

THE COWTOWN HUMANIST

JUNE 2005

**TRICE/RUHS DEBATED GOD'S EXISTENCE AT MAY 11 MEETING**

TONY HERNANDEZ TO SPEAK ON OPENING YOUTHFUL MINDS

AT OUR JUNE 8 MEETING

ANN SUTHERLAND WILL TALK ABOUT COMBATING POVERTY

AT JULY 13 HoFW SESSION

ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST THE EXISTENCE OF A HIGHER BEING

*God is dead.*

-Friedrich Nietzsche

He may have been for late 19<sup>th</sup> century European intellectuals, or at least for most of them. Yet his existence or nonexistence and supposed proofs pro and con have continued to exercise American popular culture now well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At our May 11 meeting Don Ruhs and Dick Trice debated the validity of the various proofs for the existence of God after the fashion of David Hume's dialogue between Cleanthes and Philo in his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, each speaker taking turns as the believing Cleanthes and the doubting Philo as each separate argument unfolds.

What are those arguments? 1) The teleological: Its best known formulation was by St. Thomas Aquinas. This argument starts from the evidence of order or purpose in the world. It was most famously exemplified by William Paley in his *Natural Theology* (1802) with his analogy between human artifacts and the universe. If you discover a watch in the beach, you can tell by the intricacy of its design and working parts that it had a human creator. By the same token, since the universe exhibits similar characteristics of design and purpose, it too must have had a designer. Proponents of "intelligent design" use this argument to dispute a wholly naturalistic origin of man. Hume, Kant and other philosophers have pointed out the logical lapses in this argument. 2) The cosmological: Aristotle argued that since everything has a cause, there must have been a first cause. Since a series of causes cannot be infinite, the first term in the series must be uncaused and only that which is uncaused could be the source of that first cause. Logically, as Bertrand Russell among others has pointed out, this does not follow. For example, the series of proper fractions has no first term but is rather an infinite regress. 3) The ontological: Saint Anselm (d. 1117) is the best known proponent of this argument. "A Being who possesses all other

perfections is better if He exists than if He does not, from which it follows that if He does not He is not the best possible Being." [Russell] The argument, though it has a superficial plausibility, is essentially circular. 4) Eternal truths: There must be a reason for the existence of the universe and that reason must lie outside of the universe itself. Eternal truths imply the existence of a mind that apprehends such truths. But, as Russell has pointed out, a truth cannot be said to exist in a mind that apprehends it (where was it before it was apprehended?).

Baruch Spinoza (1632-77) equated God with Nature ("pantheism"). As Pascal noted, this god is a far cry from the God of Abraham, Jacob and Moses. Understandably, Spinoza was anathemized by the authorities of his Amsterdam synagogue as an atheist. In recent years pantheism has been elaborated on to make God both nature and beyond nature ("panentheism"). It'll be a while before this one makes its way from theology seminary to the pulpit. Soren Kierkegaard (1813-55), widely regarded as the founder of existentialism, had perhaps greater influence than any other 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher on contemporary theologians. Giving up on proofs of God's existence, he sees true religious experience as deriving from a "leap of faith." Fideism (faith precedes reason in the knowledge of God) has similar intellectual origins.

Are their proofs for God's nonexistence? The presence of evil in the world is the best argument against a beneficent and all-powerful God. Even Billy Graham throws up his hands when asked to explain God's tolerance of evil. A lot of ink has been spilled to explain last December's tsunami. [I have seen one report claiming that Christians in the Aceh area of Indonesia were spared but not their Muslim brothers. Is that anyone's idea of God's goodness? Apparently so, since it is making the rounds of Christian fundamentalists.] One can adopt the view of the Gnostics who saw the creative force as evil (Yale Shakespeare scholar Alan Bloom, for example) but, though perhaps intellectually satisfying to some, it is too bleak a theology for the many. Moral evil is explained by some theologians as the consequence of free will, a good that more than compensates for the evil suffered, though perhaps not in the eyes of those suffering a surplus of the latter. (The best of all possible worlds, in Leibnitz's metaphysics. If it is, what are the others like? asked Candide.) Many do not find this a terribly persuasive argument. Up to a point, perhaps, but surely if a theistic God elects to answer prayers for petty personal advantages, he would not fail to intervene against the most ghastly crimes. Many Jews lost their faith as a consequence of the Holocaust.

