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**Saturday
November 19th, 2016**

**Monthly Chapter
Meeting**

**First Unitarian Society
900 Mt. Curve Drive
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.*

Chapter Meeting:

LGBTQIA—Getting to an Inclusive Gender Model

with Stef Wilenchek

Saturday, November 19th, 2016

Why are LGBTQIA* communities marginalized in our society? How can we better understand and talk about gender and sexual identities from a place of inclusivity?



At our next chapter meeting, Stef Wilenchek of the Gender and Sexuality Center for Queer and Trans Life at the University of Minnesota will discuss how identities like sex, gender and sexual orientation are constructed in our society and how these social constructions impact all of us. Through the use of a learning tool called the Butterfly Model, Stef will increase our knowledge of systems of sex, gender, and sexual orientation, help us understand sex and gender stereotypes and their impacts on the LGBTQIA community, and learn where and how we can help eliminate barriers in our communities.

**Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Intersex Asexual*

Stef Wilenchek (they/them/theirs) is currently the Director of the Gender and Sexuality Center for Queer and Trans Life (formerly the GLBTA Programs Office) at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. Most recently, Stef was the Assistant Director of Gender and Sexual Orientation Initiatives at Hamline University for two years. Previously, they were the director of the GLBTQ Resource Center for six and half years at the University of Colorado-Boulder. Stef has worked over a decade with college students on social justice issues, advocacy and support. Stef has a Master of Education degree from Kent State University and a Bachelor of Science degree from Baldwin Wallace University in Ohio. Stef loves swimming, telling stories with their kiddo, playing musical instruments and dancing whenever possible.



Guest Editorial:

“Does the Truth Still Matter?”

*by Harlan Garbell,
Vice President*

"Jerry, just remember. It's not a lie if *you* believe it."

George Costanza on [Seinfeld](#)

Some observers have suggested that we now live in a "post-factual" society. That is to say truth, facts, and scientific evidence are not essential, or not to be trusted, in public dialogue. For example, the ascendancy of the Republican candidate for president was fueled by his promotion of the "birther" movement. This phenomenon was based on the belief that Barack Obama was unconstitutionally elected as President of the United States as he was not a natural born citizen of this country. Evidence had always been available that this was a conspiracy-driven myth. In 2011, Obama's "long-form" birth certificate was produced and yet a large number (perhaps millions) of people still refused to believe the truth? Why is that?

I could discuss concepts like "cognitive dissonance," "confirmation bias," and "balance theory" to explain why this occurred but I don't think it's necessary to get into the psychological or sociological "weeds" for the purpose of this article. What matters is that in a post-factual environment people and groups will often argue the merits of their own political, social, and economic agendas, notwithstanding these arguments are not supported by the facts. They are subscribing to a "higher truth" instead. A truth so vital and important that facts are not necessarily determinative of the situation or issue. Often this is because the proponents of this "truth" believe that the established facts come from untrustworthy sources like the "mainstream media," experts, the "elite," or the Federal Reserve.

This, unfortunately, is nothing new in world history or American society. Politicians frequently lied to their audiences in Ancient Greece, the birthplace of the Western concept of democracy. What is new is the prominence of this phenomenon in daily life. The mistaken views of individuals and groups are energized by the proliferation of blogs, message boards and social media. Moreover, people all along the political spectrum are susceptible to this refusal to ascertain the truth in emotionally charged situations - not just the viewers of Fox News. Often the "truth" of your own feelings and world view takes precedence over observable or established facts.

Remember the old parable regarding the blind men and the elephant? Everyone may have some compelling information, or even facts, but that does not necessarily mean everyone has the truth. And when one superimposes their own biases on those partial facts the truth often becomes a victim to emotions. Again, this is nothing new under the sun. What is new is the ability of technology to increase the amount and velocity of misinformation, half-truths, and outright lies. Ascertaining the truth becomes more difficult, and perhaps even more troubling, immaterial.

OK, so what does any of this have to with us as humanists? We, of all organizations, would be the least likely to succumb to a post-factual environment. Right? Don't we as individuals, and as an organization, subscribe to the virtues of reason and science? Or, like the "birthers" do we have our own post-factual agenda? Frankly, as conflicted human beings, we are not immune to this phenomenon.

Ever since I have been a member of this organization I have heard gentle criticisms that we talk too much. Debate too much. A confession: sometimes I have thought that as well. Action can be more fulfilling than lengthy meetings. However, let's not forsake the values that have nurtured us our entire lives. Truth, reason, and wisdom should drive our decisions, even if it takes longer to arrive at. Unpopular opinions should be tolerated as long as they have a basis in fact and are not hurtful to others. We can, and should, survive a post-factual society. The truth still matters.

