

THE COWTOWN HUMANIST MARCH 2005

SUSAN JACOBY'S *FREETHINKERS* DISCUSSED AT FEB MEETING

HUMANISTS TO PARTICIPATE IN JESUS SEMINAR MARCH 8

JOE KLEEHAMMER SPEAKS ON HUMANISM AT APRIL MEETING

PAEANS TO HUMANIST GIANTS OF THE PAST AT FEBRUARY SESSION

Freethought is a cause, not of mere hostility to dogma, but of scientific inquiry, of fearless adherence to logic, of a strict discrimination between the known and the unknowable.

--Alan Nevins

Sixteen humanists gathered at West Side on February 9 to hear a presentation of Susan Jacoby's *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* by Jim Fogelman, Don Ruhs and Jim Cheatham.

For those of you who have not gotten around to reading it yet, we hope last month's program will inspire you to do so. Too little is known, even by most secularist humanists, about the rich history of secularism in this country. It's a history that abounds in great figures: Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Thomas Payne, Abraham Lincoln, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Robert Ingersoll, Margaret Sanger, Clarence Darrow to name only a few. Jacoby's book can also be recommended for the light it sheds on many of the opponents of secularism and of enlightenment values, among them: Anthony Comstock, A. Mitchell Palmer, William Jennings Bryan, Father Coughlin, Joe McCarthy and George W. Bush.

While Jacoby notes George Washington's role in presiding over a Constitutional Convention that wrote a secular document for the new nation, his denial that the U.S. was a "Christian nation" and his assurances to the Jewish community of Newport that *all* alike enjoyed "liberty of conscience" and the "immunity of citizenship" in this country, she relegates him to a role secondary to those of two other founding fathers, Jefferson and Madison, as a promoter of humanist values. His less visible role as a secularist has encouraged religious fundamentalists to try to coop him as one of their own, indeed sometimes contrasting the godly Washington with the ungodly Jefferson. In this connection, they have even complained to the Mount Vernon foundation about the lack of displays attesting to Washington's religiosity. A recently published biography of Washington. *His Excellency: George Washington* casts new light on Washington's religious sentiments. The author, Joseph J. Ellis, who has also written acclaimed biographies of Jefferson and John Adams, notes that Washington in his public utterances never referred to Jesus or to Christ and usually preferred to speak of Providence rather than of God. He goes on to describe "a missing presence" at Washington's deathbed:

There were no ministers in the room, no prayers uttered, no Christian rituals offering the solace of

everlasting life. The inevitable renderings of Washington's death by nineteenth century artists often

added religious symbols to the scene, frequently depicting his body ascending into heaven surrounded

by a chorus of angels. The historical evidence suggests that Washington did not think much about

heaven or angels; the only place he knew his body was going was into the ground, and as for his soul,

its ultimate location was unknowable. He died as a Roman stoic rather than a Christian saint.

A lively debate ensued at the end of the presentations concerning Robert Ingersoll's characterization of happiness: making other people happy. Perhaps it's a bit too facile, was one objection raised. Very few of us are capable of that quantity of altruism, not even for family and close friends. Most of us have personal needs that don't directly involve bringing joy to anyone else. Maybe happiness is not something to be directly aimed at but the outcome of "the good life" however that may be defined—most assuredly not the same for all of us. Might it be a topic for a future meeting? Let us have your ideas about this or any other subject you may want to see discussed at future meetings.

HoFW NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENT

MARCH MEETING: This month's meeting will take place on Tuesday, March 8, 7:00 p.m., at the First Methodist Church of Fort Worth, Room 336. The church is located on 5th Street in the downtown area. We will be attending the monthly meeting of the Jesus Seminar. This month's meeting features a video entitled "The Crisis in the Roman Catholic Church" and is narrated by James Carroll, a former priest. Carroll was born in 1943, attended Georgetown University and was ordained into the priesthood in 1969. He served as chaplain of Boston University from 1969 to 1974. In the mid-70s he left the priesthood to become a writer and later served as Playwright-in-Residence at the Berkshire Theater Festival in Stockbridge, MA. He published his first novel *Madonna Red* in 1976. He has since written six other novels and two books with religious themes: *An American Requiem*, for which he received the National Book Award, and most recently *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews*.