Where do we come down on this issue? Case unproven. On the other hand, God's existence cannot be disproved either. Perhaps agnosticism is the most prudent course.

We had 31 attendees including several first time comers. The vigorous debate that ensued following Dick's and Don's presentation evidenced a high degree of satisfaction with the night's entertainment.

### **HoFW NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**JUNE MEETING:** this month's meeting will be held on Wednesday, June 8, 7:00 p.m., at Friends of the Fort Worth Public Library bookstore, 5332 Trail Lake Drive, located in the Wedgworth shopping center just off Wedgmont Circle. From I-20 take Granbury Road south to Wedgmont Circle. Make a left-turn onto North Wedgmont Circle. You will see a CITGO station on your left. Then turn left again into the Wedgworth shopping center.

We will lead off the meeting with a discussion for a possible revival of our Granbury Road trash pick-up. Do we have a volunteer to organize a quarterly pick-up (Saturday morning) along an approximately one mile stretch of this busy corridor (not so busy early Saturday mornings)? Please step forth and be heard at our June meeting. If you have a better idea for community service, let us know about it.

**JUNE SPEAKER:** Westside Unitarian Universalist Church education director Tony Hernandez will speak on "The Challenge of Teaching our Youth to Become Open Minded Thinkers" at our June 8 meeting. At a time when teachers are under increasing pressure to stick to traditional teaching materials and to stifle creativity, this is a particularly important topic for us all to ponder. Tony has a B.A. degree in English with a minor in Early Childhood Education from the Metropolitan State College of Denver. He teaches the second grade at Frasier Elementary School, Burleson. Father of three daughters and grandfather of three children with one more on the way, he recently celebrated 16 years with his life partner, Tim Isaaks.

**PRE-MEETING DINNER:** Our pre-meeting dinner will be held at Jason's Deli on Over Ridge Road (near Costco's). Turn right off S. Hulen (going south) and continue a couple of blocks. Jason's will be on your right. Dinner time: 5:30 p.m.

**JULY SPEAKER:** Ann Sutherland will speak on Combating Poverty at our July 13 meeting.

**REMINDERS:** Dues are owing since March (if you haven't already paid): \$18 for individual memberships, \$24 for persons receiving the Newsletter by regular mail; \$24 for couples; \$30 for couples receiving the Newsletter by regular mail.

Please remember to bring a can of food for the needy. Dolores will see that donations get to Westside Unitarian Universalist Church for distribution.

If you have marketable books on your overloaded library shelves (as our mine), our hosts will be happy to accept them.

**CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEWSLETTER:** Our thanks go out to Sandra Langley and John Johnson for their submissions to this month's Newsletter. Contributions and suggestions for improvements are always welcome.

### **MINUTES OF THE MAY 11 BOARD MEETING:**

The meeting was called to order by the Chairman, Don Ruhs, at Friends of the Fort Worth Public Library Book Store.

Don invited our visitors, of which there were several, to introduce themselves. We welcomed the visitors and invited them to return for future meetings.

Treasurer Dolores Ruhs gave the treasurer's report. The balance in the treasury is \$890.19.

Meetings: Don announced the speakers for the next two meetings.

Reed Bilz moved that we donate \$100.00 to the Friends of the Library. The motion was seconded and carried.

Elections: The following slate of officers for the next year were elected by acclamation:

Don Ruhs, Chairman; Jim Cheatham, Vice-Chairman and Newsletter Editor; Reed Bilz, Secretary; Dolores Ruhs, Treasurer; Jeff Rodriguez, Program Chair; Russell Elleven, Webmaster.

