

THE FORT WORTH HUMANIST QUARTERLY

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Briefs

Atheists protest Rowlett decision to deny their rights to an invocation

Some two dozen area atheists, including one HoFW member, participated in a relatively quiet protest led by Metroplex Atheists at the City of Rowlett City Hall, Tuesday, September 16.

The protest was called after the City repeatedly denied atheists the right to give an invocation before any City Council meeting, although Christian churches are allowed to do so.

The atheist group carried signs calling for religious freedom for all. At one point, the crowd shouted, "We will be heard. We will be heard."

A few Christians spoke with atheists outside.

"I don't know what they want," one Christian woman said as she was leaving. Atheists in the crowd attempted to explain the atheist invocation.

Inside the Council meeting during the invocation, atheists sat while everyone else stood. The mayor defended the City's actions by stating that the prayers are for established religion in the City and that Christianity is the only established religion in Rowlett.

One side of our HoFW sign referenced Amendment I of the U.S. Constitution, which states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion..."

The City is largely White Anglo Saxon Christian, but the population is growing increasingly diverse, including 6.5 percent of Asian descent and 12 percent of foreign origin, some of whom may not be Christian.

Secular community well-represented among participants in final Beer and Bible debate at the Live Oak Lounge

By Wanda Foster

Tables were removed to accommodate a packed auditorium for the third, and possibly final, Beer and Bible Consortium debate at the Live Oak Lounge on Lipscomb Street, Sunday evening, August 31st. Although Twelve48.org, a Christian organization, sponsored the debates, a large contingent of the growing, local secular community attended. No official count has been made, but estimates are that 30 to 40 percent of attendees came from atheist and agnostic communities.

Besides HoFW attendees, the debates drew people from Dallas-Fort Worth Coalition of Reason (DFWCOR), FreeThinkers of Fort Worth, Secular Sisters, Metroplex Atheists, and others such as the Dogma Debate, LLC, a Web-based organization that produces an atheist, agnostic radio show downloaded by some 2 million people in August.

The format for each session started with a 20- to 25-minute presentation by each debater followed by a moderated question-and-answer session, including rebuttals, and a short summation from each presenter. The sessions were scheduled to end at 9 p.m., but extended beyond that time, and some people mingled and listened to music on the rooftop after the debate ended.

The August 31 debate featured two debate viewpoints, "Science Points to God," presented by Allen Hainline and "Science Does Not Point to God," presented by Lydia Allan.

Science Points to God

Hainline, president of Omega Software in Dallas, previously was an engineering fellow for Raytheon between 1987 and 1999 and was also a University of Texas Continuing Engineering Studies teacher, who taught an object-oriented



A man wearing a Dogma Debate t-shirt talks with participants near him in the right corner of a packed Live Oak Lounge auditorium. The Beer and Bible consortium has held similar events in other area pubs and taverns.

software class for a masters-equivalent certification program. Between 2009 and 2010, he attended Biola University, where he participated in graduate studies in science and religion, including studies of cosmology, intelligent design, and archeology. He previously graduated Summa Cum Laude from



Allen Hainline, Christian Debater

the University of Texas at Austin, where he received a Bachelor of Physics in 1986.

Seventeen years ago, Hainline said he faced severe doubts about his religion and would not have expected to represent a Christian opinion in a debate. During that time, he said he researched intently until he decided he was over-emphasizing science and that there are "many ways to determine that God has loved us." As he researched, he also began to believe science offers overwhelming evidence for God's existence. Many scientists, he said, are not trained in philosophy and especially not in theology when they make their assumptions, which he said may lead them to "miss the evidence."

"The more I came to research science, the more I saw there was evidence for the supernatural," he said.

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Campaign promotes FairVote.org initiatives for improved voter representation

Members invited to join letter-writing, blogging campaign

HoFW members are invited to join Sam Baker and Wanda Foster in an unofficially launched, independent blogging and letter-writing campaign to increase public awareness of the need for radical improvements in American representative democracy.

The campaign supports the democracy issues of FairVote.org, an organization that conducts extensive research regarding the lack of representation in the U.S. political system. The organization also offers several solutions for improving voter representation.

