HUMANISTS OF MINNESOTA
HUMANIST NEWS & VIEWS

Volume 31 Issue 67 July 2017

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No Chapter Meetings during the Summer

Join us at the Free-thought Picnics

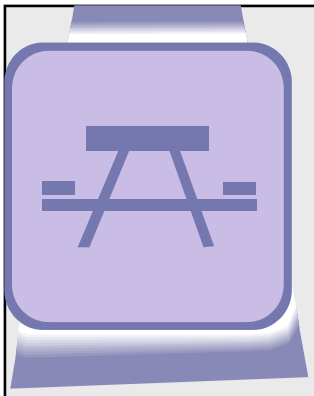
June 11
July 16
August 13

Noon to 3:00 p.m.

Columbia Park

HUMANISM:

A better life for all through education, democracy, free speech, reason, and science, without reliance on arbitrary dogmas, revelations, and faith.



This summer, join us at the Freethought Picnics! (2 left!) Sunday, July 16 Sunday, August 13

Lots of friendly people.
A play area for the kids.
Lively discussions for the adults.
Bring games, instruments, etc.

These are potluck picnics so bring some picnic food to share. The shelter area has electricity and a sink. (Don't forget to bring your own beverage, plate and utensils.)

The July Picnic is Sponsored by Humanists of Minnesota humanistsofmn.org. Noon to 3:00 p.m.

COLUMBIA PARK is located in northeast Minneapolis.

- ► Take Central Ave NE (MN Hwy. 65) to Columbia Pkwy. (Between 36th Ave. and 37th Ave.)
- ► Turn west onto Columbia Pkwy.
- ► Proceed along Columbia Pkwy. (0.35 miles).
- ► After you go under the railroad bridge, you will see the park on your left.
- ► Take the first left onto the service road (you will see a sign for "800 Columbia Blvd."). Proceed to the second parking lot on your left (0.2 miles). (You should see us by the shelter on the hill!)

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

I am having difficulty envisioning how we move forward as a society after the contentious acquittal of Officer Yanez for the Philando Castile shooting. No matter what one thinks of the verdict, there was never going to be a good end to that ill-fated encounter last summer. Yet there was a temporary suspension of judgment and short-lived respite from outrage while a police officer was brought to trial. And a modicum of satisfaction in the broader community that our system of justice played out as it was designed to do. But that is no consolation to the family and friends of Castile or the many other black and brown Americans who face prejudice, bias and fear as a regular part of their lives. And it is little consolation to humanists who long for a more just world where a Black life matters as much as anyone else's life.

Humanists understand that we live in an arbitrary and flawed world. There is no cosmic scale of justice embedded in the structure of the universe. The only form of justice that exists is the one we ourselves construct. While our sense of fairness is driven by our own subjective experiences and collective history, as a species we have tried to objectively codify some guidelines with varying degrees of success down through the centuries. Admittedly, all attempts at establishing "justice" have been far from perfect—both in design or implementation.

Currently our criminal justice system is primarily based on notions of punishment, retribution and the dubious hypothesis of deterrence. While the goal of rehabilitation has had some influence in recent times, retribution remains the central focus of our justice system. But in any case, our justice system remains unsatisfying because it can't right wrongs committed or alter mistakes made. It can't change circumstances or transform people. It can't heal broken relationships or rebuild trust.

Given our historical legacy of the enslavement and discrimination of African Americans and the near annihilation and subjugation of Native Americans, our system of justice has remained inadequate to the task of building a just and egalitarian society. The imbalance of power in social relations, the obstinacy of racism, and disagreement over what even constitutes an offense against the state, all complicate our criminal justice system. How do we move forward then in times like these?

The concept of "justice" itself seems elusive—especially in a police shooting of an innocent man. So many people are unsatisfied by the outcome of the Yanez trial because given the harm done to Philando Castile and his family, justice seems not to have been fairly or proportionally rendered. What do we want to happen in such tragic circumstances? What kind of outcome are we looking for? As legal scholar Mike Materni and others have suggested, we might look to the notion of "injustice"—wrongs suffered, losses incurred and suffering endured—as a better reference point from which to formulate our aspirations.* Justice is not best construed as some idealized state but as a process by which reparation, restitution and compensation for wrongs committed and harm done are undertaken by the relevant parties. That is very different from simply exacting punishment or retribution.