### **YOUR OFFICERS AND HOW TO REACH THEM**

Chairman: Don Ruhs, 1036 Hill Top Pass, Benbrook, 76126-3848; 817-249-1829; ruhsd@sbcglobal.net

Vice Chair & Newsletter Editor: Jim Cheatham, 1582 CR 2730, Glen Rose, 76043; 254-797-0277

Treasurer: Dolores Ruhs (address same as Don Ruhs)

Immediate Past Chair & Webmaster: Russell Elleven, 6120 Comfort Dr., Fort Worth, 78132; 817-370-2171; infohofw.org

Program Director: Jeff Rodriguez, 4901 Bryce Ave. #5, Fort Worth 76102; 817-732-4235; [schnooks61@netzero.com](mailto:schnooks61@netzero.com).

## LEGAL MATTERS

### SUPREME COURT ACCEPTS NEW HAMPSHIRE ABORTION CASE

For the first time in five years the Supreme Court has agreed to hear a state appeal (New Hampshire) seeking to reinstate a law requiring parental notification in cases involving minors. This may be a sign that the Court will take a more lenient view toward state government measures to limit access to abortion procedures. (AP)

### ACLU SUES HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES OVER ABSTINENCE AID

The ACLU filed suit May 16 against the Department of Health and Human Services, accusing the Bush Administration of spending federal tax dollars on abstinence education programs that promote Christianity. The lawsuit alleges that the program and educational materials distributed by Silver Ring Thing are "permeated with religion" and use "taxpayer dollars" to promote religious content, instruction and indoctrination. Silver Ring Thing, also known as John Guest Evangelistic Team, describes its mission as "evangelistic ministry" with an emphasis on "evangelistic crusade planning," according to IRS filings. (WP)

### CONNECTICUT'S BRAVE STEP INTO THE FUTURE

In May Connecticut's legislature—not its judges—legalized civil unions, granting gay couples "the same tax advantages, family privileges, hospital visitation rights, and other benefits reserved for heterosexual couples." The state's Republican governor insisted that the civil union law specify that marriage was reserved for heterosexual couples, but as one conservative legislator complained, "It's hard to believe that this train, as it rolls down the tracks, is going to stop at this station." It won't. Think back to the 1950s, when courts and Northern legislators began to recognize the rights of black people, triggering angry and often violent reaction in the South. At the time, white Baptist preachers insisted that integration was sinful and cited biblical passages to back up their bigotry. "Now we hear the same, Scripture-based attacks on gay marriage." But after they cite "traditional religious values," the forces of reaction can offer no rational reason for denying a whole group of Americans the right to wed the person they love. It may take years or even decades, but other states will eventually follow Connecticut in legalizing civil unions, and finally, gay marriage. The train of equal rights has left the station and isn't going to stop halfway. (Robert Scheer, *The Nation*.)

### TOP PSYCHIATRIC GROUP URGES MAKING GAY MARRIAGE LEGAL

Representatives of the nation's top psychological group approved a statement May 22 urging legal recognition of same-sex marriage. If approved by the association's directors in July, the measure would make the American Psychiatric Association the first major medical group to take such a stance. The statement supports same-sex marriage "in the interest of maintaining and promoting mental health." It follows a similar measure by the American Psychological Association last year, a little more than three decades after the group removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders. (WP)

#### SPANISH READY FOR GAY MARRIAGE

Spanish society is ready for gay marriage, even if the church isn't. When Parliament passed a bill that opened up the institution of marriage to homosexual couples, there was a predictable outcry from religious conservatives. But the dissent is no stronger than was "the opposition to divorce in its day, and now all of society accepts divorce as normal." We can expect the same evolution here. One could argue, as some conservative parties are now doing, that the legislature should have had a longer political debate on the issue. Perhaps a drawn-out discussion would have been more politically palatable, but the end result would have been the same. "Spanish society has already made up its mind"; poll after poll shows a strong majority in favor of extending full legal rights to homosexual couples. The Catholic Church is free to condemn the law—in fact, the new pope already has. And the church can certainly refuse gays its religious blessing. But it can have no say in marriage as a civil contract. With this new law, Spain demonstrates once and for all that "a religious belief is not a valid legal argument." (*El Pais*, Madrid, editorial)