The mantra in many commentaries and letters is no taxation without representation. Other key points are

- dilution of democratic representation resulting from population growth without increasing the

number of representatives

- dilution of voter power resulting from voter suppression and manipulation

Today, as it was before the American Revolution, people pay high taxes and receive little and sometimes no representation in government. During the 238 years since the Revolution, voter representation has been diluted by many factors—population growth, the effects of the Citizens United decision allowing unfettered campaign finance, lobbyists, winner-take-all single-member districts, gerrymandering (the practice of redrawing voting districts to skew outcomes toward specific parties), and the Electoral College.

FairVote.org provides substantial data on all of these factors. Sam has

tracked the FairVote.org initiative for some time, frequently pointing out that many people in this country live their whole lives without a single person in Washington to represent them.

Wanda decided to informally join the letter-writing and blogging effort in July, with the goal of leveraging our organization and other organizations to increase interest in democracy issues among activists and the general public nationwide.

Since this topic is only beginning to emerge in the public square, the primary objective is to educate people about the problem and to stir an initial, public response. While new ideas emerge through a painstaking process, the goal is to begin energizing people

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Book Review, *The God Argument: The Case against Religion and for Humanism*, by A.C. Grayling

By Morris Meador

The current book under review in the Book Club is entitled *The God Argument: The Case against Religion and for Humanism* by A.C. Grayling (2013: Bloomsbury Press).

Grayling, a well-known British philosopher and humanist, has published more than 30 books, many of them having to do with humanism. He is one of the clearest apologists

for humanist writing today. He also is a prolific speaker, and many of his addresses can be found on YouTube.

The God Argument is intended for a wide, general audience, a factor that should be taken into account by those who criticize it for lack of detail or having only 41 reference notes. Grayling’s plan for the book is well-achieved. His writing is clear, to the point, and eloquent.

The book’s organization is simple. The first half argues against religion, and the second half for humanism. Points made in these sections are well-illustrated but are painted only in broad strokes. There is no getting bogged down in too much detail, a feat achieved only by someone with mastery of the subject.

In the opening section against religion, Grayling recognizes the difficulty involved in avoiding excess detail. He says “. . . to put the matter graphically, contesting religion is like engaging in a boxing match with jelly: it is a shifting, unclear, amorphous target, which every blow displaces to a new shape.”

As Grayling makes his argument against this “amorphous target,” he uses reason, highlights the importance of empirical evidence, dissects the origins of religious thinking, and points out the many negative results of publicly expressed religion in history.

The author says he is not out to convert anyone and believes religious thinking should be kept in the private sphere. In his review of theistic arguments, Grayling is able to summarize classic arguments for the existence of a deity—arguments that have mostly been laid to rest—in a clear, easy-to-understand way.

The second section is the most exciting part of the book. In this section, Grayling answers the question: “Why cannot we have art and music, personal consolation and inspiration, a positive and humane outlook on life, without the ancient superstitions of our remote ancestors. . .” In a most enlightening fashion, he separates three debates that are often confused when speaking of humanism. These are the theism – atheism debate, the secularism debate, and the debate about the source and content of our moralities.

Grayling argues persuasively in the chapter entitled “Humanism: The Ethics of Humanity” that “in essence, humanism is the ethical outlook that says each individual is responsible for choosing his or her values and goals and working toward the latter in the light of the former, and is equally responsible for living considerately towards others, with a special view to establishing good relationships at the heart of



life, because all good lives are premised on such.”

The vision of “Humanism and the Good Life” is the heart of Grayling’s message. Humanism is an attitude toward life rather than a dogmatic religion or philosophy. The book contains many interesting topics: Chapter 1, “Clarifications;” 2, “Naming and Describing a god;” 3, “The Origins of Religion;” 4, “An Axe to the Root;” 5, “Knowledge, Belief, and Rationality;” 6, “Agnosticism, Atheism, and Proof;” 7, “Theistic Arguments;” 8, “Arguing by Design;” 9, “Arguing by Definition;” 10, “Causes, Wagers, and Morals;” and 11, “Creationism and Intelligent Design.”