One of the many takeaways from the Yanez-Castile tragedy is the need to rethink our conception of justice. And the need to augment our criminal justice system with the practice of restorative justice—an approach that focuses on the harm done to victims. Small and sporadic efforts have been undertaken in recent years but these are not enough. Our entire system needs to embrace the work of reparations for persistent maltreatments, healing of damaged relationships, bridging differences and building trust—not just in civil cases, but in criminal cases and especially those that involve our law enforcement personnel. Of course, that's a tall order for our society, but it's time we acknowledge the inadequacies of our current legal system to establish a more just society. We've got to do better. Ω

*Mike C. Materni, *Criminal Punishment and the Pursuit of Justice,* 2 BR. J. AM. LEG. STUDIES (2013)

http://hls.harvard.edu/content/uploads/2011/09/michele-materni-criminal-punishment.pdf

News Alert!

Chapter Meeting Time to Change to 3:00 p.m.!

By Audrey Kingstrom

Our monthly chapter meetings are being moved to 3:00 p.m. beginning this September (and for the coming program year). We will continue holding chapter meetings on the third Saturday of each month -- but in the afternoons instead. As many of you know the Board took a survey of the membership in early May and got additional feedback at our annual meeting. There was no clear consensus—about one third of respondents liked the proposed change, about a third preferred to stay with the morning time, and about a third really didn't care. The Board weighed all the feedback and considerations and made the decision at our June Board meeting.

We did not make this decision lightly. We know that changing a "tradition" within an organization can be difficult. Some people will not be happy with this change, but it is our hope that everyone will be open to trying the new time and consider the possible benefits for themselves, for others, and for our organizational outreach.

In recent years we have successfully undertaken other Saturday afternoon programming—the TED salon, D-cubed, critical thinking sessions and more. People are often interested in getting together after those events to further socialize over a meal. In this vein, we hope to establish some new traditions with an afternoon chapter meeting. After our formal program is over around 5:00 p.m., we intend to offer a casual social time with light snacks and drinks. Then people can make plans with fellow humanists to go out for dinner together, take in a movie or other cultural event—in small groups or large. Of course, those who have personal commitments for the evening can be on their way as early as 5:00 p.m. if need be.

Creating a deeper sense of community within our organization was one of the main considerations driving this decision. Our chapter meetings are more than educational meetings. We gather to connect with like-minded people to deepen our friendships and develop supportive relationships. And we want to enjoy ourselves and have fun together. Our chapter "meetings" are when we gather to learn together, get inspired together, and have fun socializing together. We hope many members and seekers will enjoy taking in an afternoon program and social time after completing their Saturday obligations and even extend their socializing into the evening with fellow humanists. Ω

Humanist Community:

Caring Connection Corner

In our May newsletter, Paul Heffron discussed prisons and our criminal justice system and referred to four of our members who are incarcerated in state facilities. Here is a profile of the second of these.

Steve Wilson

Steve has been a member of HofMN for quite a while and appreciates corresponding with fellow humanists and atheists. I have exchanged letters with him since 2014. He is serving a long sentence in a Wisconsin prison. He reads a wide range of literature, enjoys the outdoors, is a runner, and participates in sports. He has about four years left on his sentence. He works with computers in the prison and hopes that will help him get work when he's released.

His address is:

Steve Wilson 267819
Oshkosh Correctional Institution
PO Box 3310
Oshkosh, WI 54903-3310
(No need to include the prison name but you must include his prisoner number right after his name.) Ω

Announcements

DISCUSSION GROUPS ETC.

