

COWTOWN



HUMANIST

November

2009

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



Reading Noam Chomsky, who the New York Times describes as "arguably the greatest intellect on the globe today," is an education in itself but seeing and hearing him (via DVD) can be electrifying. He recently gave a speech in Harlem before 2,000 activists, journalists, professors, and college students that brought them all cheering to their feet. We will see this great man at our November 9 meeting if we receive the dvd in time. In case it doesn't, we will have another documentary available and you will be e-mailed to know.

A small group of our members met Saturday, Oct 31, for trash pick-up and treated ourselves to a fine breakfast at the Swiss Pastry Shoppe after our civic labor. I apologize for not publicizing the merriment, camaraderie, and feasting this occasion offers in time for more to take advantage. The misfortune of you who missed the fun will be noted and your envy appreciated.

See you at our next meeting!

Halloween Scare

Yes it's that time again. Time for everyone to have fun except for the Christians, who must try their best to get in the way, preach to your children, and protest anyone having fun without their god involved.

After all, Halloween is the only celebrated holiday in America that has non-christian roots AND has not been successfully co-opted by Christianity, so that's right out if you're so insecure about your mythology that you can't even stomach giving candy to kids.

Christians need to realize that Halloween is just as Pagan as Christmas and Easter. The only problem is that "All Saints Day" didn't stick, so now they are trying to make Halloween a "currently religious" holiday (as opposed to a holiday with religious roots that is now secular) so they can protest it.

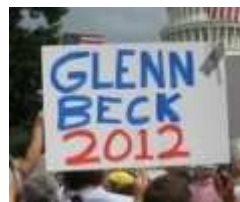
From the American Atheist website

From People for the American Way

The right-wing extremism on display in August's town hall meetings was pretty shocking. But amazingly, the Right tried to top itself this September with a series of events that truly showed how the Radical Right got its name. People For the American Way was there to cover the events and expose both the Far Right's extremism and its influence on national policy makers.

Here are just the top three, in chronological order:

"GLENN BECK SENT ME"



Glenn Beck's "9/12 Project" rally in Washington, D.C.

was billed as an effort to get people to embrace the spirit of unity Beck says was the prevalent feeling of most Americans the day after the 9/11/01 terrorist attacks. In reality, it was a circus of "Tea Baggers," secessionists and radical libertarians, as well as "Birthers," "Deathers" and every other breed of right-wing conspiracy theorist.



Family Research Council's annual 'Values Voters Summit,' which took place the weekend of September 19, once again drew a long list of the who's who in Religious Right politicking and activism.

OBAMA: "ENEMY OF HUMANITY"



If you asked what could be further on the outer fringe of right-wing extremism than the above two events, and the answer would be this past weekend's 'How to Take Back America' conference in St. Louis, hosted by such radical zealots that many on the Right won't even associate with them. Of course,

plenty will still associate with them, like Mike Huckabee (last month's Equine Posterior Achievement Award winner, incidentally) and *five* current members of the U.S. House of Representatives -- one of whom, Rep. Trent Franks, called the president an "enemy of humanity." We had our own inside man at the conference to get us the goods first hand.



For more see: PeopleForTheAmericanWay.org

Morals Without God

by Franz de Waal

After listening to the [debate](#) between Bill O'Reilly and Richard Dawkins, it struck me again that the resistance to evolutionary theory largely stems from the illusion that without God there can be no morality. Some believers feel threatened by evolutionary theory not because the theory is right or wrong -- the evidence doesn't seem to matter much to them -- but because accepting it would mean accepting that we have been created by natural processes *including* our morality. The final part is what bothers them the most.

O'Reilly exclaimed that at least Jesus had "advanced the human condition in a moralistic way" and another believer, [Reverend Al Sharpton](#), expressed the same sentiment in a 2007 debate in the New York Public Library:

Similarly, I have heard people literally echo Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov, exclaiming that "If there is no God, I am free to rape my neighbor!"