In the last sentence of his book, Grayling writes: “It requires only clear eyes, reason and kindness; and with them a determination to make the world the best place it can be for the flourishing of creativity, good possibilities, and the affections of the human heart.”

Book Club meets fourth Saturday of each month

The Humanist book club formed by HoFW member Morris Meador meets the fourth Saturday of each month at 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth, 76110.

Participants select each of the books to be reviewed and discussed. At the Saturday, September 20th meeting, the Club reviewed chapters 1 – 11 of the book, *The God Argument: The Case Against Religion and For Humanism* by A.C. Grayling, which discusses the case against religions.

At the October 25th meeting, they will cover chapters 12 through 22 of the same book, which provides the case for humanism.

Everyone is invited to participate.

	October	November	December
Key HoFW Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular Meeting, Wednesday, October 8, 7 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth, TX, Speaker: TCU Professor, Dr. Michael Slattery, Climate Change Note New Time and Date: Thursday, October 23, 7 p.m., Social, to be announced: http://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Fort-Worth/#calendar HoFW Book Club, Saturday, October 25, 3 to 4:30 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth, TX 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular Meeting, Wednesday, November 12, 7 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth, TX November Social to be Announced at http://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Fort-Worth/#calendar HoFW Book Club, Saturday, November 22, 3 to 4:30 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth, TX 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular Meeting, Wednesday, December 10, 7 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth December Social to be Announced at http://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Fort-Worth/#calendar HoFW Book Club, Saturday, December 27, 3 to 4:30 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth, TX Note: December Social and Book Club events may be subject to revision. Check the Web calendar before attending.
Area Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Metroplex Atheists, Wednesday, October 2, 2014, 7 p.m., "Sexy Violence! Violent Sex! The Weird-Ass Morality of the Bible!" UTA, Lone Star Auditorium, 500 W. Nedderman Dr., Arlington, TX Fort Worth Gay Pride Parade and Street Festival, Saturday, October 4, 2014, 11:30 a.m., Corner of W. 2nd Street and Cherry Street, Fort Worth, TX State Senate District 10 Candidate's Forum, Monday, October 6, 7 p.m., 901 Page Avenue, Fort Worth, TX 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Events will be added at the following Web site as they are scheduled: http://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Fort-Worth/#calendar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Events will be added at the following Web site as they are scheduled: http://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Fort-Worth/#calendar

Letters to the Editor

All HoFW members and other readers who wish to write Letters to the Editor responding to articles that appear in this publication are invited to express their own views and provide feedback.

Our newsletter policy requires letters to reference a specific article that has appeared in one of the two most recent issues. We do not publish open letters or third-party letters.

Responders should limit their letters to 150 or 175 words and provide the writer’s e-mail address. In addition, for those who require anonymity, please provide the name you would like published with the letter.

All letters should be exclusive to *The Fort Worth Humanist Quarterly* and should not be published in any other publication.

Anyone who would like to submit a letter can do so by e-

mailing the editor at the following address: vice-chair@hofw.org.

Space is limited, so we make no guarantee that all letters will be published. Letters may be edited or shortened to fit the space.

We request that all content show a respectful tone, even when viewpoints differ from those of *The Fort Worth Humanist Quarterly* or any other party.

THE FORT WORTH HUMANIST QUARTERLY

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Opinion

Our Unrepresentative Democracy

by Sam

Almost nothing turns my stomach more than hearing a politician express—in reverent tones—his allegiance to the “grand design of the Founding Fathers,” particularly when it is apparent he doesn’t know what it was.

We were all brought up to believe the Founders were demigods. It was pounded into us by our teachers and parents. We laugh, or some of us do, when Bill Maher says, “Now when Jesus sat down to write the Constitution . . .” because the joke is just a hair’s breadth away from what we were actually taught: that the Founders were divinely inspired and that our system of government is perfect.

Combine Founder worship with complete ignorance of other democratic systems, and, voila, we have a citizenry totally incapable of seeing any defects in our government structure.

