



**June**

**2011**

**The Humanists of Ft Worth meet at the Westside Unitarian building (901 Page Ave Ft Worth) on the 2nd Wednesday of each month at 7 PM**



## **From The Chair**

This organizational meeting is for the new officers to speak with the group as a whole.

We will discuss ideas for the future of the group.

We will set the chairs in the room in a semi-circle for better group discussion.

### **Agenda:**

Open Meeting  
Recognize Secretary  
Minutes of last meeting  
Minutes of last board meeting

Recognize Treasurer  
Treasury report  
Recognize Visitor and New members  
Humanist Quotes  
Skit (If we can find the people\time)  
Topics for meeting

### **Introduce new officers:**

Each officers may speak for a few minutes  
Discussion of roles in the group  
Meeting\Group Facilitators Volunteers  
Setup and Break down  
Snack and Coffee  
Nominating committee for officers

Balance of agenda to be outlined by chair

The editor as spokesman for the entire group wishes to welcome Gene Gwin as new chair and thank Dick Trice for his many years of service to the organization

## **Humanists Denied Advertising Space, File First Amendment Suit** [American Humanist.org](http://AmericanHumanist.org)

(Washington D.C., June 1, 2011) Today the Appignani Humanist Legal Center filed a lawsuit on behalf of the United Coalition of Reason (UnitedCoR) in response to an Arkansas transit organization's refusal to lease advertising space on account of the proposed ad's atheist and humanist content, violating of the Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment.

"Governmental entities cannot discriminate among speakers on the basis of their viewpoint when operating a public forum they have opened for speech, such as public transit advertising space," said Bill Burgess, attorney and legal coordinator of the American Humanist Association's legal arm, the Appignani Humanist Legal Center. "The government likewise cannot impose burdensome conditions on speech it deems 'controversial,' as the transit authority did in this instance by insisting that the Coalition, unlike other advertisers, post a damage deposit because the authority said it feared the ads would be destroyed by vandals. The First Amendment does not permit a heckler's veto."

The ad, which reads, "Are you good without God? Millions are," was rejected by the Central Arkansas Transit Authority (CATA) and On the Move Advertising, Inc., despite the facts that CATA holds no clear policy on ad content, and has displayed religious and political themed advertisements in the past.

"Being visible is important for us," said Fred Edwards, executive director for the United Coalition of Reason, "because atheists and agnostics in our society often don't know very many people of like mind. Furthermore, if traditionally religious people can be open about their views, why shouldn't we be open about ours?"

The United Coalition of Reason is a nonprofit national organization that helps local nontheistic groups work together to achieve higher visibility, gain more members, and have a greater impact in their local areas. This goal is achieved by assisting local groups in the "community of reason" to cooperate with each other.

"The government has no rightful role in determining whether speech that it disfavors should be heard," concluded Burgess. "Freedom of speech is guaranteed to all Americans, secular and religious alike. We will not stand silent in the face of censorship motivated by religion."

## Humanists Mourn Death of Jack Kevorkian, Advocate for Death with Dignity

(June 3, 2010, Washington D.C.) Today, leadership at the American Humanist Association mourned the death of Dr. Jack Kevorkian, a physician, humanitarian, and brazen advocate for end-of-life choice. [Dr. Kevorkian was given the Humanist Hero Award](#) by the American Humanist Association in 1994. The American Humanist Association became one of the first national organizations to support end of life choices in a [1974 statement](#).



“Dr. Kevorkian led the charge for the right of those who wanted the freedom to end their suffering,” said Roy Speckhardt, executive director of the American Humanist Association. “His unwavering determination in the face of protest, and even legal repercussions, was a testament to his strong conviction and compassion.”

Dr. Kevorkian spent much his career advocating for the legalization of euthanasia. With a strong sense of ethics, Kevorkian refused 97 percent of assisted suicide requests received, reserving his services for the terminally ill and suffering.

“I am not a hero, either—by my definition anyway,” said Dr. Kevorkian at the 1994 American Humanist Association annual conference. “To me, anyone who does what should be done is not a hero. Heroes to me are very, very rare. And I still feel that I’m only doing what I, as a physician, should do... That doesn’t mean I’m more compassionate than anyone else, but there is one thing I am that many are not, and that’s honest.”

Though successfully challenging the law on numerous prior occasions, Dr. Kevorkian was charged with second degree murder for his efforts, and served 9 years in jail. He was paroled in 2007, last year Al Pacino played his role in the film *You Don't Know Jack*, [reviewed in the Humanist magazine](#), and he continued to lobby for euthanasia’s legalization until his death at the age of 83.