Perhaps it is just me, but I'd be wary of anyone whose belief system is the only thing standing between them and repulsive behavior. Why not assume that our humanity, including the self-control needed for a livable society, is built into us? Does anyone truly believe that our ancestors lacked rules of right and wrong before they had religion? Did they never assist others in need, or complain about an unfair deal?

Human morality must be quite a bit older than religion and civilization. It may, in fact, be older than humanity itself. Other primates live in highly structured social groups in which rules and inhibitions apply and mutual aid is a daily occurrence. Acts of genuine kindness do occur in animals as they do in humans. Altruistic behavior serves a cooperative group life, which benefits the actors of such behavior, yet the behavior is fueled by its own autonomous motivations, which vary from self-serving to other-regarding.

The animal kingdom offers so many examples that I surely cannot summarize them here (see my new book, [The Age of Empathy](#)), but the interesting part is not so much whether animals have empathy and compassion, but how it works. In one experiment, we placed two capuchin monkeys side by side: separate, but in full view. One of them needed to barter with us with small plastic tokens. The critical test came when we offered a choice between two differently colored tokens with different meaning: one token was "selfish," the other "prosocial." If the bartering monkey picked the selfish token, it received a small piece of apple for returning it, but its partner got nothing. The prosocial token, on the other hand, rewarded both monkeys equally at the same time. The monkeys gradually began to [prefer the prosocial token](#). The procedures were repeated many times with different pairs of monkeys and different sets of tokens, and the monkeys kept picking the prosocial option showing how much they care about each other's welfare.

Ed note: Doesn't it amaze the reader that so-called moral religious people perpetuate wars in the name of their god(s) If this be morality give me amoral behavior . (A bit of paraphrase with apology to

Patrick Henry)

'Good Without God,' Atheist Subway Ads Proclaim

By [Jennifer 8. Lee](#)

Atheism is coming to the subway — or at least subway ads promoting it are.

Starting next Monday, a coalition of local groups will run a monthlong advertising campaign in a dozen Manhattan subway stations with the slogan "A Million New Yorkers Are Good Without God. Are You?" The posters also advertise the Web site [BigAppleCoR.org](#), which provides a listing of local groups affiliated with the Coalition of Reason, the umbrella organization that coordinated the campaign.

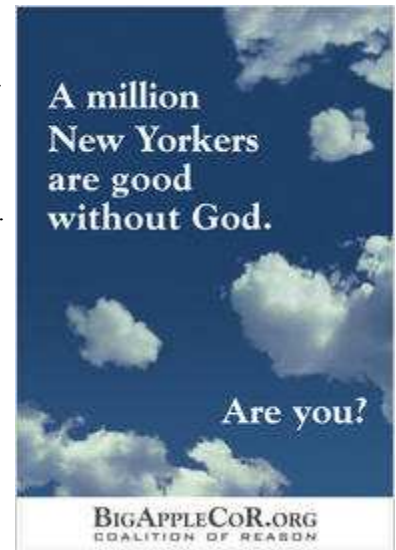
The campaign — which is being paid for by \$25,000 from an anonymous donor — follows a similar but unrelated [monthlong campaign on buses by New York City Atheists](#) in July. Jane Everhart, a spokeswoman for the New York City Atheists, said that campaign was highly successful and brought in many new members. "We are trying to raise money to do it again," she said.

The subway station advertisements were chosen for the \$25,000 campaign because they were the best deal for the given budget, said Michael De Dora Jr., the executive director for the New York branch of the [Center for Inquiry](#). A Times Square ad would have cost \$45,000 to \$50,000 for a month, while a campaign that blanketed the inside of subway cars would have cost \$70,000.

The subway campaign is timed to a new book called "[Good Without God](#)" by Greg Epstein, which is to be released on Oct. 27 by William Morrow. Mr. Epstein, the Harvard University humanist chaplain, is having a book signing at Columbia University Bookstore on Oct. 28.

Other books on atheism, including best-selling ones by Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, have helped to give visibility to an "atheism awakening," where atheists have been [finding strength in numbers](#). President Barack Obama's inaugural address even included a reference to "nonbelievers" among an enumeration of various religions.

