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Chapter Meeting:

Putting Refugees First

With Leah Jaslow, American Refugee Committee

Saturday, March 18th, 2017

Please join us Saturday, March 18th as we welcome Leah Jaslow, Donor Services – Engagement Assistance, from the American Refugee Committee (ARC), to discuss how ARC is using a human-centered design approach to help refugees survive conflict and crisis and rebuild lives of dignity, health, security and self-sufficiency. At a time when the world is witnessing the worst refugee crisis since WWII, we know there is much work to be done. In the face of this tragedy, refugees know best what they need and ARC is listening to them. Learn how ARC is bringing humanity back to the core of humanitarian work. You will hear about the innovative projects ARC staff has implemented around the world. From co-creating relief efforts with members of the Somali Diaspora to creating change with relatively few resources 365 days of the year, ARC chooses to focus on the abundance in our world and the belief that anything is possible.



More than 35 years ago, Chicago businessman Neal Ball started the American Refugee Committee. He recruited a volunteer relief team who deployed to the Thai-Cambodian border. Ever since then, ARC has worked to provide opportunities and expertise to refugees, displaced people and host communities. ARC is committed to the delivery of programs that ensure measurable quality and lasting impact for the people it serves. Ω

**Saturday
 March 18th, 2017**

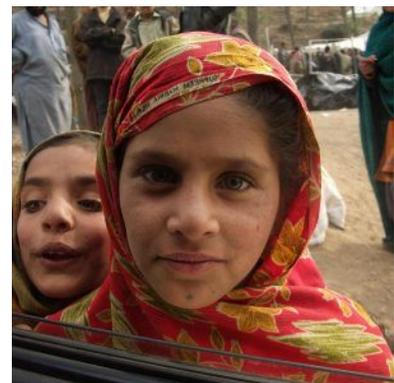
**Monthly Chapter
 Meeting**

**First Unitarian Society
 900 Mt. Curve Avenue
 Minneapolis**

**Doors open at 10:00 a.m.
 Program 10:20 a.m.-Noon**

HUMANISM:

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



PRESIDENT'S

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Stand your ground! That is the rallying cry of the gun lobby. But this is no defensive strategy; they have gone on the offensive. The gun lobby would like to take us back to the Wild West. With a good friend in the White House and Republican majorities in both Houses of Congress, Second Amendment zealots across the country are emboldened to further dismantle every sort of regulation on gun use and ownership. Their distorted views of the Constitution and the Second Amendment fuel their movement and this should be of concern to us all.

Countries around the world struggle to implement democracy—to negotiate differences through the ballot box as opposed to the barrel of a gun. Disturbingly, a few years ago, right here at our State Capitol I met gun zealots who were prepping for an insurgency—building up their arsenals—insisting it was their Second Amendment right and duty! But now the plentiful money and fear-mongering of the gun lobby has successfully pre-empted the need for any armed insurgency to take over the government. These extremists won big time last November at the ballot box. So what's in store?

Here in Minnesota, a [“Stand Your Ground” bill](#) was recently introduced in the state legislature. It would eliminate the legal obligation to retreat from danger before using deadly force – even outside one's home. If Trayvon Martin being shot by George Zimmerman in Florida in 2012 comes to mind, yes, you get the picture. Also introduced was a [“Permitless Carry” bill](#) which grants anyone the right to carry, transport, buy, sell, (etc.) any firearm or self-defense device without a state permit or restriction of any kind. Heretofore Minnesota had been able to withstand such provocative gun laws unlike many other states around the country. However things are changing. As they say, elections have consequences.

On the national front the gun lobby is aggressively seeking to [overturn longstanding gun safety measures](#) along with some recently enacted by President Obama. Common-sense rules that prohibit people with mental disabilities from obtaining guns—including the elderly with dementia. Common-sense regulations that keep people from buying silencers that would make it more difficult for bystanders or law enforcement officers to hear gunshots. Common-sense measures that allow states to enforce their own conceal-carry laws as opposed to practicing reciprocity with those states whose laws are more lenient.

Second amendment zealots would have us believe that gun rights cannot be regulated or abridged in any way. That is total bunk! The Founders established our constitution to promote the general welfare and provide for our *common* defense. They chose democracy, the process by which citizens come together to govern themselves through peaceful law enforcement. The Bill of Rights was added for reassurance that the individual still had standing within majority rule—not that individuals could be above society's laws. Two-hundred and fifty years of our democratic experiment reveals that there is no perfect formula for balancing individual rights with legal social regulation. Societies are not static; historical contexts change and so do our laws.