ABOUT THE JESUS SEMINAR: The Jesus Seminar was organized under the auspices of the Westar Institute to renew the quest for the historical Jesus and to report the results of its research to more than a handful of gospel specialists. At its inception in 1985, 30 scholars took up the challenge. Eventually, more than 200 professionally trained specialists, called Fellows, joined the group. The Seminar meets twice a year to debate technical papers that have been prepared and circulated in advance. At the close of debate on each agenda item, Fellows of the Seminar vote, using colored beads to indicate the degree of authority of Jesus' words or deeds. They have determined that he probably said only about 20 percent of the quotes attributed to him by the canonical gospels. The Fort Worth chapter meets monthly to discuss topical religious issues.

PRE-MEETING DINNER: 5:30 p.m. at Romano's Macaroni Grill, 1505 South University Drive (just south of I-30).

Reminders: Dues fall due in March. They remain the same as in 2004: \$18 for individual members receiving the Newsletter by e-mail, \$24 for individuals receiving the Newsletter by regular mail: \$24 for couples. Please remember to bring a can of food for the needy. West Side Unitarian-Universalist Church will arrange for distribution.

APRIL MEETING: Joe Kleehammer of 1st Jefferson Unitarian-Universalist Church will be our April 13 speaker.

LET US HEAR FROM YOU: Thanks go to Don Ruhs and Sandra Langley for their contributions of this month's Newsletter. Contributions and comments are always welcome.

YOUR OFFICERS AND HOW TO REACH THEM

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LEGAL FRONT

SUPREME COURT BARS DEATH PENALTY FOR JUVENILE KILLERS

In a 5-4 decision, the Supreme Court ruled March 1 that imposing the death penalty on convicted murderers who were younger than 18 at the time of their crimes is unconstitutional. The court held that executing young offenders violates "the evolving standards of decency that mark the progress of a maturing society," and that American society has come to regard juveniles as less capable than adult criminals. The ruling lifts the death sentences of 70 defendants. Although 19 states nominally permit executions of juveniles, only Texas, Virginia and Oklahoma have executed any in the past decade. Until today, the U.S. and Somalia were the only nations that sanctioned putting teenage criminals to death. Justice Scalia joined by Chief Justice Rehnquist and Justice Thomas said the majority opinion made "a mockery" of constitutional precedent and was based on "the flimsiest of grounds." He added: "What kind of Equal Justice under Law is that—without so much as 'sorry about that'—gives as the basis for sparing one person from execution arguments explicitly rejected in refusing to spare another?" (NYT)

REMEDY IN NEED OF CANDOR

For opponents of the death penalty, the Supreme Court's decision [March 1] striking down the horrid practice of executing people for crimes committed before they came of age represents a watershed. After years of making capital punishment ever easier for states to carry out, the court is drawing important lines. Children cannot drink, cannot vote, cannot serve their country in war—all because society has made the judgment that, as a class, they lack sufficient maturity to make certain judgments wisely and must be protected. Allowing juveniles to be sentenced to death is a total abandonment of that responsibility. Yet in 1989, the Supreme Court declared that executing people for crimes committed at ages 16 and 17 does not offend the Eighth Amendment's bar on "cruel and unusual punishments." The court was wrong then and its decision [March 1] to correct its mistake removes a barbaric excess of the system of capital punishment.

[The Post editorial takes exception, however, with Justice Kennedy's majority opinion, specifically the "evolving standards" argument that opened the door for Scalia's blistering sarcasm. The Post argues that the court would do better to acknowledge error in its 1989 decision.]