Mr. De Dora said the million-person estimate of New Yorkers who do not believe in God was an extrapolation from surveys on religion. The [American Religious Identification Survey](#), which was released earlier this year, showed that those who put "none" for religion had risen to 15 percent in 2008, from 8 percent in 1990. Based on their projections.



Metamorphosis: How A Baptist Boy Became A Pinko, Heathen Tool Of Satan

Is church-state separation a liberal concept – or a conservative one?

In a [recent column](#) in the *Lexington Herald Leader*, Kentucky preacher Paul Prather says such definitions are malleable. They can even morph over time from one extreme to the other.

Prather, now pastor of Bethesda Church near Mt. Sterling, found himself caught in a culture-war crossfire a few years ago.

“In the early 1990s, as I recall it, after I’d become a religion writer for the Herald-Leader, I wrote an opinion column in favor of the strict separation of church and state,” Prather recalls. “This was, to my understanding, an exceedingly conservative view.”

Prather, who had been raised Southern Baptist, thought church-state separation ranked just below John 3:16 in theological importance for evangelical Christians. Baptists and other dissenters had been persecuted by the “established” clergy in the colonial era, and they wanted no part of church-state unions.

But times had changed.

“I sat back, waiting for congratulatory letters to roll in from my conservative, evangelical friends,” Prather recalls. “I did indeed hear from many evangelicals, including a number of Baptists. They excoriated me as a pinko, a heathen and a tool of Satan.”

In contrast, the columnist said self-described “Christian liberals” hailed him as their new local hero.

Prather, now a Pentecostal pastor, said he was shocked that such a transformation in viewpoints had taken place in only a few decades.

But public opinion surveys today confirm that the split Prather identified is wide and deep. A [recent poll](#) found that 81 percent of progressive religious activists say the United States “should maintain a strict separation of church and state.” Only 21 percent of conservative religious activists agreed.

None of this is particularly surprising. Since the rise of the Religious Right in the early 1980s, evangelicals have been subjected to a constant barrage of vicious attacks on the church-state wall.

It’s too bad nonetheless.

I think of church-state separation not as a liberal concept or a conservative one, but rather as part of the constitutional foundation of American life. It is a pragmatic and essential policy that Americans of all religious and political a **culture-war crossfire a few years ago**.

Taken from Americans United for the Separation of church and state’s Newsletter of November ‘09

First Kiva Team to Reach \$1 Million!



Congratulations!!

The first Kiva Lending Team to reach \$1,000,000 in loans is the Atheists, Agnostics, Skeptics, Freethinkers, Secular Humanists and the Non-Religious!

The team consists of almost 6,000 Kiva Lenders and together they have made 32,946 loans totaling \$1,000,625.00 to Kiva Entrepreneurs - quite the feat and something we at Kiva are super excited about!

We've enjoyed following this team's goals that they set for themselves via their message board; you can also check out their team communication on their team blog:

Cut and paste: <http://atheist-monkey.blogspot.com/>

This is a cause your editor also supports

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Atheists Lead The Movement To End Poverty

In just over one year the community of Atheists, Agnostics, Skeptics, Freethinkers, Secular Humanists and the Non-Religious (AASFHNR) at Kiva.org have raised \$1 million (USD) in interest-free loans to help end poverty. Kiva.org is a US non-profit organization that connects lenders with borrowers, from around the globe, who need a micro-finance loan. Peter Kroll, the AASFHNR community team leader, created the community on August 28th, 2008 with the ambition to organize those who share his world view that "people should care about reducing the suffering of other human beings because we acknowledge the evolutionary fact that we are all one human family."

Kiva's co-founder Matt Flannery has put out his call that "now is a time for the world's privileged to demonstrate to the world's poor just how compassionate and resilient we are." The AASFHNR community has responded, as well as many other communities and individuals. More than four years after Kiva's founding almost \$100 million has been lent worldwide.