Every day, we as citizens are accountable to the government and ultimately to each other as we dutifully comply with the myriad of regulations we choose to impose upon ourselves for the common good. Think traffic laws and car licenses, property taxes and house deeds—just to name a few. Of course, seldom is there consensus on just the right amount of regulation, but that is the nature of democracy. Compromise. None of us gets exactly what we want and none of us can do whatever we want, whenever we want—living as we do among our fellow human beings in ever closer proximity.

American democracy continues to be a radical experiment in rule by law—i.e. regulation—and in the peaceful resolution of differences and conflicts. Many gun-rights zealots want to hedge their bets that democracy won't work. On the one hand, they insist that they are law-abiding citizens, but these so-called defenders of the Second Amendment claim to need no regulation. Further, they insist that guns aren't the problem; it's the people behind the guns. But any attempt for universal, thorough background checks on *the people* behind the guns is also off-limits to these gun extremists. In effect, they are positioning themselves beyond the reach of law—above democratic governance. That is a very troubling thought.

As Americans, we watch countries around the world struggle to govern--working to keep peace amidst conflicting parties and establish effective law enforcement agencies with disciplined police officers. Those that cannot provide adequate safety to their citizens are viewed as “failed states.” Is that where we are headed?

We are at a turning point in our own country. We can further arm our citizens—as the gun lobby would have

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us do—so self-appointed extremists can take “justice” into their own hands. Or we can re-commit ourselves to building a more perfect union that works for the well-being and prosperity of all our citizens. Double-down on our own efforts to establish effective law enforcement agencies with disciplined police officers. Let’s stop the veneration of gun-toting extremists and debunk their distorted interpretation of the Second Amendment. Let’s support [common-sense gun violence prevention](#) measures now. Ω



Humanist Community

New Social Action Team to Unite Humanists in Advocacy Efforts

by *Suzanne Perry*

Many people who are distressed by the current political climate are wondering how best to stand up for the causes they care about. Humanists of Minnesota is organizing an effort to help its members work together to strengthen their voices on critical issues.

I have agreed to lead a Social Action Team that will coordinate advocacy efforts that reflect the priorities of our members. We are in the process of setting up sub-teams to follow specific issues and act as

“ambassadors” to other organizations that are working in the field. These groups will, for example, rally our members to write letters, lobby, or attend events.

We have two volunteers already: Bobbi Jacobsen has agreed to coordinate advocacy on end-of-life issues and to be a liaison to Compassion & Choices. Heidi Hoy has agreed to coordinate advocacy on climate change and to be a liaison with MN350. I have also volunteered to be a liaison with the ACLU of Minnesota, which works on issues including criminal justice, racial justice, and immigration rights.

Other potential issue areas include church-state separation, health care, reproductive rights, election reform, LGBTQ rights...your suggestion?

I believe we should step up our advocacy efforts both because these causes are important and because it will raise our visibility as an organization. The more that humanists weigh in on social issues, especially during this time of deep concern, the more others will start wondering what we are all about.

The Social Action Team held its first meeting on Feb. 25 (after deadline for his issue), so I will have more to report in next month’s newsletter. Meanwhile, if you are interested in joining this effort, or in coordinating advocacy in a particular area, please let me know at suzanneper@msn.com. Ω

New Book Releases from HofMN Members

Humanists of Minnesota is proud to have among its members well established (and best selling!) authors. Two of these have just come out with their new releases:

George Erickson, former HofMN president and newsletter editor, has just released his fifth, and what he has called his “most important” book, *Unintended Consequences: The Lie That Killed Millions and Accelerated Climate Change*. In George’s words, the book “stresses the seriousness of climate change, the safety and efficiency of nuclear energy, misunderstandings about radiation safety, and the exposure of the tactics and motives of those who oppose nuclear power but support inefficient, deadly, environment-damaging alternatives instead.” For more information go to: <http://tinyurl.com/gmryhbp>.

Previous books by George are: *Eyes Wide Open* (2010), *Back to the Barrens: On the Wing with Da Vinci and Friends* (2007), *Time Traveling with Science and the Saints* (2004), *True North: Exploring the Great Canadian Wilderness by Bush Plane* (2000).

William Fietzer, former English instructor and academic librarian at the University of Minnesota, is having a launch party of his new “paranormal thriller”, *Mission: Soul Rescue*, at 2 p.m. Saturday, March 11, at Moon Palace Books (3260 Minnehaha Ave. Minneapolis).

Previous works by Bill are: *Metadata Murders* (2006), *Penal Fires* (2002). 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>

Medical Aid in Dying Get involved with the MN Campaign!