Getting rid of the juvenile death penalty is long overdue. But if federal juridical actions on capital punishment are to have lasting credibility, the justices must develop more principled bases for their decisions than the majority mustered here. (WP editorial)

SUPREME COURTS HEARS TEN COMMANDMENTS' CASES

The high court on March 2 took up cases involving the Ten Commandments monument on the Texas Capitol grounds and exhibits of the Ten Commandments in two Kentucky courthouses. The court's decision, expected sometime in 2006, could affect the display of religious symbols at public sites across the country. "I think 90 percent of Americans believe in the Ten Commandments," said Justice Antonin Scalia, "but 85 percent probably couldn't tell you what they are." [Now that's quite a feat! Would they know that Protestants, Catholics and Jews have different versions?] The challenge to the Texas monument drew extra attention because of the man who waged it—Van Orden, an SMU law school graduate, now homeless, who slept in an Austin park while spending his days in the Texas State Library preparing the case. The Ten Commandments monument was donated to the Texas Legislature in 1962 by the Fraternal Order of Eagles, a century-old civic organization. The monument is one of 17 memorials on the Capitol grounds. Justice Anthony Kennedy complained about "an obsessive concern to any mention of religion" on public sites. Several attorneys on both sides of the issue said the justices' comments suggested that the court might support the state's arguments. The Kentucky courthouse exhibits are on shakier ground.. (FWST)

DEATH WITH DIGNITY CHALLENGED AT THE SUPREME COURT

The Supreme Court agreed February 22 to decide whether the federal government can block Oregon's right-to-die law, setting the stage for a debate that tangles issues of individual liberty, federal authority and personal privacy. The justices said they'll review a lower court decision that barred the Bush administration from using federal prescription drug laws to override Oregon voters' wishes to allow doctors to help terminally ill patients die. Oregon is the only state with such a law. The high court will hear the case in the fall and issue a ruling by spring 2006. (Knight-Ridder)

Under Oregon's voter-approved law, doctors can prescribe controlled drugs to mentally competent, terminally ill patients who are diagnosed to be within six months of death. Euthanasia, where a third party intentionally terminates life, is banned throughout America. In Oregon, the patient must take the drugs by himself, without the doctor even being present.

Assisted suicide represents less than 0.1% of the total deaths in Oregon. Most of those who sought a doctor's help to end their lives were less concerned with pain than with a loss of dignity and a desire to control the circumstances of their death. Most were cancer patients; most were also in hospice programs.

California and Vermont are now considering adopting laws that are similar to Oregon's. Eli Stutsman, the Oregon lawyer who argued the case before the 9th Circuit Court last year, says the Supreme Court has tended to support state authority over federal authority. He expects it will do so again. (Economist)

GONZALES URGES PATRIOT ACT RENEWAL; WILL FIGHT PORNOGRAPHY

Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzalez speaking to a Hoover Institute seminar in Washington on February 28 affirmed his support for controversial anti-terrorism legislation up for congressional renewal this year but also indicated he is willing to consider changing some of its provisions to ensure their continuation. He vowed to continue his predecessor's war against pornography. (WP)

GOVERNMENT TO APPEAL DECISION ON FEDERAL LAWS ON OBSCENITY

In a case representing a major test of the Bush administration's campaign against pornography, the Justice Department said February 16 that it will appeal a recent decision by a federal judge that declared federal obscenity laws to be unconstitutional. The department said that if the judge's interpretation of federal law is upheld, it would undermine not only anti-obscenity prohibitions, but also laws against prostitution, bigamy, bestiality and others "based on shared views of public morality." In a ruling last month in Pittsburgh, U.S. District Court Judge Gary Lancaster threw out a 10-count indictment that charged a California video distributor with violating federal obscenity laws. The judge wrote that the anti-obscenity laws "burden an individual's fundamental right to possess, read, observe and think about what he chooses in the privacy of his own home by completely banning the distribution of obscene materials." (NYT)