2nd Friday, 5:00 p.m., *Humanist Happy Hour St. Paul,* Green Mill Restaurant & Bar, 57 Hamline Ave S.
4th Friday, 5:00 p.m., *Humanist Happy Hour Minneapolis,* Pizza Luce, 800 W. 66th St., Richfield
2nd Friday, 10:00 a.m., *Coffee and Current Events,* Loring Park Dunn Bros., 329 W. 15th St., Mpls.
2nd Saturday, 10:30 a.m., *Blasphemers' Brunch***,** Pizza Luce, 800 W 66th Street, Richfield
2nd Sunday, 11:00 a.m., *Sunday Assembly.* 514 Lowry Ave. NE, Minneapolis.
1st Sunday, 9:00 a.m.-noon, *Lake Superior Freethinkers monthly meeting.* Radisson Hotel Duluth, Viking Room. For information contact Bill van Druten, (218) 724-4176.
1st Sunday, 10:00 a.m., *Central Minnesota Freethinkers, St. Cloud Coffee Social.* Check their website for details*: cmfreethinkers.org* or contact them at *info@cmfreethinkers.org*
Mondays, 5:00-6:30 p.m., *Atheists for Human Rights Happy Hour,* Ol' Mexico Restaurant, 1754 Lexington Ave., Roseville (just north of Larpenteur). Tables on terrace level. Call Paul Craven, (763) 788-8918.
1st and 3rd Mondays, 6:30 p.m., *Freethought Toastmasters Club*, Larpenteur Estates Party Room, 1276 Larpenteur Ave. W., St. Paul. Contact George Kane, nup@minn.net or (651) 488-8225.
2nd & 4th Mondays, 5:00-7:00 p.m., *Freethought Dinner Social*, Davanni's, 8605 Lyndale Ave So, Bloomington. Call Marilyn Nienkerk, (612) 866-6200.
1st Tuesday, 11:30 a.m.—1:00 p.m., *Freethought Lunch,* Dragon House, 3950 Central Ave. NE, Columbia Heights, MN. Call Marilyn Nienkerk, (612) 866-6200.
3rd Wednesday, 11:30 a.m., *Freethought Lunch*, Dragon House, 3950 Central Avenue NE, Columbia Heights. Call Bill Volna, (612) 781-1420.
2nd Thursday, evening, *Rochester Area Freethinkers (RAFT),* Downtown Rochester Public Library, Meeting Room A. Contact Jim Salutz, jsalutz@aol.com or (507) 280-8012.

OTHER EVENTS

2nd Wednesday, 7 p.m., *Humanists of Minnesota* Board of Directors meeting. Open to all members. Contact Audrey Kingstrom at akingstrom@comcast.net.
Thursdays, 7:00 p.m. (during school year), *Campus Atheists, Skeptics and Humanists (CASH)* general meeting. 3rd floor Coffman Memorial Union, 300 Washington Ave. SE, Minneapolis. Contact cash@cashumn.org.

Check out our Meetup events at
http://www.meetup.com/humanism-166

Humanists of Minnesota at PRIDE Festival

Thank you, Ellie Bjorklund and Nick Hayden (shown above) and all our other volunteers at our PRIDE booth—Greg Hart, Seth Engman, Harlan Garbell, Rohit Ravindran (below right), Molly Wilbur-Cohen, Christine Retkwa, Tommy McCarty and Audrey Kingstrom.

We gave out over 1200 "I Believe in Good" stickers! They were a big hit at the festival!

"Humanist Views," our weekly cable program, airs at **6:30 p.m. Mondays** on MTN Channel 75.

Notes From a Commencement Weekend

by Nathan Curland

This year was the 50th Reunion of my graduating class at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.). I had never attended a class reunion of any type before but felt that since this was a special one, I should give it a try. Besides, two of my fraternity brothers were on the Alumni organizing committee and I hadn't seen any of them for 50 years! What probably sealed the deal was that Jeff and Bob were being very proactive, pointing out that our class was also the 100th to graduate from M.I.T. (which was founded in 1861) and many special commemorative events were planned, including, of course our class's participation in the Commencement Activities for the class of 2017 and the burial of a joint time capsule with that class to be opened by them in 2067.

However, I am not writing these notes so as to give you a blow by blow playback of the four-day weekend but to convey how the activities we engaged in, and speakers we listened to, reminded me of how humanistic my university experience was and how that tradition continues there today and even more so. Take diversity, for example. When I attended the school it was mostly white males (we did, of course, have our share of minorities: Asian, Black, female students, e.g.). This year's graduating class had *no* majority ethnic/racial group at all, with Caucasian and Asian at approximately 1/3 each and the remainder from various other subgroups. For my class, out of 936 students, 3% were female. For the class of 2017, 46% are female.