#### EVOLUTION ON TRIAL

The Kansas Board of Education is proposing new standards requiring teachers to challenge the theory of evolution in the state's public schools. Scientists boycotted three days of hearings on the changes, accusing the board of holding a "kangaroo court" that was rigged against Darwin's theory of how life on Earth had evolved. A string of experts testified in support of a competing theory, known as intelligent design, that holds that the complexities of the universe must have been sketched out by a supernatural creator. If the board adopts the new standards, as expected, Kansas would become the second state, after Ohio, mandating that students be taught that there is controversy over evolution. Alabama and Georgia are considering similar measures. (AP)

#### INTELLIGENT DESIGN: A HUGE ADMISSION OF DEFEAT?

We evolutionists have nothing to be scared of. Intelligent-design is not a "tarted up version of creationism." It's a huge admission of defeat. Intelligent-design

advocates have abandoned the "biblical literalism" of their forbears and have accepted the scientific method, "not authority, as the ultimate test." They now acknowledge, for instance, that the Bible is wrong about the age of the Earth, and that it's billions of years old. They even concede that mutation and evolution occur. All the intelligent-design crowd has left are some gaps in the evolutionary record, and hypothesis that these gaps can't be explained without God. Instead of "sneering," scientists should welcome the ID advocates' invitation to subject both theories to rigorous review. Such concessions, "sincere or not," show that creationists "aren't threatening us, they're becoming us." (William Saletan, Slate.com)

#### SMITHSONIAN TO SCREEN DISCOVERY INSTITUTE ID PROPAGANDA

The Seattle-based Discovery Institute, a group propagating "intelligent design", is announcing on its Web site that it and the director of the museum "are happy to announce the national premiere and private opening reception" on June 23 for the movie, "The Privileged Planet: The Search for Purpose in the Universe." The Discovery Institute is paying the Smithsonian \$16,000 for the "privilege." A 'Smithsonian spokesman denied it endorses the video or the contents of the video. (NYT)

In a subsequent twist, the Smithsonian decided sponsorship of the video was not consistent with its scientific mission. The showing of the video, however, will go forward though the \$16,000 fee will not be paid. (WP)

In still another odd twist to this soap opera, the Museum has acknowledged that its policy is not to accept religious or political material for showing at the Museum. "The Museum was naïve or negligent not recognize [the religious intent of the Discovery Institute's film], and more naïve not to anticipate the backlash. ...This is precisely how the intelligent design movement has gotten as far as it has: by advocating outwardly inoffensive ideas in ever more prestigious places, thereby giving the movement scientific validity." [Or perhaps better expressed, "the patina of scientific validity." There's probably more to this story than we've yet been told.] (WP editorial)

#### OPPONENTS OF STEM-CELL RESEARCH MAY RUE THEIR STAND YET

The stem-cell debate has been linked to abortion, as if depriving science of the use of these cells somehow extends "the culture of life." But here the "pro-life" position should argue for therapeutic research. Under Bush's stem-cell policy, 400,000 surplus blastocysts at fertility clinics are eventually thrown in the trash instead of a few thousand being used to enhance life. To be intellectually coherent, Bush would have to shut down all in vitro clinics, depriving millions of infertile couples of the chance for a child. Fat chance. ....The next battle is in the

Senate, where Sen. Sam Brownback (R-KA) now says he will filibuster the stem-cell bill. This will split the GOP, with stem-cell supporter Orrin Hatch confident he has the 15 GOP votes (along with 45 Democrats') necessary to break the filibuster and get it passed. ...Unless there's another war, stem cells will become one of the defining issues of the 2006 campaign. Look for smart Democrats to run ads with relatives of the afflicted ("My sister has Parkinson's") pointing out that Congressman X is so extreme, he voted against a bill supported by many Republicans to begin curing these diseases. This will inevitably lead to backpedaling and compromise and the victory of a broad-based "pro-cure movement" that may help save not just my life, but your cousin's or your mother's or your own. (Jonathan Alter, *Newsweek*)