“Dr. Kevorkian’s contributions to medicine and humanity are great,” concluded Speckhardt. “He gave energy to the ‘death with dignity’ movement and brought this important civil liberties issue to the forefront. History will thank him for that.”

“Besides, what is ethics?” Kevorkian continued in his 1994 Humanist Hero speech. “Can you define it? My definition is simple: ethics is saying and doing what is right at the time...doing the right thing changes with time.”

The American Humanist Association ([www.americanhumanist.org](http://www.americanhumanist.org)) advocates for the rights and viewpoints of humanists. Founded in 1941 and headquartered in Washington, D.C., its work is extended through more than 100 local chapters and affiliates across America.

## We Are Not Denmark, But Keep Working on it

By Abby Zimit

A new study [finds](#) the 10 happiest nations in the world have long-term economic strength that supports good schools, jobs, social services, health care, environmental protection and a sane work/life balance. The list does not include America. **What makes people happy? The question, which has been debated by philosophers for centuries, now is being tackled by international bureaucrats and the results are interesting, to say the least.**

24/7 Wall St. analyzed the new OECD Better Life Index to objectively determine the happiest countries in the world. The Index is based on 11 measurements of quality of life including housing, income, jobs, community, [education](#), the environment, health, work-life balance, and life satisfaction. We made “life satisfaction” the cornerstone of our index because it is as good a proxy for “happiness” as the survey provides. We then compared “life satisfaction” scores to the other measurements to find those economic and socio-political realities that had the highest and lowest correlation to happiness.

Old, stable nations of northern Europe took five of the top 10 spots on our list. These include Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway, and Denmark. Switzerland is also on the list and has many characteristics in common with the Scandinavian countries. The resource-rich, English-speaking countries of Australia and Canada made the cut as well.



Note: the secular countries are by far the happiest . . . Ed

**Nicholas Kristof NY Times Columnist Issued the following quiz, which confirms the lack of biblical knowledge held by most Christians**



**Let's see how well Humanists can fare**

**1. The Bible's position on abortion is**

- a. Never mentioned.
- b. To forbid it along with all forms of artificial birth control.
- c. Condemnatory, except to save the life of the mother.

**2. The Bible suggests "marriage" is:**

- a. The lifelong union of one man and one woman.
- b. The union of one man and up to 700 wives.
- c. Often undesirable, because it distracts from service to the Lord.

**3. The Bible says of homosexuality:**

- a. Leviticus describes male sexual pairing as an abomination.
- b. A lesbian should be stoned at her father's doorstep.
- c. There's plenty of ambiguity and no indication of physical intimacy, but some readers point to Ruth and Naomi's love as suspiciously close, or to King David declaring to Jonathan: "Your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." (II Samuel 1:23-26)

**4. In the Bible, erotic writing is:**

- a. Forbidden by Deuteronomy as "adultery of the heart."
- b. Exemplified by "Song of Songs," which celebrates sex for its own sake.
- c. Unmentioned.

**5. Jesus says that divorce is permitted:**

- a. Only after counseling and trial separation.
- b. Never.
- c. Only to men whose wives have been unfaithful.

**6. Among sexual behavior that is forbidden is:**

- a. Adultery.
- b. Incest.
- c. Sex with angels.

**7. The people of Sodom were condemned principally for:**

- a. Homosexuality.
- b. Blasphemy.
- c. Lack of compassion for the poor and needy.

This quiz, and the answers following, draw from a new book, "Unprotected Texts: The Bible's Surprising Contradictions about Sex and Desire." It's by Jennifer Wright Knust, a bible scholar at Boston University who is also an ordained American Baptist pastor.

**Answers to the quiz:**

1. A. Abortion is never mentioned as such.

2. A, B and C. The Bible limits women to one husband, but other than that is all over the map. Mark 10 envisions a lifelong marriage of one man and one woman. But King Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines (I Kings 11:3). And Matthew (Matthew 19:10-12) and St. Paul (I Corinthians 7) both seem to suggest that the ideal approach is to remain celibate and avoid marriage if possible, while focusing on serving God. Jesus (Matthew 19:12) even seems to suggest that men make themselves eunuchs, leading the early church to ban enthusiasts from self-castration.

3. A and C. As for stoning on a father's doorstep, that is the fate not of lesbians but of non-virgin brides (Deuteronomy 22:13).