What we should have been taught is that the Founders were intelligent but fallible men. They got some things right and some things wrong. Some good ideas were poorly implemented.

The basic concept of the House of Representatives was noble. It was to be an “exact portrait of the people,” as John Adams said, with members directly elected and subject to reelection every 2 years.

The Founders’ concern for true representation of the people in the House was paramount. It exceeded their concern for free speech, freedom of religion, the right to bear arms, freedom from search and seizure, and all the other rights enumer-

ated in the Bill of Rights. How do we know this? Because the first article in the original Bill of Rights, “Article the First,” was about congressional apportionment. What teachers probably failed to tell you is that the original Bill of Rights contained 12 amendments, not 10.

This first article had three parts. Initially, there was a ceiling of 30,000 constituents for each representative. Second, after the House reached 100 members, Article the First increased the ceiling to 40,000 constituents. Finally, after the number of House members reached 200, Article the First provided that there would be a *permanent ceiling of 50,000 constituents per representative*. In other words, the Founders’ original design was to increase the number of House members in proportion to the population.

Consequently, the Founders would most certainly be aghast, absolutely horrified, that the House is now composed of a permanent number of 435 members representing an astounding number of more than 700,000 constituents each.

As one representative stated during the debate to permanently limit the number of House members, in contravention of the Founders’ design:

Members are . . . supposed to reflect the opinion and to stand for the wishes of their constituents. If we make the ratio [of constituents per Representative] too large the idea of representation becomes attenuated and less definite. The personal interest of the voter in his representative becomes less important to him, and we may lose

something of the vital strength of our representative form of government.

That is exactly what happened, isn’t it? House members no longer reflect the opinions of and no longer stand for the wishes of their constituents, and consequently many people have little interest in, or even knowledge of, their representatives. That is the reason so few people bother to vote in congressional elections.

A current congressional candidate who favors the status quo recently told me that “the advantage of our current system is that each citizen has a specific representative who . . . they can meet and talk to and complain to . . .”

Meet and talk to? What is he smoking? Since most representatives have more than 700,000 constituents, we are lucky to get a form letter in response to a suggestion or complaint. That is hardly the representation the Founders envisioned for the people.

Unfortunately, the Founders’ idea that the House should be an “exact portrait of the people” was imperfectly implemented. The only way they thought to implement the concept was by limiting the number of constituents per representative. They must have realized that opinions would be diverse even among 50,000 people. Did they really intend that the views of up to 49.9 percent of the people in a district not be represented in the House?

The Founders were products of tradition, as we all are. The single-member, winner-take-all district was part of the British tradition and unfortunately was given little if any

critical thought in the 18th century. The unfairness of awarding 100 percent of the representation to a majority as small as 50.1 percent probably failed to occur to them. Consequently, they failed to consider that a multi-seat district formed with a slightly more complicated voting system would produce a House that better represents the diverse opinions in a geographical area and that much more closely reflects their desire for the House to be “an exact portrait of the people.”

If they had thought much about single-member districts, I think the unfairness of leaving large political minorities, such as Libertarians or Greens today, with no voice in Congress would have been anathema to them because they very much believed in the marketplace of ideas. They would want minority opinions represented. If they had been able to foresee today’s two-party monopoly, they would regard it as self-evident that a Republican cannot represent a Democrat and vice versa.

The previously mentioned congressional candidate quickly abandoned his “strong fidelity to the Founders’ original design” when I told him we would now have more than 6,000 House members under the First Article in the original Bill of Rights. Suddenly, he considered the Founders idiots unable to foresee our population growth. He refused to support proportional representation or an increase in House members.

His lack of interest in allowing me and like-minded voters to elect someone in Congress who represents our views is directly proportional to my interest in his election.

HoFW Humanist Perspectives

by Adam

The secular community in Fort Worth has been fortunate to have three events this summer with atheists and Christians on the same stage to discuss the question of god. The Bible and Beer Consortium is an event hosted by a religious organization known as Twelve48.org.

Rather than having Christians discuss atheists’ beliefs, they decided to invite atheists on stage to share their beliefs. This provided a wonderful opportunity to attend lively discussions and share the thoughts of our secular community with our religious neighbors.