## **CHURCH & STATE**

### **PERRY TO WAGE RE-ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN CHURCHES**

Governor Rick Perry is coming to Tarrant County's Calvary Cathedral on June 5. Concurrently he will be signing two bills: one restricting abortion and the other setting a vote on a definition-of-marriage constitutional amendment. "There is no question that the Republican Party, nationally and in Texas, is the home of the Protestant fundamentalists and Christian conservatives. *But*, the idea of taking bills passed in the Legislature into a church to sign them into law, instead of in the Texas Capitol or the governor's office, seems unusually political. And unusually inflammatory," commented SMU political science professor Cal Jillson. [With Frist, Brownback and Santorum sniffing around the White House porticos and Jeff waiting somewhere in the wings, who is the Lord's most faithful servant promises to be the dominant theme in the 2006 Republican primaries.] (Bud Kennedy, FWST)

### **PROSELYTIZING AT COLORADO SPRINGS**

Born-again Christians have become so aggressive in proselytizing at the U.S. Air Force Academy that 56 cadets have filed formal harassment complaints. In response, the academy has begun a course called "Respecting the Spiritual Values of All People," though some evangelical cadets are questioning the need to take it. "They have said, 'We are in the majority, why do we have to do this?'" said Lt. Col. Edie Disler, who helps run the program. (LAT)

The origin of the tempest at the Air Force Academy goes back to July 2004 when Mikey Weinstein, an attorney/advisor in the White House during the Reagan presidency, visited his son cadet Curtis Weinstein and was informed that Curtis had been called a [expletive] Jew, and accused of killing Jesus by a number of cadets. Mikey Weinstein's investigation uncovered an atmosphere at the Academy saturated with evangelical Christianity. Chaplains and other top military



leaders at the institution, he said, exhorted cadets to bring their peers to faith in Jesus. Cadets who embraced evangelical beliefs received preferential treatment, and cadets of other faiths or none found that their perspectives were not respected.

Weinstein, an Americans United member, informed AU, which then undertook its own investigation. It found:

--Proselytism by faculty members and staff. Cadets relayed accounts of professors, who, on the first day of class, announced that they were born-again Christians and urged the cadets to adopt the same religious beliefs.

--Instances of upper-class cadets harassing junior cadets on the basis of religion or employing religious slurs.

--A mass e-mail to cadets from Academy Commandant of Cadets Brig. Gen. Johnny Weida, which highlighted the National Day of Prayer and urged cadets to participate.

--The posting of a banner reading "I am a Christian first and last. I am a member of Team Jesus Christ" by football coach Fisher De Berry in the locker room used by the Academy football team.

--The practice of marching cadets who decline to attend chapel services after dinner back to their dorms in a ritual called the "heathen flight."

--Academy policies that permit evangelical Christian cadets to leave Academy grounds to attend religious meetings offsite but deny that same right to non-religious cadets who want to attend freethought meetings.

--Numerous examples of official Academy events opening with Christian prayers.

Since lodging the protest, Americans United has received dozens of e-mail messages from career and former military officers and enlisted men and women, complaining of similar instances mixing church and state in the military. One Jewish officer noted, "I have learned to 'accept' Christian proselytizing in any number of forms. It has certainly gotten worse in my opinion with the overtaking of the Republican Party by evangelical Christians and related politico-religious groups." (C&S)

#### SOUTHERN BAPTISTS DROP SUPPORT OF CHURCH ELECTIONEERING BILL

U.S. Rep. Walter Jones' (Rep.-N.C.) effort to allow churches to endorse candidates while keeping their tax exemption has suffered a setback with the

withdrawal of support from an influential backer. Richard Land, head of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, announced in late April that the denominational agency would no longer support the latest version of the Jones' bill. According to an article from Baptist Press News, the revised measure increases "the likelihood of government intervention in churches and other religious bodies." (C&S)