HOUSE PASSES BILL ON INDECENCY

Chafing over a "wardrobe malfunction" and racy radio shock-jock programs, the House overwhelmingly passed legislation February 16 authorizing unprecedented fines for indecency. The bill would increase the maximum fine to \$500,000 from \$32,500 per violation for a company and to \$500,000 from \$11,000 for an individual. A similar bill in the Senate has broad bipartisan support. Opponents said they are concerned that stiffer fines would lead to more self-censorship by broadcasters and entertainers unclear about the definition of "indecent." (AP)

NEW YORK JUDGE OK'S SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

State Supreme Court Justice Doris Ling-Cohan ruled on February 4 that the New York State ban on same-sex marriage is unconstitutional. She said a New York City clerk was wrong to deny a license solely because a couple was the same sex. Mayor Michael Bloomberg is appealing the ruling. (Freethought)

U.S. MUST RELEASE PADILLA OR PUT HIM ON TRIAL

A federal judge in South Carolina ruled February 28 that the Bush administration lacks statutory and constitutional authority to indefinitely imprison a U.S. citizen who was designated an "enemy combatant." District Court judge Avery F. Floyd said the indefinite detention of Jose Padilla—who the administration has said is a terrorist supporter of al Qaida—is illegal and that Padilla must be released from a naval brig in Charleston, South Carolina, within 45 days or be charged with a crime. "To do otherwise would not only offend the rule of law and violate this country's constitutional tradition, but it would also be a betrayal of this nation's commitment to the separation of powers that safeguards our democratic values and our individual liberties." Floyd, who was appointed by Bush, accused the administration of engaging in "legal activism" when it asserted Bush had the authority to detain Americans on U.S. soil who are suspected of taking or planning actions against the country. The government says it will appeal. (WP)

CHURCH & STATE

COMPASSION FATIGUE?

Back in 2000, George Bush defined himself as a compassionate conservative who was out to find a new (and, controversially, religious) way to help the poor: its aim was to use public money and private donations to involve churches, temples and mosques in America's social policy. Recently, David Kuo, the former deputy director of the White House's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives argued on a religious website, that Mr. Bush's "promises remain unfulfilled in spirit and in fact". Mr. Bush, he points out, originally talked of finding \$8 billion a year for "the armies of compassion". In practice, the program has got nothing like that. The most important bit of compassionate conservatism—tax breaks to encourage charitable giving—could have been implemented as part of the 2001 tax cuts. But this was dropped from the bill because the White House preferred to repeal the estate tax [paid on only two percent of estates] and could not afford both. The bottom line, argues Mr. Kuo, is that the White House "never really wanted the 'poor people stuff'". Perhaps stung by Kuo's criticisms, the administration has undertaken a charm offensive on the Hill with the apparent objective of getting a "faith-based" bill through Congress. Perhaps Mr. Kuo's criticisms will end up invigorating the agenda, rather than marking its demise. (Economist)

[Bush told an audience of his religious supporters on March 1 that he strongly advocates more money for his faith-based initiative.]

RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION PROMOTED BY BILL

The Job Training Improvement Act (H.R. 27), which contains a provision allowing federal funds to be used by "faith-based" agencies that discriminate in hiring based on religion, has been introduced into the House of Representatives. (Freethought Today)

HOW TO AVOID A FIGHT OVER THE COMMANDMENTS

In the Bible, Jesus himself offered a compromise to the endless argument over the public display of the commandments. In the Gospel of Matthew, a man asks Jesus how he can enter heaven. "Keep the commandments," Jesus replies—and then proceeds to edit the Old Testament's ten down to six: "You shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness. Honor your father and mother. Also, you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Remarkably, Jesus left out the four commandments that "emphasize formal

observation of religion”—such as not honoring other gods and keeping holy the Sabbath Day. Conservative Christians have long ignored Jesus’ streamlining of the moral code, because they much prefer the Old Testament’s wrathful and judgmental God. But if our concern is truly promoting morality, and not religion, then let us heed the code of conduct Jesus actually gave us. It’s a code upon which all religions—indeed, even atheists—can agree. (Gregg Easterbrook, WSJ)