4. B. Read the "Song of Songs" and blush. It also serves as a metaphor for divine relations with Israel or with humans.

5. B and C. Jesus in Mark 10:11-12 condemns divorce generally, but in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 suggests that a man can divorce his wife if she is guilty of sexual immorality.

6. A, B and C. We forget that early commentators were very concerned about sex with angels (Genesis 6, interpreted in the Letter of Jude and other places) as an incorrect mixing of two kinds.

7. C. "Sodomy" as a term for gay male sex began to be commonly used only in the 11th century and would have surprised early religious commentators. They attributed Sodom's problems with God to many different causes, including idolatry, threats toward strangers and general lack of compassion for the downtrodden. Ezekiel 16:49 suggests that Sodomites "had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy."

Hmm. "Did not aid the poor and needy." Who knew that that's what the Bible condemns as sodomy? At a time of budget cuts that devastate the poor, isn't that precisely the kind of disgusting immorality that we should all join together in the spirit of the Bible to repudiate?

## **Leading atheist publishes secular Bible** by

Jessica Ravitz

The question arose early in British academic A.C. Grayling's career: What if those ancient compilers who'd made Bibles, the collected religious texts that were translated, edited, arranged and published en masse, had focused instead on assembling the non-religious teachings of civilization's greatest thinkers?

What if the book that billions have turned to for ethical guidance wasn't tied to commandments from God or any one particular tradition but instead included the writings of Aristotle, the reflections of Confucius, the poetry of Baudelaire? What would that book look like, and what would it mean?

Decades after he started asking such questions, what Grayling calls "a lifetime's work" has hit bookshelves. "The Good Book: A Humanist Bible," subtitled "A Secular Bible" in the United Kingdom, was published this month. Grayling crafted it by using more than a thousand texts representing several hundred authors, collections and traditions.

The Bible would have been "a very different book and may have produced a very different history for mankind," had it drawn on the work of philosophers and writers as opposed to prophets and apostles, says Grayling, a philosopher and professor at Birkbeck College, University of London, who is an atheist.

"Humanist ethics didn't claim to be derived from a deity," he says. "(They) tended to start from a sympathetic understanding of human nature and accept that there's a responsibility that each individual has to work out the values they live by and especially to recognize that the best of our good lives revolve around having good relationships with people."

Humanists rely on human reason as an alternative to religion or belief in God in attempting to find meaning and purpose in life.

Determined to make his material accessible, Grayling arranged his nearly 600-page "Good Book" much like the Bible, with double columns, chapters (the first is even called Genesis) and short verses. And much like the best-selling King James Bible, which is celebrating its 400<sup>th</sup> year, his book is written in a type of English that transcends time.

Like the Bible, "The Good Book," opens with a garden scene. But instead of Adam and Eve, Grayling's Genesis invokes Isaac Newton, the British scientist who pioneered the study of gravity.

"It was from the fall of fruit from such a tree that new inspiration came for inquiry into the nature of things," reads a verse from "The Good Book's" first chapter.

"When Newton sat in his garden, and saw what no one had seen before: that an apple draws the earth to itself, and the earth the apple," the verse continues, "Through a mutual force of nature that holds all things, from the planets to the stars, in unifying embrace."

harm no others, think for yourself, take responsibility, respect nature, do your utmost, be informed, be kind, be courageous: at least, sincerely try."

Grayling, reached Friday at a New York hotel just as he began his U.S. book tour, has been dubbed by some a "velvet atheist" or an "acceptable face of atheism," he says, in contrast to more stridently anti-religious writers like Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins, both of whom he counts as friends.

In other contexts, Grayling – who will soon take over as president of the British Humanist Association – admits he's written critically about religion. But not in "The Good Book."

"It's not part of a quarrel," he says of his latest work. "It's a modest offering... another contribution to the conversation that mankind must have with itself," and one he says he wrote for everyone, Bible lovers included.

Given where society is today, inviting that conversation is all the more important, he says.

More than 16% of Americans say they are unaffiliated religiously, according to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. Even so, Grayling says the hunger for a spiritual connection continues. That yearning, he argues, can be satisfied for many by taking a walk in the country, curling up with a beautiful book of poetry or even in falling in love.

"In all different ways, we can celebrate the good in the world," he says.

While many intellectual traditions – religious and otherwise – teach that there's "one right way to live," Grayling says he hopes "The Good Book" will encourage people to "go beyond your teachers, your text" to understand that "we have to respect and relate to one another."

