual fact, he doesn't live up to his own reputation? Take the Sermon on the Mount. Sure it's got some good advice, I mean who would argue with judge not, lest you be judged or do unto others as you would have them do unto you. But it also has some bad advice and some really weird advice, like take no thought for tomorrow, or don't resist evil. The sermon also seems to have a very narrow focus on why we should act morally, pretty much just relying on the carrot and stick approach. The only reason to do good, according to Jesus, is so you receive your heavenly reward.

I'm not discounting the fact that perhaps some of his ideas were radical for the time or that many take his overall message to be one of peace and love. I'm sure it sounded good to all those attending the Jesus rally on the mountain, but on closer inspection, it hardly stands up as timeless wisdom.

There's no doubt that Jesus could talk the talk. (confusing parables notwithstanding) But did he walk the walk? Again, I took a look around the New Testament. We're all familiar with his well known miracles: walking on water, healing the sick, feeding the thousands. But really, what's the big deal? I mean, he was the Son of God

and/or God, the all powerful. If he did these things, well, colour me unimpressed. I mean how hard was this, given his magical powers? It would have required no more effort than the blink of an eye. Less actually. I mean we're talking about someone that spoke an entire world into creation. It seems to me that Jesus was pretty good at giving an answer, but kind of fell short on showing his work. I might find the whole thing more believable if there were any concrete examples of him doing good that didn't involve smoke and mirrors. Why aren't there any examples of this so-called carpenter helping anyone build a house?

It's a bit of a puzzle to me that so many believers think they're following in Jesus' footsteps when they do good works, help the poor or care for the sick. This requires them to give their time, money, and sometimes risk their own health and then they go and give the credit to Jesus. Maybe they think that without the inspired teaching of Jesus, they would have no reason to do good. But it seems to me that too many people are selling themselves short.

When I look around at all that people do, every little act of kindness or great act of courage, I'm more inspired by the real heroes who work to make this world better for each other. Blessed are the peacemakers, but let's also give credit to the cheesemakers and all the others whose efforts make this world a better place.

- Diana Goods

SIGN OF THE TIMES:



UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, February 11, 2012

Regular Meeting

Location: Canad Inn Polo Park, 1405 St. Matthews Avenue

Time: 5:30 p.m.

Speaker/Topic: Charles Darwin's Birthday Party and Open Forum (Hot Topics!)

Saturday, March 10, 2012

Regular Meeting

Location: Canad Inn Polo Park, 1405 St. Matthews Avenue

Speaker/Topic: TBA

Saturday, April 21, 2012

Regular Meeting

Location: Canad Inn Polo Park, 1405 St. Matthews Avenue

Speaker/Topic: TBA

Saturday, May 12, 2012

Regular Meeting

Location: Canad Inn Polo Park, 1405 St. Matthews Avenue

Speaker/Topic: (tentative) Chris Tait, lawyer. School prayer in Manitoba schools

Executive:

Jeff Olsson, President
Donna Harris, Vice President
Helen Friesen, Treasurer
Allison Nelson, Secretary

Members at Large:

Greg Christensen
Diana Goods
Barry Hammond
Heather McDonell
Pat Morrow
Jake Peters
Grant Rogerson
Sophie Shulman

Newsletter Editor:

Donna Harris
ham_librarian@yahoo.ca
or ham_news@yahoo.ca

We're on the Web!

See us at:

mb.humanists.ca



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

New Member Renewal

Membership Category:

- Individual Membership \$30.00
- Individual Limited Income \$10.00
- Household Membership* \$50.00
- Household Limited Income \$15.00

* After July 1st, just pay ½ the yearly fee for the rest of the year. After October 31st, pay full fee and get the entire next year.

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. _____

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: ____/____

Name on Card: _____

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.