The history of the rise of the female M.I.T. engineering student was well documented and reported by a classmate of mine, Dr. Barbara Gilchrest, M.D. She told the story of Pamela Curtis Swallow, who, in 1873, was the first woman to be allowed to attend (not enroll in) an Engineering School in the United States, but was treated as a second class student despite her capabilities. (She became an expert on ecology and a co-founder of the Woods Hole Research Center.) Her diligence and determination paved the way for women to be officially enrolled at M.I.T. in 1883. However, female students were not given the same opportunities as men and had to live off-campus and oftentimes commute, which greatly hampered their ability to achieve graduation rates comparable to men. This changed dramatically in 1964 with the construction of McCormick Hall as a dedicated dormitory for women students. Subsequent female graduate rates were on par with men and the number of women accepted at M.I.T. has risen steadily ever since. (McCormick Hall was constructed due to a gift by Katherine D. McCormick, B.S. Biology, M.I.T. Class of 1904. McCormick was a key figure in the Suffragette Movement and is credited with singlehandedly funding the research that led to the contraceptive pill in the 1950s.)

Commencement exercises were on Friday, June 9th. M.I.T. was awarding degrees to 2700 students, of which 2/3 were advanced degrees. This is also quite a change from my year where the ratio was heavily slanted to undergraduate degrees. This shows what a powerhouse M.I.T. had become over the years in Research and Development. (You need graduate students to staff research projects!) The commencement speeches were very compelling and humanistic. Even the invocation by Chaplain John Wuestneck focused mostly on the infinity of the cosmos and our place in it and only mentioned a higher power in passing ("…some of us believe in a higher power and some have no ties to any religion at all…"). Carl Sagan would have been proud. Both keynote speaker Tim Cook, CEO of Apple, and M.I.T. President Rafael Reif, emphasized the importance of bringing compassion and empathy to your research and engineering work and that your primary focus is to meet the needs of humanity.

The humanities were always a key part of one's education at M.I.T. and each student was required to take one humanities course each semester (I focused on philosophy during my years there.) A shining example of a well-rounded M.I.T. graduate was on display that evening with "Tech Night at POPs" where M.I.T. Alumni sold out Symphony Hall for the The Boston Pops Orchestra. The featured soloist that evening was Sylvain Carpentier, who that day had received his Ph.D. in Mathematics from M.I.T. Carpentier is French and won first prize at the 2013 International Piano Competition for Outstanding Amateurs in Paris. He played Chopin for us (and of course received a standing ovation).

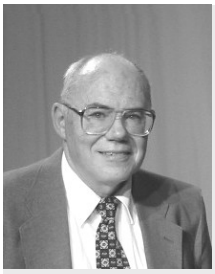
No Alumni weekend at M.I.T. would be complete without lectures on Science and Engineering. This year the Institute highlighted the work being done in its newest department: Biological Engineering (only 20 years old). The work focuses on a wide range of bio-technologies to fight diseases, build new bio-sustainable materials and develop diagnostic bio-tools. President Reif outlined the MIT Environmental Solutions Initiative he

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

launched last year and the $5 Billion MIT Campaign for a Better World that he founded (so far, $3.4 Billion has been raised!).

All in all it was a memorable weekend and reminded me of the environment I attended where, for me, the first seeds of humanistic principles were sown. Ω



Book Notes:

George Erickson on Nuclear Energy and the AHA's Silence

By Paul Heffron

The March issue of the newsletter mentioned George Erickson's new book, *Unintended Consequences*. The subtitle refers to a "lie" that is linked to unintended consequences, namely, the failures to deal with climate change by regarding nuclear energy as unsafe. The "lie," according to George, was committed by one of our greatest humanist leaders and perpetuated by liberal environmentalists and others. He was Prof. Herman Joseph Muller, a Nobel Laureate in Physiology and Medicine in 1946. He was given the prize for his research allegedly demonstrating that low-level radiation causes genetic mutations. Before he received his Nobel Prize a better experiment than Muller's cast doubt on his research and his resulting claim. He knew about the experiment and even praised it but maintained his claim in his acceptance speech for the prize. That is what George refers to as the "lie."

Professor Muller was the AHA Humanist of the Year in 1963 and served as president of the AHA in 1956-1959. George doesn't blame the AHA for honoring Muller, who received many honors and deserved them. But George does blame the AHA for failing to give consideration to current science on low-dose radiation and the safety and efficiency of nuclear energy, especially in the new Molten Salt Reactor using thorium instead of uranium.