PROMOTING VIRTUE OVER UNITY

The American people may be willing to compromise on secular matters, such as Social Security, taxes, and even Iraq. But when it comes to issues of religious significance—abortion, gay marriage, the teaching of evolution—Bush’s political base of Christian conservatives has no interest in finding middle ground. “As many deeply religious Americans see it, compromise between righteousness and sin is: sin.” In a new poll, 82 percent of non-church-going Americans said that politicians should sometimes compromise to get results. Only 63 percent of regular worshippers agreed—a figure that has fallen by 16 percent since 2000, suggesting a growing intransigence. The number of churchgoers who would be prepared to compromise over abortion has fallen by 19 percent; and over gay rights, by 16 points. This is troubling, because for a democracy to function, people with fundamental disagreements have to believe in “working things out.” Christian conservatives, though, see Bush as one of their own, and they view the next four years as “a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity” to promote the kingdom of God here on Earth. They’re not going to let trivialities like civility and compromise get in the way. (William Raspberry, WP columnist)

RELIGION IN THE NEWS

Which is it? Is man only a blunder of God, or God only a blunder of man?

--Friedrich Nietzsche

THE LOST GODDESS OF ISRAEL

The origin of Yahweh, the god of Israel, has been a matter of speculation among archaeologists and biblical scholars for generations. The biblical narrative of the covenant of one god with the descendants of Abraham and later Jacob, the Exodus from Egypt, and the subsequent conquest of the “Holy Land” is now viewed as legend by most scholars—albeit one that has some basis in fact. By about 1100 BCE numerous small settlements had sprung up on the margins of urban Canaanite society. When the settlers “took to the hills”, for whatever reason, they seemed to have brought many of the old Canaanite gods with them. One of those gods may have been Yahweh, with his Canaanite consort. The books of Samuel and of Kings demonstrate that the worship of Yahweh’s wife, Asherah, did not die out but remained a part of ritual and cult throughout the monarchies and until the conquest of Judah, that is, from circa 1000 to 586 BCE. The writers of the Bible, many living in the period after the Babylonian exile and in the midst of a religious reform movement, sought to give monotheism greater authority by ascribing it to the period of the kings. As a result, Asherah was relegated to the status of the wife of the reviled Ba’al—the god of the evil Queen Jezebel and other villainous biblical figures in order to discredit her. In his new book *Did God Have a Wife?*, renowned biblical scholar William Dever cites archaeological finds in the Palestinian hills to support the thesis that worship of Asherah continued long after the supposed triumph of monotheism with the Jews. The question arises whether Israelite monotheism ever truly existed in pre-Exile period. These days, says Dever, “It’s hard to find a mainstream scholar who believes that early Israel was monotheistic.”

It has been several decades since most archaeologists have come to accept that the Israelites of the Iron Age were no less 'pagan' than their Canaanite neighbors. What happened to the worship of Asherah? Perhaps toward the end of the monarchy, the political elite may have recognized the usefulness of monotheism in the same way that the emphasis on the worship of Amun in Egypt during the New Kingdom (circa 1540-1070 BCE) and Marduk in Babylonia during the Neo-Babylonian Empire (circa 629-539 BCE) arose. That is, it enabled the development of a powerful priesthood in support of a state religion and divinely inspired monarchy. Then came the fall of Judah and exile in Babylonia from 586 to 538 BCE. Priests didn't want to be out of a job. Interpretation of God's purposes became their exclusive preserve. "Our god has defeated us, he is punishing us." (*Archaeology* Mar/Apr 2005)