Medical aid in dying is one end-of-life option* currently authorized in six states (CA, WA, OR, VT, CO and MT). We are trying to pass similar legislation here in Minnesota and are partnering with Compassion and Choices in that effort. Here are two opportunities for involvement.

Join us for the press conference on March 1st at 11:00am at the Capitol in Room B971 (that's in the basement). Sen. Chris Eaton and Rep. Mike Freiberg will introduce the MN End-of-Life Option Act. (If you arrive by 10:30am, meet-up with fellow member Suzanne Perry at the periphery of the Rotunda then head to the basement together.)

Please wear your Compassion and Choices t-shirt (some will be available at the event) or wear YELLOW. Here are links to a [map of the Capitol Complex](#) and an informational webpage regarding [parking at the Capitol](#). Or take the Light Rail Green Line and get off at Rice St. Station.

Join Compassion & Choices for a volunteer workshop on March 7th, 1:00-3:00pm at City Bell 2nd floor conference room in Richfield (6600 Lyndale Ave. S.). Learn how to talk effectively about the MN End-of-Life Option Act (formerly Compassionate Care Act). Hosted by fellow member Bobbi Jacobsen.

*Death with Dignity for ill, mentally capable people who have a prognosis of six months or less to live, to request, obtain and—if his or her suffering becomes unbearable—self-ingest medication that brings about a peaceful death.

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





February Chapter Meeting

Ethics and Animals

Summary by Nathan Curland

Forty-five Humanists and friends came to our February (Darwin month!) chapter meeting to hear Professor Jeff Johnson of St. Catherine University talk to us about the ethics surrounding humans cultivating and eating animals.

Dr. Johnson started by describing the methods used in industrial farming of animals. He noted that in the United

States humans “eat their way” through 9 billion animals per year. In a typical Tyson broiler chicken facility (food chickens) the birds are allotted a 10” x 10” space each. They have been specially bred for quick growing which puts stresses on their internal organs leading to much suffering. Chickens for egg production have even less space. They are bred small and after 1 ½ years are destroyed, since they are not useful for food. Males are killed at birth since they are useful neither for eggs or food. The life cycle for pork pigs are equally grim. The sows spend most of their lives in gestation cages which are 2’ x 7’, the size of the pigs themselves. They are moved to birthing cages to bear the piglets but then immediately re-impregnated and returned to the gestation cages. When their ability to produce babies is diminished, they are slaughtered for meat.

Johnson then turned our attention to defenses that are put forth for eating animals. The most common is that it is “natural to eat animals”:

- “That’s what animals do”. The counter is that unlike other (most?) animals humans can make moral decisions.
- The food chain license arguments:
 - Tradition. This is not a good argument since slavery, women’s rights etc. were once defended by “tradition”.
 - We are omnivores. Yes, but we can choose what we eat and vegetarianism and veganism are successful lifestyles.

He then tackled the question as it has been discussed by philosophers over the ages: What kind of moral status do animals have? One approach is via “relevant differences”. Immanuel Kant took the view that since animals are not self-conscious they are simply a means to an end ... “and that end is Man.” A more modern version by Carl Cohen argues that since humans have a unique capacity to formulate moral principles, whereas animals don’t, the autonomy/rationality of humans gives them moral standing. In contrast to these views, Christine Korsgaard makes a “Kantian argument” that animals have things that are important to them (that “matter”) just as humans do, and therefore have some degree of moral standing. James Rachels took this a step further by asserting that evolution teaches us that “intelligence is distributed by varying degrees.” Humans are not the only rational ones, just more rational. Jeremy Bentham, an 18th century philosopher and founder of Utilitarianism, responded to Kant by asserting that it is not the faculty of reason that determines moral status (since then infants and those with dementia would have none) but what matters most is “if they can suffer.” In the 1970’s Peter Singer extended this view by evoking the Principle of Equality: we should treat people (and animals) equally despite differences and that there is no moral justification for refusing to take suffering into consideration. Racism or sexism are examples of downplaying the interests of other groups and speciesism is just another.

Dr. Johnson’s final discussion had to do what kind of character do we, as humans, want to have? Aristotle developed and enumerated a list of Virtues and Vices of mankind and noted that developing character is important for a civilized society to endure. Recently Rosalind Hursthouse wrote of applying Virtue Ethics to the treatment of animals asserting that current practices are cruel and asking “what does that reveal about our character.” One hundred years ago, Mary Midgley suggested we apply the Golden Rule to animals. Johnson proposes a Modified Golden Rule: “Do onto other animals as you would do to an animal you love.”