And, sorry, George. A lie is still a lie even if you believe it. Ω



Highlights from the Board

*by David Guell
Secretary*

From the October board meeting:

- The Board accepted Susan Champion's resignation.
- Rohit reported that we were approved for 10 licenses of Sales-Force.com.
- The Board approved devoting the February chapter meeting to a topic relevant to Darwin Day.

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

Second 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>

Hospitality Team Initiative

Get Involved! Volunteers Needed!

Volunteers are needed to help out with hospitality at Humanists of Minnesota events—especially the monthly meetings. Our long-time volunteers, Juliet Branca, Jerry Smith and Mark Thoson would like to share these responsibilities with others. And the Board would like to establish a hospitality team to help them manage refreshments and lunches going forward. Responsibilities would generally include: make and/or arrange for coffee and tea, pastries and lunches as planned; purchase necessary supplies; provide food and beverage service set-up and clean-up. The team would meet as needed.

Please contact Audrey at:

akingstrom@comcast.net if you are willing to serve on this team. Thanks!

Support Humanists of Minnesota! Painlessly!

Do you shop at Amazon.com?

If so, Amazon will donate some of their profits to Humanists of Minnesota! Just use the following URL to enter their website when you shop there (note: though the charity listed is the AHA, the funds will go to HofMN):

<http://smile.amazon.com/ch/41-1570800>

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



*Conference Review:**Humanist Voices in the 21st Century**Summarized by Nathan Curland*

On Saturday, October 15, 2016 over 200 people descended on the First Unitarian Society (FUS) to participate in the all-day conference “Humanist Voices in the 21st Century,” an event co-sponsored by many different local and national groups including Humanists of Minnesota. The conference was

organized to celebrate the founding of Humanism in Minnesota 100 years ago by humanist pioneer John Dietrich and explore what the next 100 years of humanism might look like.

We were welcomed by Phil Duran, current chair of the FUS board, who informed us that, due to the efforts of many, the Minneapolis City Council has proclaimed November 1, 2016, to be John Dietrich Day and read to us the entire proclamation which highlighted Dietrich’s key accomplishments. He then introduced Dr. David Breeden who gave us a short historical background on the beginnings of humanism in Minneapolis. This started when the Minneapolis chapter of the Liberal League voted to incorporate as a Unitarian congregation and invited Henry Martyn Simmons to join them as pastor in 1881. The congregation adopted what today are considered universal humanist principles such as: humans are ends to themselves and not a means to some ‘greater goal’; and that the root of humanism is naturalism. John H. Dietrich joined the congregation in 1916 as minister and was the first in the state to call himself a “humanist.” Today there are many different flavors of humanism. FUS members refer to themselves as Congregational Humanists.

Stephanie Zvan moderated the morning panel discussion which included William Hart and Sonita Sarker of Macalester College, Anthony Pinn of Rice University, Phil Zuckerman of Pitzer College, and Chris Stedman, Executive Director of the Yale Humanist Community. To the question of “how has humanism fallen short in the past 100 years,” Pinn responded that it needs to get away from the standard issue of separation of church and state and focus on what he considers to be more pressing and current issues such as class, gender and race. Hart focused on the effect of the New Atheists whom he considers to be a bit elitist and this has led to too much of an “identity focus.” Stedman felt that humanism has struggled because it doesn’t address real issues in people’s lives and hasn’t done a good job of “institution building”. Sarker stated that we need to promote the plurality of humanism: Material Humanism; Intersectional Humanism; Flexible Humanism. Zuckerman noted that humanist ideals are demonstrated by many people who don’t label themselves as “humanists”. On this point, the panel agreed that there are plenty of such humanists (Zuckerman, Sarker) but we need to be careful in claiming them since such a claim can serve to undermine the movement as a whole (Stedman, Hart, Pinn).

On questions dealing with moving forward, Pinn (following Albert Camus) opined that humanism should represent itself as being in opposition to theism, not religion per se, since formal opposition to the latter tends to alienate people. Humanists have a general hesitancy of forcing our opinions on others (which, on the other hand, seems to be is a key tenet of theism). Stedman advocated community involvement (noting that it made him a better person). Zuckerman asked “how do we culturalize humanism” given that there seems to be no real agreement on values or a consensus on what are the strengths of humanism (one suggestion is “flexibility”). Stedman noted that convincing people to live with uncertainty is a real issue. Pinn pointed out that there is not a humanist organization but multiple humanist organizations each of which appeals to different people.