EPISCOPALIAN CHURCH AFFIRMS PRO-GAY VIEW

Episcopalian leaders in North America declined February 25 to apologize for endorsing the ordination of homosexual bishops and same-sex unions despite growing threats of a schism with other branches of the Anglican Church, which has 77 million members world wide. A conference of church leaders meeting in Northern Ireland on February 24 called on the Canadian and U.S. churches to voluntarily withdraw from the Anglican Council, a key decision-making body, until the controversy is resolved. While U.S. bishops have repeatedly called for dialogue with other churches, they have given no indication that they are prepared to back down on the issue. (WP)

IN 2004, 1,000 PERSONS ALLEGED ABUSE BY PRIESTS

More than 1,000 people reported to civil or church authorities in 2004 that they had been sexually abused as children by Roman Catholic priests, the second largest number of allegations for any year on record, the U.S. Bishops Conference said February 18. During 2004, the church spent \$157 million legal settlements and other costs related to sexual abuse. It received allegations against 756 priests and deacons, half of whom had previously been named in similar accusations. It temporarily removed more than 300 clergymen and permanently defrocked 148, church officials said. (WP)

GEORGIA PREACHER FOUND GUILTY OF CHURCH SCAM

A preacher was convicted February 7 of stealing nearly \$9 million from hundreds of small black churches across the country that were promised hundreds of thousands of dollars in exchange for small investments. Abraham Kennard was found guilty in U.S. District Court in Rome, Georgia, of all 116 counts, including mail fraud and tax evasion. Prosecutors said he ran a pyramid scheme largely meant to take advantage of a tight network of black preachers. (WP)

STATE CHURCH ASKS GREEKS FOR FORGIVENESS

Greece's embattled Orthodox Church leader begged the nation for forgiveness February 22 after a blitz of allegations ranging from trial-fixing to purported sex escapades battered the church's reputation as guardian of Greek culture and honor. Public outrage has reached such a level that some lawmakers and commentators in Athens have suggested stripping the Orthodox Church of its status as the official state religion—a proposal once almost unthinkable in a nation where church and political history are often intertwined. (AP)

RELIGION INJURIOUS TO MENTAL HEALTH

An Israeli study found a whopping 29% of Orthodox Jewish men developed dementia, compared to only 10% of nonreligious Israeli men. Explanation for this “peculiar” result? Possibly diet, genetics, narrow range of intellectual activity—including intense memorization of religious texts, and, as offered by a reporter: “Maybe God has captured their minds.” (New York Daily News)

TOP OF THE NEWS

THE NEW ASSAULT ON DARWIN

Religious conservatives have mounted a new offensive against the teaching of Darwin’s theory of natural selection, and it’s having a chilling effect on teachers and school officials throughout the U.S. A half-dozen states are refusing to use the word “evolution” in their textbooks. In the Bible Belt, millions of fundamentalist parents are demanding that evolution be taught only as “a theory,” no more valid than Genesis’ account of Adam and Even in the Garden of Eden. Even in the blue states, some parents want students to be taught a more modern form of creationism, called “intelligent design”—the belief that humans and other living things evolved, but through the design and intervention of God. With 55 percent of the public insisting that evolution is just an unproven theory, many school districts and science teachers are now simply avoiding the whole topic. (Cornelia Dean, NYT)

To keep up with the rest of the world, our kids must be scientifically literate. But now we’re headed backward, into the 19th century. Intelligent design may represent a slight improvement over Scopes-era creationism, since it at least accepts the fact of evolution. But the idea that all of life is following a blueprint created by a Designer “cannot be tested or proven,” and is therefore not science. It’s a belief. Our kids need to understand the difference, and how to think critically and scientifically. Intelligent design has no place in the classroom. (Alan Leshner, *Philadelphia Inquirer*)