In the lively Q&A session that followed the issue of moving to vegetarianism was discussed and Johnson took the opportunity to discuss the inefficient conversion ratios between animal husbandry and crop cultivation for food. We had heard these statistics before but a question came up with regard to food for domestic animals such as cats which require animal food (the answer of using leftovers was not convincing). There

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was also a question raised with respect to the treatment of domesticated animals noting that neutering, de-clawing and caging, for example, are not necessarily examples of humane treatment. Johnson received some pushback on the moral equivalence of eating animals vs. killing them humanely. An alternative was noted that animals that are specifically bred for food should not really exist to begin with. A final unanswered question was an observation that via evolution we became humans (with our large brain sizes, for example) by eating animals. Are we supposed to give that up? (The counter question, of course, is are we civilized enough to do so now?)

Following the meeting approximately half the attendance stayed for a vegan pizza theme lunch organized by Rohit Ravindran and Mark Thoson. Ω

Book Review:



“God: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction”

By Dan Barker

Reviewed by Paul Heffron

Dan Barker’s new book *God* (Sterling, 2016) is not a fun read. The subtitle, *The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction*, cues you that this book is going to be grim. If you like horror literature, this is your baby. Richard Dawkins in his book *The God Delusion* asserted that the god of the Old Testament is “arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction” and listed nineteen appalling character traits of Yahweh, the Hebrew god, all of which make him chief of villains. Dawkins got a lot of flak for that assertion. So he asked Dan Barker, who is well versed in biblical study, to do a book defending his

seemingly outrageous claim. Dan combed the Bible and found that the case against God was even stronger than Dawkins had made out. In chapter after chapter he lays out all the verses and passages that describe Dawkins’s nineteen horrific traits, plus many more, of the deity commonly called God. (God has become the name for this particular god, replacing the biblical name which is rendered in English as Yahweh or Jehovah. In modern versions of the Bible that name was translated as LORD, all upper case to distinguish it from the common word for lord and to be rid of the primitive, tribal name.) Reading all these ghastly passages is relieved only by Barker’s informative commentaries interspersed throughout the book. It may not be a fun read, but Barker certainly makes it interesting, even astounding and horrendous.

I took a very rigorous course in the Old Testament at seminary. I became familiar with the awful things that God commands and does over and over in those scriptures, and yet I didn’t view this god as someone to be condemned. There were ways of rationalizing all the bad stuff and making the Bible palatable. Even so, Barker’s book made me realize how thoroughly disreputable the god of the Old Testament is from beginning to end. Barker adds a final chapter that refutes the idea that the New Testament departs from the Old and reveals God as a loving father. No, says Barker, it’s the same god. That will begin an even bigger controversy: Jesus as one with the god of his Bible?

Why bother with all this negative criticism of what for many people is so sacred? Because the deity in question is immensely harmful. As someone said, it’s like weeding the garden. If we want the world to grow what is beautiful and nutritious, we have to pull the weeds, and that includes the villainous fictional character know as God. Ω



Highlights from the Board

*by David Guell
Secretary*

From the February board meeting:

- David reported results of investigating the MembershipWorks CRM system. Rohit reported findings of his investigation into SquareSpace for our website and hosting.
- The expenses from FY2016 were reviewed as a starting point for FY2017 budget planning.
- Harlan is heading up the Nominations committee. The committee will be introduced at the March chapter meeting.

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, March 5th, 10:00 a.m. to noon: "The Militarization of Municipal Police Departments," by Bill Comiskey. Augsburg College, Christensen Center 1st Flr, 720 22nd Ave S., Minneapolis.

Stillwater Chapter. Monday, March 13th, 7:00 p.m.: "Terrorism, Fear, Evil, and the Developing Global Crisis," by Michael Andregg, Adjunct Professor, St. Thomas U. Family Means Bldg., 1875 Northwestern Ave, Stillwater.

West Metro Chapter: Saturday, March 25th, 10:00 a.m. to noon: "MN Legislature Actions," by Senator John Marty.

Maple Grove Discussion Group:

Saturday, March 11th, 10:00 a.m. to 11:45 a.m.: "Common Core: How Federal Standards are Damaging Our Local Schools," with Linda Bell, Minnesota Advocates and Champions for Children. 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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March 2017

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION OR RENEWAL

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

For national or international membership write to:

American Humanist Association
1777 T Street NW
Washington, DC 20009-7125
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.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone number: _____

e-mail: _____

(for special announcements, blogs etc. Keeps you in touch!)

I would like my newsletter sent via email () (in color!)

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

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