(To view a podcast of the morning panel discussion visit <http://firstunitarian.org/podcasts/dietrich-100-the-future-of-humanism-panel/> supplied by Bob Aderhold)

After a (free will donation) lunch, one hour of simultaneous breakout sessions moderated by the various panelists were held. This was followed by a 15-minute break and a repeat of the sessions (so that you could attend more than one). I attended William Hart’s on *Humanism and Politics* and Phil Zuckerman’s on *Secular vs. Religious Morality*.

The *Humanism and Politics* session got pretty bogged down since people really couldn’t agree on how basic humanist principles actually impact their political view. In the end, what I took away was that humanists pretty much do their politics in other groups that are more focused on particular issues and that attempts to identify a particular issue for humanists will just alienate some segment away from the organization we are trying to expand.

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The *Secular vs. Religious Morality* session, in contrast, was dynamic and exciting spurred on by the energy and in-depth background that Zuckerman brought to the breakout. He started by reminding everyone of the inverse correlation that has been demonstrated between religiosity and rates of murder, aggression, domestic abuse, child abuse mortality etc. from countries around the world (and even between states in the U.S.A.). He urged us to compare the Universal Declaration of Human Rights against the Ten Commandments to see how we have progressed in morality over the past millennia. He noted that the answer he has for the question “where do secularists get their morality from” is to enumerate four points: the empathetic brain supplied by evolutionary pressures; the environment in which one is raised; the culture in which one lives in; and the experience that one accumulates (which generally leads to some form of the Golden Rule). Theistic morality, in contrast, can be considered to be “outsourcing”, since it avoids looking within oneself but appeals to an authority. Thus theists abdicate their moral decisions.

Here are some observations from other attendees:

“Some challenging thoughts I heard at the conference – the idea that humanism has more than one strand; i.e. the existences of multiple humanisms as different pathways to humanism. The challenge to be uncomfortable with different perspectives while being honest about one’s non-negotiable values. Being cognizant of how one is positioned in the social, cultural, economic and power structures of society. If we don’t see our differences, we can’t be honest about how to live with differences or resolve them when necessary. And finally, building connections with other organizations and groups that share some of our values to accomplish larger goals in society.” (Audrey)

“In the break-out session *LGBTQ Identity and Humanism*, Chris Stedman opened the discussion with an example from his personal life: Stedman participated on Bill O’Reilly’s talk show as a representative of humanism and atheism. Following the airing of the show he received negative feedback from some fellow humanists not regarding the content of his message, but rather regarding his obviously queer demeanor. (Stedman has a prominent “queer” tattoo on his arm and explained that word for him is not pejorative. In his experience as a teen, the term “gay” was often used as an insult.) Group participants also shared their experiences as friends and members of the LGBTQ community. I came away from the discussion appreciating that only when there is growth of understanding and broader acceptance of the LGBTQ community will their valuable input as individuals be included in the future voices of humanism.” (Sally)

“Prof. Anthony Pinn, in a word, said perspective is what we have to offer society. As for developing that perspective in dealing with issues at our meetings we need to have the right type of physical space and set up to accommodate facilitated discussion.” (Paul) Ω

Humanist Community:

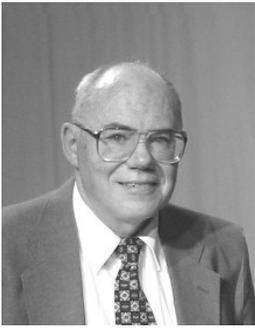
HofMn Re-launches Caring Connections Team

by Joyce Edwards

As a small community of approximately 200 naturalists and freethinkers, Humanists of Minnesota strives to be responsive to our members’ top priorities. Several have expressed a wish for closer ties with the organization and with each other, especially in times of need. In faith communities, those needs are often met through pastoral care or “caring circles.” As we look to foster a more closely knit community, we are considering forming a team whose mission it would be to provide compassionate and practical support to members who are facing a challenge. Starting small at first, services

might include supportive phone calls/cards/emails; hospital visits; and rides to Humanists of Minnesota events, to name a few.

A few years ago we attempted to build this team but the effort faltered when we lost our team leader. We have decided to try again and are looking for members to help get this initiative off the ground. If you have an abundance of caring and compassion for your fellow members and want to get involved, please email Joyce Edwards at jesearch@att.net. Ω



Freethought History:

***The Swerve:
How the World Became Modern
(Norton, 2011)***

Paul Heffron, Chapter Historian

Stephen Greenblatt, Professor of Humanities at Harvard, wrote an intellectual history narrative called *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*. It was a New York Times Best Seller, winner of a Pulitzer Prize, a National Book Award, Time Magazine's #1 Best Nonfiction Book and, in addition, received high praise from scholars and critics. It is the story of a Renaissance humanist book hunter who discovered a long-lost ancient Roman epic poem, which had a big impact on his fellow

humanists, on the leaders of the Enlightenment, and on the making of the modern world. I'm inclined to bet that Greenblatt's superbly written book is the best slice of Renaissance history you're currently likely to find on any intellectual history or humanities bookshelf.