STATE DEPARTMENT STUDY CITES TORTURE OF PRISONERS

The State Department’s annual Human Rights Report released February 28 criticized countries for a range of interrogation practices, including sleep deprivation for detainees, confining prisoners in contorted positions, stripping and blindfolding them and threatening them with dogs—methods similar to those approved at times by the Bush administration for use on detainees in U.S. custody. The State Department report also harshly criticized the treatment of prisoners in such countries as Syria and Egypt, where the U.S. has shipped terrorist suspects under a practice known as “rendition.” Tom Malinowski, advocacy director of Human Rights Watch, commented that autocrats can now push back and assert that the tactics criticized by the State Department are routinely used by the U.S. (WP)

GAY WARRIORS: AMERICA SHOULD LEARN FROM ITS ALLIES

Bill Clinton tried to introduce what might be called “open service” in 1993, but ended up bringing forth a backlash both against the idea and his own administration. Since then, by law, America’s policy has been “don’t ask, don’t tell”—its troops neither should be asked nor need volunteer information about their sexuality. That has not stopped plenty of people being ousted and ousted. Since 1993, more than 10,000 gay Americans have been booted back onto Civvy Street. ...Many of those ousted possessed valuable skills: between 1998 and 2004, 20 relatively rare Arabic speakers and six Farsi speakers were forcibly discharged after they were found to be gay.

None of the [oft-cited] complaints [of the U.S. military] really stands up. Begin with the fact that there are already plenty of gays in America's armed forces. One recent estimate put their number at 65,000. Anecdotal evidence suggests lesbians may be more prevalent than is normal, and gay men slightly less prevalent. Many of these people will be "out", at least to their close comrades—after all, military banter is excruciatingly personal. According to a recent poll of enlisted men, more than half thought gays should be allowed in the armed forces. In the current time of overstretch, even the older, more conservative, officer class seems to be changing heart. ...As for the idea that the ban reflects American mores, polls suggest that at least 64% of Americans would allow gay soldiers.

Congress should look at the British example. In 2000, when the queen's army jumped out of the closet (so to speak), many senior officers were aghast. Their arguments then were similar to American fears now: sooner or later, showers and bars of soap were mentioned. Four years later recruitment has not suffered; most new recruits are unfazed about meeting gay comrades. And with gays subject to the same rules governing appropriate behaviour as heterosexuals, the showers need hold no fears for happily-married men. Come on, Rummy, what are you afraid of? (Economist editorial)

RACE A FACTOR IN TEXAS TRAFFIC STOPS

A study commissioned by immigrant advocacy groups released February 24 found that police throughout Texas stop and search black and Latino drivers at higher rates than whites, but that officers are more likely to find drugs, guns and other contraband on whites. The study, called "Don't Mind If I Take a Look, Do Ya?" examined 2003 statistics provided by 1,060 law enforcement agencies on consensual searches of vehicles during traffic stops and how often contraband was found. The statistics, they said, show a pattern of racial profiling. (WP)

ENVIRONMENT IN THE NEWS

MORE EVIDENCE THAT GLOBALWARMING IS MAN-MADE

Since water has a far higher capacity to retain heat than air, most of any heat that is causing global warming should end up in the oceans. Scripps Institution of Oceanography researcher Tim Barnett has looked at ocean-temperature surveys made over the past 65 years. He confirms that the sea has gotten warmer since the 1940s, and particularly since the 1960s. Furthermore, it has done so from the top down. At a depth of 700 meters, things are almost unchanged. But surface temperatures in all six of the ocean basins, he examined, (the north and south Atlantic, Indian and Pacific oceans) have increased by about half a degree Celsius. So the Earth has, indeed, warmed up over the past few decades. To test the idea that people, rather than natural phenomena, are the reason for the warming, he took two widely respected models of the world's climate (which couple events in the atmosphere with events in the sea, and take account of both greenhouse gases and aerosols) and played with their variables in different ways. The only changes that produced patterns of heating which matched reality were the man-made one. Which is confirmation, in Dr. Barnett's eyes at least, that the guilty party in global warming is industrial man. (Economist)