George says he made a major attempt to present the case for nuclear energy in a letter to the AHA board and officers, in an article submitted to *The Humanist*, and in an offer to do a presentation at an AHA conference breakout session. He says there has been no response and they seem to have been completely indifferent to him. The AHA has supported solar and wind as the main solution to climate change and opposed nuclear energy, as do the liberal and environmental organizations generally. Since there is good science and technology behind the new kind of nuclear reactors (summarized in George's book), the AHA and *The Humanist* should lead a discussion and education on the current status and prospect of nuclear energy, as it has done on so many issues in its history.

In Amazon's reader comment section for *Unintended Consequences* Herb Silverman wrote, "George Erickson put a lot of time, effort, and careful research into making a good case for nuclear power. I used to be one of those liberals he criticizes for focusing on damage from nuclear power and not learning about its positives as a cleaner energy source. I HAVE SINCE CHANGED, and Erickson's book is a valuable evidence-based resource. I highly recommend it for anyone who is concerned about our environment, which should be everyone." Ω

Humanists Unforgettable Bike Ride Into Stillwater (HUBRIS) II

Seven humanists gathered for a ride into Stillwater for the 2nd annual HUBRIS. The weather was a (mostly sunny) beautiful, if cool, June day. (A brief shower slowed us down on the return trip.) Lunch and drink was had at Pappy's by the River.

Shown here are participants (l.to r.;f.to b.: Michelle Losey, Jerry Smith, Nate Curland, Tim Berry, Brad Bolin and Craig Stilen. Not in picture: Ed Lubinski)

HUMANIST NEWS & VIEWS

Editor, Nathan Curland
Editorial Committee - Harlan Garbell, Suzanne Perry, Mahad Muhammad, Nathan Curland

Articles, letters, event notices and other writings are welcome. Send to: *editor@humanistsofmn.org* with the word "newsletter" in the subject line, or to P.O. Box 582997, Minneapolis, MN 55458-2997. (E-mail submissions are preferred.) All submissions must include the writer's full name, postal address, telephone number and e-mail address. All submissions become the property of this newsletter and cannot be returned. Submission deadline is the 23rd of the prior month.

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Upcoming Critical Thinking Club Meetings

Twin Cities Chapter: Sunday, July 2nd 10:00 a.m. to noon: "Evolution, Creationism, and Unintelligent Design," by August Berkshire. Augsburg College, Christensen Center 1st Flr, 720 22nd Ave S., Minneapolis. $4 charge.

Stillwater Chapter. Monday, July 10th, 7:00 p.m.: "Israel's Zionists vs. Palestine,". Family Means Bldg., 1875 Northwestern Ave, Stillwater.

West Metro Chapter: Saturday, July 22nd, 10:00 a.m. to noon: "Bias, Morality, and Politics: Can't We All Just Get Along?" by Kevin Hawkins. RidgePointe Senior Apts, 12600 Marion La. W, Minnetonka.

Maple Grove Discussion Group:

Saturday, July 8th, 10:00 a.m. to 11:45 a.m.: "How to Structure a Winning Argument," with John Nordin, Ph.D., Senior Lecturer, Communication Studies, U. of MN . Maple Grove Community Center, 12951 Weaver Lake Rd, room 133, Maple Grove 55311, $5 donation. Register at landforsale@visi.com or call Laurie at (763) 420-6350.

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July 2017

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Your membership is vital to the growth of Humanism and the Humanist community. Our membership categories are:
(For categories at RH and above, married couples or domestic partners will be considered as one membership, if you so indicate.)
( ) (B) Budget, $25.00
( ) (RI) Regular Individual, $40.00
( ) (RH) Regular Household, $60.00
( ) (S) Sustaining, $100.00
( ) (P) Patron, $250.00
( ) (BN) Benefactor, $500.00
( ) (L) Life Membership, $1000.00
( ) (T) Trial subscription for 3 months, just ask
*Full time students at an accredited institution can receive a complimentary subscription

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For national or international membership write to:

American Humanist Association
1821 Jefferson Place NW
Washington, DC 20036
www.americanhumanist.org

Council for Secular Humanism
PO Box 664
Amherst, NY 14226
www.secularhumanism.org

Please check the appropriate box, complete the information and mail with your check to Humanists of Minnesota, P.O. Box 582997, Minneapolis, MN 55458-2997.

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Second Member at same address (for RH and above):

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