The book hunter was Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459 CE). The book he found, in a monastery in Germany, was Lucretius' *On the Nature of Things*, a long and brilliant poem in six untitled books in Latin, which covered everything that mattered. It was the only surviving copy. A monk had copied the scroll of the poem into a codex, and it apparently was recopied, and recopied, and lay hidden from the world for about a thousand years. Poggio was the best copyist of his time. It took him many days to copy the work into roman script, which he had invented to replace the cumbersome gothic script. (We use it today as the roman font in our computers.) He passed his copy on to fellow humanists who made their own copies. A century later with the invention of the printing press the book became generally available to those who could read Latin and appreciate a beautiful and sophisticated literary classic. Translations eventually appeared. The book, according to Greenblatt, set in motion the most prominent intellectual force that led to secular modernity.

Lucretius (c. 99-55 BCE) was greatly influenced by Epicurus (341-270 BCE). He espoused Epicurus' world view, which derived from a Greek philosopher's speculation that the entire universe, all reality including humans and gods, if there were any, was made up of atoms in motion. He also adopted the Epicurean way of life based on a very broad and humanistic concept of pleasure or enjoyment of earthly life. Ironically, the monks had dutifully copied and preserved this great work of literature, which was so subversive and undermined the church's doctrines and practices.

Poggio and other Renaissance scholars in the new field of humanities sought out and imitated the works of the ancient Greeks and Romans. They were not humanists in our sense of the word. In their time humanists were those who engaged in a new departure in learning, scholarship, literature, and art. They and their works were generally accepted, or at least allowed, by the church. Their humanism was not a philosophy of life at odds with the church. The humanists were mostly loyal Catholics or at least professed to be Christian. Petrarch (1304-74 CE) is referred to as the father of humanism, but he was a devout Catholic and not the father of humanism in the modern sense of the word as a human- and nature-centered philosophy of life. He influenced Boccaccio (1313-75 CE) who wrote *The Decameron*, a collection of bawdy stories (the inspiration of two of my favorite movies, *Boccaccio 70* and *Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*, De Sica, 1962 and 1963). Later in life Boccaccio professed some regret for having written so impious a book, but he, like the other humanists, couldn't help but be influenced by the humanistic values and worldliness of the ancient works they loved so dearly. They were no doubt influenced by the Epicureanism in Lucretius' great poem, but it was very dangerous to openly profess any hint of infidelity. It was the time of the Inquisition. In the next generation Giordano Bruno (1548-1600 CE) openly asserted the Epicurean world view of Lucretius and was burned at the stake for his heresy. We look back on these humanists as heroes and as forerunners of modern free-thought and of the humanism that emerged in the 20th century.

In addition to the life story of Poggio and the story of the impact of Lucretius' poem (which ends with Thomas Jefferson, who had five copies of the poem in three languages), *The Swerve* in 20 pages summarizes the contents of the 7,400 lines of the poem. It also relates many fascinating details of the Renaissance world including the Catholic Church and its hierarchy. For example, there were three popes at the time, one in Rome, one in Spain, one in France. The one in Rome was corrupt and hypocritical, as was the Curia he ruled. Poggio was his apostolic secretary and had to cope with all the corruption and intrigue. A council (1415 CE)

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HUMANIST NEWS & VIEWS

Editor, Nathan Curland

Editorial Committee - Brad Bolin, Dale Handeen, Suzanne Perry

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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was called and took place in the German town of Constance to resolve the three competing claims to the papacy and to deal with heresy. Safe passage was guaranteed even to the influential heretic John Hus. However, the Roman pope sensed danger and fled. He was caught, charged, found guilty of heinous crimes, deposed, and imprisoned. Hus was burned at the stake. Apparently the council was a 'success.' Ω

Upcoming Critical Thinking Club Meetings

West Metro Chapter. Saturday, November 26th, 10:00 a.m. to noon: "Judging the Quality of Your Skepticism," by Burke Hilden. Ridge Point Apts. Meeting Room, 12800 Marion Lane W., Minnetonka.

Stillwater Chapter. Monday, November 14th, 7:00 p.m.: "Wisdom Isn't Rocket Science," by Judy Stern. Family Means Bldg., 1875 Northwestern Ave, Stillwater.

For additional information, visit:

www.meetup.com/Critical-Thinking-Club/calendar

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November 2016

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(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
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*Full time students at an accredited institution can receive a complimentary subscription

For national or international membership write to:

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Washington, DC 20009-7125
www.americanhumanist.org

Council for Secular Humanism
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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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e-mail: _____

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

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