The third event, held on August 31, was a straightforward debate. Allen Hainline defended the claim that science points to a god, and Lydia Allan defended the claim that it does not. This discussion was full of the “god of the gaps” arguments we encounter so often. Hainline spent a lot of time on the apparent fine-tuning

of the universe, claiming that because physical constants are just right for the existence of life, there must have been a supernatural creator at work.

Allan countered with the best line of the night, conceding that life as we know it may not have existed, but asserting a lack of imagination in envisioning other forms of life that may be able to thrive in universes with different physical constants.

However, Allan’s performance was not as sharp as Hainline’s. Each speaker was allotted 25 minutes to speak. Hainline used the full amount, while Allan rushed through her speech in just 15 minutes. While Hainline had a commanding grasp of physics and cosmology, and to a lesser extent biology, Allan barely introduced topics before moving on to the next point.

The most disappointing part of the night was Allan’s off-putting demeanor and that of her fans. While

Hainline called her by name in his speech, she referred to him merely as her “opponent” at least four times. On other occasions she replied with snarky comments, eliciting cheers and applause from some in the audience. I did not observe similar jeers from the Christians in attendance.

The secular members of society frequently complain that the religious majority portrays us in a negative light. We are supposed to be amoral, rude, and generally unpleasant. Intellectual heavyweights like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens have science, logic, and persuasion on their side, but they often lack charm.

To combat negative stereotypes, we must remember to be kind and respectful when the situation warrants it. On stage, Allan fell short of my expectations.

Gathering a bunch of enlightened atheists and agnostics in one room to hurl insults and laugh at our reli-

From the Editor:

Most HoFW members favor science and rationalism over religion, magic, and dogma. Within that realm, we remain a very diverse group, however, with different thoughts, perspectives, and ways of arriving at our beliefs in a world often unfriendly to secular thought. This column presents our stories. Many of the names have been changed or limited to first names to protect the innocent.

gious neighbors is not what I want from the secular community. I prefer civil debate, reasoned argument, and educational discussions over pep rally antics. We cannot complain that we are vilified in the perceptions of our neighbors while providing examples of poor behavior.

Thank you to the Bible and Beer Consortium and Twelve48.org for organizing these events this summer. Hopefully more lively discussions will be held in the future.

Debaters disagree on definitions of science, Kalam argument, and fine tuning

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As he laid out his evidence, he said, “I don’t mean proof. We are not going to be able here to prove anything one way or the other, but I think there is stronger evidence that there is a God.

“Sometimes overzealous Christians or other religious groups will come up with examples that are not very good, so we want to speak about areas where we have education and have studied well,” he said.

He offered a wide range of scientific and creation science points. Among the key arguments he used were topics such as the Kalam cosmological argument, fine tuning, and problems with evolution and multiverse theories of physical laws.

Based on an ancient Sunni Muslim tradition, the Kalam argument, in its classic form, postulates that (1) everything that has a beginning of its existence has a cause of its existence; (2) the universe has a beginning of its existence; and (3) therefore, the universe has a cause of its existence.

Contemporarily, the Kalam argument has reemerged in other forms, including the works of William Lane Craig, a Christian theologian who reformulated the theory in 1979 in his book *Kalam Cosmological Argument*.

Hainline said that while sciences point only to naturalist or materialist reasons and observations, if we apply the Kalam argument, we could deduce that, if the universe began to exist at some point in time, then a transcendent cause or force could have brought it into existence. Using that logic, he said, the transcendent cause could be a god.

“If your cause brought about all of space, time, matter, and energy, then, by deduction, we could deduce that it has the properties that must be spaceless, timeless or changeless, immaterial..., and able to bring about the entire universe,” he said. While we cannot say this is God, he said this explanation offers some of the properties of god.

Hainline also pointed to science suggesting that “everything we know about our universe is that it has expanded every nanosecond of its existence.”

If we try to craft models of the universe where this is not true, he said we run into other serious problems, such as violating the second law of thermodynamics that the universe has to run on available energy. If the existing models are true, he said we should have reached a state of energy equilibrium by now, but we have not.