#### BILL TO MAKE 'FAITH-BASED' OUTREACH PERMANENT

U.S. Rep. Mark Green (R-Wisc.) has introduced a bill to make faith-based centers in 10 federal agencies permanent. Bush used executive orders to establish the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and faith-based outreach offices in ten departments and agencies. Green's press secretary told The Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy that the bill "gives assurance" that the faith-based offices "will stay in place after Bush leaves office." The bill also mandates that a director will be appointed to the office and lays out a long list of "responsibilities," including working "to eliminate improper Federal barriers so as to allow faith-based and community entities to compete for Federal funding." (C&S)

#### BENEDICK XVI: A NEW FUNDAMENTALIST POPE?

Many liberal Roman Catholics are astonished by [Cardinal] Ratzinger's election (he is really the Stalin of the papacy, whose key role is to enforce its bureaucratic rules and dogmas). The Vatican's propaganda apparatus is attempting to soften his image as the Grand Inquisitor, given widespread criticism of his election. Will he change? Alas, if the Church of Benedict XVI continues to defend the fundamentalism that it has in the past two decades, what a tragedy this would be for the modern world—given the growth of Protestant fundamentalists, who insist that only they will be saved by the rapture, and the fundamentalists of militant Islam who insist that only devout Muslims will be welcomed in Heaven. What sanctimonious nerve on the part of all fundamentalists—whether Roman Catholic, Protestant, or Muslim—to condemn everyone else to hell except their own brand of True Believers.

President George W. Bush visited Cardinal Ratzinger at Vatican City in June 2004, seeking support for his presidential candidacy. Ratzinger a week later wrote a letter to U.S. bishops declaring that Catholic politicians who are pro-abortion should be denied communion. (The hierarchy later waffled.) But Ratzinger had allied the Vatican with the American right wing.

We are facing a clear and present danger to our liberties in the United States by militant religionists. We need to forthrightly defend secularism.

The preamble to the Constitution states: "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America." Thus, it derives its powers and liberties from the people, not from some divine dispensation granted by a foreign theological potentate speaking "in the name of God."

Its Article VII states, "...no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States." The First Amendment states that "Congress shall make no law regarding an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." Thus, the Constitution of the United States is a secular document. Ratzinger's attack on secularization is an attack on the American system of government. (Paul Kurtz, *Free Inquiry*)

## **RELIGION IN THE NEWS**

### THE EVOLUTION OF RELIGIOUS ETHICS

The first order Moses gave after descending from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments was for the execution of those who had fallen into sin while he was gone: "And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. And Moses said, 'Today you have ordained yourselves for the service of the Lord...'" (Exodus 32: 26-29). And when Yahweh delivered the land of Hesbon to the Hebrews, they "utterly destroyed every city, men, women, and children; [they] left none remaining" (Deuteronomy 3.3-7). When his commanders spared the women and children of the Medianites, Moses rebuked them: " Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man by lying with him. But all the young girls who have not known man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves (Numbers 30:17-19). [Up until fairly recent times the Bedouins of the Arabian desert were following pretty much the same precepts.]

Lacking any political power the early Christians had to fall back on eternal punishments to keep the faithful in line, often citing Jesus' parable of the sheep and goats in which the "sheep" are the blessed who "inherit the kingdom" while the goats are the "cursed" who have earned "eternal fire" (Matthew 25:32-41).

The Koran mandates death to apostates and holds out the promise of eternal bliss to Jihadists defending the faith.

For the evolutionist all this is what is to be expected, says John Teehan , associate professor of philosophy at Hofstra University in the June/July 2005 issue of *Free Inquiry*. Morality and ethical codes specified how members of the

in-group were to be treated in order to maintain the tribe's or religious sect's cohesiveness. Outsiders were as often as not a threat to group existence and a different code of treatment pertained to them. He concludes: "The role of violence in religion is a vital issue. People puzzle over the apparently paradoxical morality found in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Proponents characterize these religions as religions of peace and then struggle to explain evidence to the contrary. From an evolutionary perspective, there is no paradox, it is just what is to be expected. Morality evolves as a means of fostering pre-social in-group behavior and of defining and defending the boundaries of that group. Religion, as an expression and extension of that morality, embodies these goals. Despite universalistic inspirations often invoked by religious moralities, their histories and other texts belie their evolutionary origins."