Early sales indicate that people are open to what this new "Bible" teaches. On Monday, Grayling's book was number 41 on Amazon's UK bestseller list and number 1 in the philosophy and spirituality categories.

## **SPIRITUALITY, GOD AND THE ATHEIST MIND**

To many atheists, spirituality is a sometimes beautiful, but always wholly natural thing, and they welcome the breadth and nuance it adds to their lives. There are others who are seemingly unaware or are not willing to accept they are spiritual beings too, perhaps they think that in not believing in the existence of a religious eternal soul or paternalistic, vengeful, jealous god, they must also reject any idea of spirituality, particularly if they see it as nothing more than an invention of religion.

## Fit to Serve by Steven Surman American Humanist Magazine June 2011

Fort Hood's sprawling 340-square-mile property—one of the largest active armored posts in the United States Armed Forces—boasts the self-styled title of the “Great Place” because of the quality of life enjoyed by soldiers and family members residing on its premises. Indeed, Fort Hood, which is located halfway between Waco and Austin, Texas, has in recent years expanded its reputation toward rejuvenating the wellness of soldiers and their families by nurturing a trinity of the body, mind, and spirit. **The stronghold for this task is the fort's Resiliency Campus, which houses the Spiritual Fitness Center, a facility functioning on the edict that all human beings are comprised of three components: the physical (body), the mental (mind), and the spiritual (soul). These three attributes are interwoven and interdependent, and the center operates as a contemporary shrine for religious leaders and the community as a whole to turn to in the search for serenity. But along with ministering to the immediate needs of Fort Hood, the center serves a greater purpose: it acts as a religious outpost for the Global Assessment Tool, or GAT, a roughly 200-question self-appraisal that's part of the Army's Comprehensive Soldier Fitness (CSF) program. “Religion,” incidentally, is a word used by the GAT with guile—rather, the neutered term “spirituality” takes precedence.**

But nearly 1,500 miles away from Fort Hood in Washington, DC, Jason Torpy is having none of it. Torpy, currently serving as the president of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers (MAAF), is unsettled by the GAT and CSF openly arbitrating the spiritual and religious beliefs of soldiers and has expressed his concern to a number of military officials. Notably, he presented his case for two hours to Lt. Col. Jesse Henderson, the CSF content manager.

“I presented our concerns and he met each one with apathy and an inability to understand the problem. [Lt. Col. Henderson] refused to accept any of the suggestions I made,” Torpy recalls. But he wasn't deterred and pursued the matter to the highest level within the CSF: Brig. Gen. Rhonda Cornum, the program's director. But she was no more concerned than anyone else.

### A Grand Assumption

The bureaucratic indifference shown by the CSF officials was no great shock to Torpy, who understands the inner mechanisms of the Army first-hand. During his years of service (1994 to 2005) he earned the rank of captain, and toured in Iraq from 2003 to 2004. His service refutes the old, persistent adage that there are no atheists in foxholes. Though Torpy was raised Catholic, he never accepted the instruction and identified as an atheist from an early age.

In his current role as the MAAF president, the thirty-four-year-old immerses himself in all issues pertaining to the military and how religion is presented and utilized within its vast organizational network, from chaplain outreach to maintaining an open and proud roster of newly dubbed “atheists in foxholes.” The MAAF was founded back in 1997 by retired M. Sgt. Kathleen Johnson (now the military director for American Atheists). MAAF's ultimate goal is to win recognition of and respect for nontheist rights, but the spiritual fitness test is a stinging reminder that Torpy must still travel a long road. At the same time Torpy acknowledges that his group shares the general mission of the CSF and GAT: “To minimize combat stress as well as more serious issues such as PTSD and suicides.”

Implemented in 2009, the \$117 million CSF program was developed by the University of Pennsylvania and is described on its official website as a “long-term strategy that better prepares the Army community... to not only survive, but also thrive at a cognitive and behavioral level in the face of protracted warfare and everyday challenges of Army life.” Further claims say that the CSF is founded on thirty years of research and employs various tactics to help evaluate and improve the physical and mental welfare of soldiers. The most notable is the GAT—a 105-question evaluation focused on five core dimensions: the physical, emotional, social, familial, and spiritual. The GAT is currently an annual requirement for all soldiers, and Army officials involved, including Cornum and Lt. Col. David Petersen (an Army spokesman) have said that the GAT is a private and personal tool intended only for the soldier taking it. All results are confidential.

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