Energy equilibrium is a state in which energy reaches maximum entropy, a state in which degradation of the matter and energy in the universe reaches inert uniformity.

Next Hainline appealed to theories of fine-tuning, probabilities, and

consciousness, which he considers have left clues pointing to God’s existence. He defined fine-tuning as a technical term referencing the narrow range of constants or standard values for a range of conditions without which life would not exist.

He said these findings make it appear that the universe was “rigged for life.” If many of these fine-tuned elements did not exist, then the conditions for life would not even be present for Darwinian selection to begin, he said.

As an example, he said that the fine-tuning required to maintain ordinary stars, i.e., those unlike our sun, requires a nuclear fusion rate that “takes the level of fine tuning to 1 in 10 to the power of 38.”

Science Does Not Point to a God

The agnostic debater, Lydia Allan, has a master’s degree in neurobiology from Columbia University and a bachelor’s degree in psychology from the University of Texas at Austin. During pursuit of these degrees, she left the Christian faith and subsequently pursued two additional degrees, including a bachelor’s degree in philosophy from the University of Texas at Austin and a master’s degree in history of ideas from the University of Texas at Dallas.



Lydia Allan, Agnostic Debater

Her current scholarly interests lie in philosophies of mind and science, with specific interests in models of cognition and science policy formation during the culture wars, during which good science she says was negatively affected by bad religion. She also is listed as a staff member of Dogma Debate, LLC. Started in 2008, the organization began producing a radio podcast in 2012 and distributes content downloaded from iTunes, iHeart Radio, Spreaker, Stitcher, and other outlets.

Allan gave a much briefer presentation than Hainline. She opened by explaining that she had been a Christian for a long time before changing her mind. In her own experience with the Christian faith, she said certain passages in the Bible led her to expect God to do certain things to have a relationship with his creation. Also, she said she was struggling with depression and praying to God for answers. When no answers came, she began to think “maybe there is not a god.” So she began her own research. Results of this effort and her studies helped her determine that evidence for the existence of a god is not very good.

“I actually am an agnostic. I don’t claim any knowledge about the existence of any gods. I only claim that I don’t believe in them because of the lack of evidence of that,” she said.

The first question Allan raised was “what is science?” In response to the question, she presented a definition of science taken from the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, which states that:

The English word “science” is primarily used about the natural sciences and other fields of research that are considered to be similar to them. Hence, political economy and sociology are counted as sciences, whereas studies of literature and history are usually not. The corresponding German word, “Wissenschaft,” has a much broader meaning and includes all the academic specialties, including the humanities.

The German term has the advantage of more adequately delimiting of the type of systematic knowledge that is at stake in the conflict between science and pseudoscience. The misrepresentations of history presented by Holocaust deniers and other pseudo historians are very similar in nature to the misrepresentations of natural science promoted by creationists and homeopaths.

Allan said, “I’m going to talk about science, I’m going to talk about pseudoscience, and then I’m going to talk a bit about epistemically warranted beliefs.”

She said defining science should help clear up things that, by definition, are unnecessary for epistemological science.

“Science asks questions about the natural world,” she said, “and it has nothing to say about the supernatural. Science relies on collection of data based on observations the supernatural simply cannot be a part of.”

Allan said these views have nothing to do at all with philosophical matters in naturalism, which is a position many people take. Science, she said, is not just an atheist perspective.

“There are plenty of Christians, who actually follow science.” As an example, she mentioned Frances Collins, M.D., Ph.D., the director of the National Institutes of Health.

Allan provided a list of 19 Nobel Laureate or Nobel Prize winning physicists who are atheists.

“If physics so clearly points to an intelligent design argument, why are the world’s leading physicists so often atheists?” she asked.

As a secondary observation, Allan said comparing the morality of Christians and nonbelievers also yields no obvious difference. Both groups exhibit similar social ills,

such as divorce, crime, and abortion, she said, adding that some Christian groups such as evangelicals have higher rates of divorce and crime than nonbeliever groups.