"GOD'S MANDATE": PUTTING THE WHITE HOUSE ON NOTICE

Frustration with the Bush Administration's environmental policies is bubbling up from mainstream churches and synagogues, as reflected in a statement signed recently by more than 1,000 church and congregational leaders in about 35 states. Called "God's Mandate: Care for Creation", the

statement said that “there was no mandate, no majority and no “values” message in the November elections of the president and the Congress to roll back and oppose programs that care for God’s creation.” After the election, several Catholic, Protestant and Jewish leaders came up with the idea of a strong statement on the environment to warn the White House and Republicans in Congress that there are limits to the support they can expect from the religious community. The statement objects to Bush’s policies on global warming, toxic emissions from coal-fired power plants and lack of emphasis on conservation. The National Council of Churches is circulating the statement to 250,000 clergy and lay leaders across the country. (WP)

BOOK CORNER

By Don Ruhs

Rights from Wrongs: A Secular Theory of the Origins of Rights, by Alan Dershowitz. Basic Books, 2004, 261 pgs., with index and footnotes.

In this book Dershowitz delves into the sources of and reasons for human rights. He totally discounts any thought of rights originating from divine sources, but, rather, avers that our rights and laws, even those of ancient origin, come from the recognition that human beings abuse and mistreat other human beings. Humans abuse and mistreat nature and the environment. They abuse and mistreat animals. He notes the fact that certain rights accepted in one culture are not necessarily accepted in another.

The theory of rights present in this book goes as follows:

--Rights *do not come from god*, because God does not speak to human beings in a single voice, and

rights would exist even if there is no God.

--Rights *do not come from nature*, because nature is value-neutral.

--Rights *do not come from logic*, because there is little consensus about the a priori premises from which rights may be deduced.

--Rights *do not come from law alone*, because if they did, there would be no basis on which to judge a

given law system.

--Rights *come from human experience*, particularly experience with injustice. We learn from the

mistakes of history that a rights-based system and certain fundamental rights—such as freedom of

expression, freedom of and from religion, equal protection of the laws, due process, and participatory

democracy—are essential to avoid repetition of the grievous injustices of the past. Working from the

bottom up, from a dystopian view of our experiences with injustice, rather than from the top down,

i.e., from a utopian theory of perfect justice, we build rights on a foundation of trial, error and our uniquely human ability to learn from our mistakes in order to keep from replicating them.

While the Judeo-Christian Bible condones slavery (Lev. 25:44-46; Ex. 21:2-6; I Tim. 6:1), our civil laws today prohibit ownership of a fellow human being. However, it took some forward-thinking ideologues and a civil war, and many lives, to change the minds of most Americans. Notwithstanding, biblical injunctions still hold sway with most Americans:

There are no divine laws of morality, merely human laws claiming the authority of God. Nor are there

any moral laws that derive from the nature of man, merely human efforts to control the evils and to

promote the goodness of human nature. Any attempt to build a jurisprudence on the word of God or

the workings of nature must fail, because neither God nor nature speaks with one voice capable of

being heard or understood by humans. Nor can a jurisprudence be built on legal positivism, since that

approach to law is bereft of substantive moral content. It is merely descriptive of what the law is,

rather than prescriptive of what it ought to be. Finally, no combination of the two will solve the

problem, since in the end one must trump the other when there are inevitable conflicts. (Chap. 7, p.78:

Is Natural Law a Helpful or Harmful Fiction?)

This is the third book of Dershowitz's I have read. I continue to find his work fascinating and topical. I especially enjoy his ongoing fight against religious and political fundamentalism. And, he does not hesitate to define fundamentalism as any group, whether Christian, Jewish, Islamic, or other religious, political or philosophical sect, that seeks to force its beliefs on others to the detriment of basic human rights. This is another "must book" for the library of Unitarians, Humanists and others interested in understanding and furthering the basic ideals of freedom.

That's it for this month's *Cowtown Humanist!*