Worth a read in an issue featuring several other very good articles.

### **TOP OF THE NEWS**

#### **AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL RIPS U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD**

An unfortunate comparison made with the USSR's Gulag shifted media attention away from the substance of AI's charges of U.S. government wrongdoing at Guantanamo Bay and elsewhere onto the fairness of the analogy. Some administration critics as well as administration spokesmen lamented AI's lack of proportion. Below are some of the points the Amnesty report made:

- More than 500 detainees of around 35 different nationalities continue to be held at Guantanamo Bay without charges or trial.

- Some detainees were minors when captured.

- An Administration Review Board (ARB) set up by the U.S. to determine if detainees were "enemy combatants" or not denied detainees access to lawyers and allowed the use of "secret evidence" against them.

- Evidence extracted under torture is admissible before the ARB.

- The government refuses to release names or precise numbers, fueling fears that they can be transferred or killed without even appearing in official records.

- More than 50,000 people have been detained by the U.S. in Afghanistan and Iraq and routinely denied access to lawyers, families and Red Cross.

- At Abu Ghraib a U.S. Army investigation showed numerous instances of sadistic, blatant and wanton criminal abuses.

--Government memos show numerous contraventions of Geneva agreements regarding the use of torture.

--A U.S. Army major told a Senate committee about 100 "ghost" detainees the whereabouts of whom is unknown.

--U.S. authorities recorded more than 300 cases of alleged abuse during 2004.

--More than 100 detainees are known to have died in custody so far.

For the complete report go to [www.ihs.edu](http://www.ihs.edu).

#### THE OUTING OF JIM WEST; MORE TO COME?

Gay-bashing former Washington state legislator and current Spokane mayor Jim West was "outed" recently by an investigator posing as a teenager on the internet for the Spokesman-Review. Should the newspaper have entrapped the mayor like this. "Any time a news organization tries to tell its public the truth while engaging in deception to obtain it, it poses a risk to the credibility of its report," says Aly Colon, an ethics expert with the Poynter Institute, a school for journalists. The revelations about him may boost a "gay civil rights" measure that was narrowly defeated in the state legislature this past April but will probably come up for a vote again next year. There may be wider ripples, too. Gay conservatives are mumbling of undisclosed homosexuals in the Republican hierarchy. An equivalent sting in Washington, DC (remember Marion Barry smoking crack?) might find some unexpectedly famous names in Mr. West's virtual hunting grounds. (*Economist*)

#### LOC WITHDRAWS JOB OFFER FOLLOWING GENDER CHANGE

The job candidate interviewing to be a terrorism research analyst at the Library of Congress seemed to have exceptional qualifications: a 25-year Army veteran, former Special Forces commander who spent a career hunting terrorists and who received several combat medals, and recipient of two master degrees. He had personally briefed the vice president, the defense secretary and the Joint Chiefs of Staff on sensitive operations. The interviews and salary talks went well for David Shroer. A job offer followed and was accepted. Then the new employee brought up one last item: Once work began, the name would be Diane, not David. The job offer was rescinded the next day. After a 16-year marriage and career as an Army Ranger in which he made 450 parachute jumps, Shroer decided, after counseling, to undertake a gender change. Now he is suing the Library as Diane Shroer, not as Jane Doe. He decided not to go back in the closet. (WP)

## THE DOWNSIDE OF GLOBALIZATION

The danger of being obliterated was greater during the cold war. But U.S. vulnerability across the board has actually increased because of globalization. U.S. borders are now essentially porous. They can be crossed by terrorists, by viruses—computer or physical--by bombs rather than tourists. ...U.S. leadership requires followship. As strong as we are, we simply lack the resources to do it all. You need virtually all the countries in the world cooperating, or the terrorists, the drug merchants, or others, will find the soft spots and exploit them to everyone's disadvantage. (Richard Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations and director of policy planning at the State Department until June 2003, in a *Newsweek* interview on the occasion of the publication of his book *The Opportunity*, which criticizes the Bush administration for alienating the rest of the world.)