Her statistics, not specifically quoted during the speech, show that only 0.2 percent of all prisoners in the U.S. define themselves as atheist, and a higher number of evangelical Christians get divorced than their nonreligious counterparts (Baylor University statistics). Abortion also is higher among religious people than nonreligious people, according to Guttmacher Institute research in 2000 and 2001.

Allan said science relies on inductive reason, not deductive reasoning, but pseudosciences allow deductive reasoning. She said science has a commitment to methodological naturalism rather than philosophical or ontological naturalism, including reliance on collection of empirical data gained through observation. The problem for the supernatural is that it cannot be observed or proved.

She backed up her claims with statements from Karl Popper (1902 – 1994), an internationally known, Austrian-British philosopher and professor at the London School of Economics.

Popper stated that “statements or systems of statements, in order to be ranked as scientific, must be capable of conflicting with possible or conceivable observations.”

So if a hypothesis is not falsifiable, Allan said it simply is not scientific. Allan also reviewed criteria for demarcating or distinguishing science from pseudoscience, including unwillingness to test, unrepeatable experiments, disregard of refuting information, and built-in subterfuge or testing arranged so that the theory can only be confirmed, never disconfirmed, by the outcome.

She refuted the Kalam Cosmological Argument that everything that begins to exist has a cause. She said it relies on considering the Big Bang an event, but she said by this argument, the Big Bang is not an event because the rebuttal relies on the Grand Theory of Relativity, which requires that an event takes place inside space-time. But the Grand Theory of Relativity provides that the finite universe has no space-time boundaries and hence lacks singularity and a beginning (a reference to the work of Stephen Hawking, a physicist famous for his work with black holes).

Allan concluded by saying that “her opponent will not be able to present any scientific arguments that point to any God because science does not deal with supernatural phenomena.”

She said any arguments that attempt to use science to point to something supernatural either (1) fail to understand how science works or (2) rely on well-known and criticized philosophical arguments. Nothing scientific points to God.

Strategies for improving representation rely on connection with disaffected voters

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who need additional democratic representation to solve societal issues.

FairVote.Org

The Web site, www.fairvote.org, presents FairVote's significant research of our current electoral and voting systems, which disenfranchise a broad range of U.S. citizens, encouraging voter apathy and diluting voter influence on the system.

The campaign emphasizes various key elements of current elections and voting systems that cause these issues to exist and produce gridlock in Washington, DC today:

- Explosion of the U.S. Population – During the 18th century, as our nation was forming, the system provided one representative for approximately 30,000 people. Today we have only one representative for more than 700,000 people. The campaign stance is that no single person can or does represent that many people adequately.
- Single-Member, Winner-Take-All Districts – Single-member districts are set up so that if one person wins an election with 51

percent of the vote, the losers, the other 49 percent, get no representation in our largely two-party system. The blogging campaign and FairVote.org position is that second- and third-tier voting blocks also should receive some representation.

- Two-Party System – The concern is that a nation with more than 300 million people will never be adequately represented by a closed, two-party system. In fact, we no longer have a true two-party system, but everyone is forced to try to pigeonhole their candidates into the two main parties so they can gain any influence at all. Often the less preferred choice gets elected, just on the basis of electability rather than on the basis of capability. FairVote considers preference voting systems allowing citizens to prioritize candidates, so that if the favorite received the fewest votes in the initial count, their votes are shifted to their second choice, and the votes are recounted. The position of the letter-writing and blogging campaign is that we should allow additional representatives for second- or third-

level winners, so that major voting blocks receive some representation in Congress. The gridlock in Washington currently is made possible because moderate coalitions are unable to be formed today against the backdrop of internal, Republican party power struggles between Tea Party social issues and Republican governance issues.

- Gerrymandering – States have drawn and redrawn districts into odd shapes based on the personal political affiliations of policy makers at the time rather than on the governmental needs of the people. Often this practice results in voting areas that fit the politics of existing political leaders. Gerrymandering contributes to the fact that virtually all states, including Texas, one of the most gerrymandered states in the Union, have predictable outcomes. These controlled design structures do more than the vote to determine who can actually get elected. As a result, many districts remain the same even when the popular vote statewide favors someone other than the elected party. This practice divides and conquer voters with

counter opinions and interests.

- The Electoral College – Three of our presidents were elected by the Electoral College without winning the popular vote: Rutherford Hayes, Benjamin Harrison, and, most recently, George W. Bush. The letter-writing and blogging campaigns support enactment of the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact, which will allow popular election of the president without a constitutional amendment. It has already been passed by states having more than half the electoral votes needed for it to become effective.

Strategy

The campaign is informal, but strategies have been established, among them seeking internal support from local atheist organizations, informing politicians of the problem, and leveraging the energies of organizations already energized to implement change, particularly among the under-represented and disenfranchised.

For example, Sam has directly approached candidates and area atheist organizations, and Wanda has contacted community organizations and newspapers in Ferguson, Missouri.

Minutes: Humanists of Fort Worth Monthly Meeting, Wednesday, September 10, 2014

The meeting was called to order at 7 p.m. by Chair Sam Baker. Twenty-nine members and visitors were present.

Lori Clark, principal air quality planner for the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) spoke on North Central Texas air quality, saying it had improved significantly in the past twenty years, and what North Central Texas local governments are doing to encourage use of solar power.

Larry Howe with Plano Solar Advocates delved into the numbers of how the costs of solar energy are being brought lower, including purchase price, the size of generation needed for different homes, the issue of returning excess electricity to the grid, and the whole economics of a transition to solar power. Buzz Smith, Classic Chevrolet electronic vehicle advocate and blogger, described buying his first electric car, including being very impressed when he test drove the vehicle at its speed and quietness, and summed up by saying "once you own an electric car you'll never go back to gasoline." He also had his Chevy Volt on-site to show, to allow people to ride, to test drive, and to experience an electric vehicle first hand.

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
John Fisher, Secretary

Treasurer's Report

Cynthia Williams, HoFW Treasurer, reports that we have 43 dues-paying members and 147 Meet-Up site members. Our current bank balance is \$1,077.91.

During July, the Board met to discuss and later implement changes necessary to bring our accounts into full compliance with current Internal Revenue Service regulations. Since passage of the Patriot Act, nonprofit organizations have been required to establish a financial tracking number, known as an Employer Identification Number (EIN), and to file end-of-year financial reports. Because the previous account had been opened as a personal account, it was necessary to close that account, obtain an EIN, and then reopen the new account based on the new tracking number. Without doing so, we would have been unable to access the organization's funds for any purpose.

The Board also opened the first HoFW Post Office box to serve as the organization's official mailing address.

Since member dues are our sole income source, increasing membership only improves the vitality of our organization, and it is how we fund our activities. Please share any ideas you have for increasing members or for bringing in other funds to support us.



From left, Lori Clark, NCTOG principal air quality planner, Buzz Smith, electronic vehicle advocate and salesman, Larry Howe, with Plano Solar Advocates NCTOG, and Sam, HoFW chair, show off a Chevy Volt, a plug-in car that Smith fills up only once every 2 months.

Advertising and T-shirt sales considered

Options sought for fund-raising as a nonprofit

By Wanda Foster

Any organization contributes to the community more effectively with adequate funding. Our organization operates on a shoestring budget but has the capability to raise funds in many different ways.

When the Board met in July, we discussed the possibility of becoming a 501(c)(3) nonprofit with the purpose of expanding our activities through fund-raising mechanisms. Much work remains to be done to make this happen, including updating the bylaws and coming up with various fund-raising schemes to attract funding both inside and outside of the organization.

Some of the ideas floated so far range from selling classified and display advertising in the newsletter to selling cups and T-shirts with atheist and humanist themes on the Internet. In addition, we could actively seek donations for specific purposes, yet to be defined.

While we do not expect these efforts to be hugely successful at the outset, we would like for members to think about any nonprofit purposes of interest to them and particularly any additional ideas for fund-raising.

At this time, we are no longer paying honorariums to most speakers to save money. Please contact Sam if you have any fund-raising ideas.