## A GIFT TO THE GUN INDUSTRY

The Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act, which the House Judiciary Committee approved last week, is not a measured piece of legislation. Its purpose is to blast out of court current and future lawsuits against firearms manufacturers and dealers for the carnage wrought with their products. This bill is no tort law reform. Rather, it's a gimme for the gun industry, almost a blanket shield against even justified lawsuits. ...not all of the lawsuits are frivolous or deserve to be thrown out without examination. What about a gun dealer who recklessly sells 100 handguns to an obvious straw buyer who then sells them to criminals who kill people? Should the courts not even entertain a negligence claim? What about a lawsuit against a manufacturer of firearms that are not useful for any legal purpose? The bill has certain exemptions from its liability protection, but they are so narrow as to be almost useless in ensuring that reasonable claims can proceed. ...Civil justice reform measures should make the rules of litigation fairer and more rational. This bill, which would create a unique exemption for gun makers and dealers from the normal rules of liability, does just the opposite. (WP editorial)

## WHAT THE LEGE DID AND DIDN'T DO: A FEW CHEERS AND SOME JEERS

Well, they balanced a \$139 billion budget and passed some notable bills on such diverse issues as asbestos lawsuits, probation and parole reform, teachers' retirement and workers' compensation. But they failed to reform the state's system for financing public education, which lawmakers at the beginning of the session said was their top priority. It was the third time since 2003 that they've failed to do so and so it will get thrown into the laps of the Supreme Court justices yet again. [Now here's a case where Tom Delay has a legitimate beef about lawmakers ceding their responsibilities to the courts.]

Further to their discredit, House lawmakers approved a proposal to bar gay men and women from taking in foster children. The Senate sensibly balked. But both Houses obtained the two-thirds vote needed to send an unnecessary, though no doubt popular, constitutional amendment to the voters that would ban gay marriage, despite a state law that already bans it and warnings that it could have unintended side effects elsewhere, such as on common law marriages between heterosexuals.

For the best and most complete summary I have seen on the lege's session, go to [www.daniels@baylorhealth.edu](mailto:www.daniels@baylorhealth.edu).

### **BOOK CORNER**

*Wilderness and the American Mind*, by Roderick Frederick Nash. Fourth Edition, Yale University Press.

Here's a beautifully written, fun read for all who enjoy nature untouched by the hand of man. The American experience of "wilderness" starts in the Old Testament with the exclusion of the first couple from Paradise. Throughout the Bible wilderness is represented as a forbidding place where possible to be turned into a land of "milk and honey." However, the biblical view is not altogether monochrome. It was also seen as a place for spiritual renewal. John the Baptist, for example, went into the wilderness to seek spiritual growth.

When John Winthrop sought reasons for having left England for the wilderness, he argued why "suffer a whole Continent...to lie waste without any improvement." For the next 200 years, a strictly utilitarian philosophy pretty well dominated Americans' view of nature: it was there to serve man. Only gradually did a more nuanced view begin to influence American thought, primarily that of New England intellectuals such as Thoreau and Emerson. (It was to be along time before men of the West were to concede that the wilderness had value for its own sake.) Later, men such John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club, were to mount a passionate defense of wilderness that was to influence most decisively Theodore Roosevelt. 20<sup>th</sup> century voices such as Aldo Leopold carried the cause forward in the federal government and the halls of Congress resulting in legislation establishing national parks and wilderness areas.

Today the threat to the remaining wilderness is two-fold: 1) being loved too much (wilderness necessarily implies a relative absence of human contact; 2) a new utilitarianism in Washington ready to sacrifice what remains of wilderness to the oil and timber industries. Will Americans sacrifice a unique part of their heritage for a few cents off on each gallon of gasoline for their gas-guzzlers and for somewhat cheaper homes and home furnishings?

**That's it for this month's *Cowtown Newsletter***