Micro-finance is the brain-child of Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Mohammad Yunus. Yunus realized decades ago, on a visit to a poor village in his country of Bangladesh, that the local people were caught in an endless

caused by loan-sharks. He realized what a difference it would make by "removing the barriers faced by the poor so that they can unleash their creativity and intelligence in the service of humanity."

Can't wait for the Supreme Court to field this one!



Despite the pesky constitutional issue of separation of church and state, the tiny Oklahoma town of Wakita plans to open the country's first all-Christian prison, with a "Christ-centered" curriculum and all born-again staff. Town officials are all for it; Wakita taxpayers have yet to offer an opinion.

"It is a bedrock principle in American life that religion should pay its own way. No citizen should ever be taxed to pay for the religious indoctrination of another." - Americans United for Separation of Church and State.



We continue to gain ground ! From the NY Times Nov 7, 2009

The atheists and their organizations are connecting on the Internet, holding meet-ups in bars, advertising on billboards and buses, volunteering at food pantries and picking up roadside trash, earning atheist groups recognition on adopt-a-highway signs.

Ten national organizations that variously identify themselves as atheists, humanists, freethinkers and others who go without God have recently united to form the Secular Coalition for America. These groups, once rivals, are now pooling resources to lobby in Washington for separation of church and state. A wave of donations, some in the millions of dollars, has enabled the hiring of more paid professional organizers.

The organizations liken their strategy to that of the gay-rights movement, which lifted off when closeted members of a scorned minority decided to go public.

Part of what is giving the movement momentum is the proliferation of groups on college campuses. The Secular Student Alliance now has 146 chapters, up from 42 in 2003.

Despite changing attitudes, though, polls continue to show that atheists are ranked lower than any other minority or religious group when Americans are asked whether they would vote for or approve of their child marrying a member of that group.

In England, the Atheist Bus Campaign, an effort to disseminate a godless message to the greater public, proved very popular. It all began when Ariane Sherine, a comedy writer, saw an advertisement on a bus. The ad was fairly mild, just a passage from the Bible and the address of a Christian Web site. But when Ms. Sherine looked on the Web site, she was startled to learn that she and her nonbelieving friends were headed straight to hell, to "spend all eternity in torment."

She thought, how about putting some atheist messages on the bus, as a corrective to the religious ones? And so were planted the seeds of the bus campaign.

When the organizers announced the effort in October 2008, they said they hoped to raise a modest \$8,000 or so. But something seized people's imagination. Supported by Mr. Dawkins, the scientist and author; the philosopher A. C. Grayling; and the British Humanist Association, among others, the campaign raised nearly \$150,000 in four days, and had more than \$200,000 by January 2009, when it unveiled its advertisements on 800 buses across Britain.

"There's probably no God," the advertisements said. "Now stop worrying and enjoy your life."

Songs on a plane

Somali Adulterer Stoned to death

From BBC News Nov 6, 2009

Islamists in southern Somalia have stoned a man to death for adultery but spared his pregnant girlfriend until she gives birth.

Abas Hussein Abdirahman, 33, was killed in front of a crowd of some 300 people in the port town of Merka.

An official from the al-Shabab group said the woman would be killed after she has had her baby.

Islamist groups run much of southern Somalia, while the UN-backed government only control parts of the capital.

This is the third time Islamists have stoned a person to death for adultery in the past year.

Al-Shabab official Sheikh Suldan Aala Mohamed said Mr Abdirahman had confessed to adultery before an Islamic court.

"He was screaming and blood was pouring from his head during the stoning. After seven minutes he stopped moving," an eyewitness told the BBC.

The BBC's Mohammed Olad Hassan in Mogadishu says that if the woman is also killed, her baby would be given to relatives to look after.

Last month, two men were stoned to death in the same town after being accused of spying.

A 13-year-old girl was stoned to death for adultery in the southern town of Kismayo last year.

Human rights groups said she had been raped.

Another man has also been punished in this way in the Lower Shabelle region.

Lest you think these "fundies" are cruel, remember the woman is permitted to bear her child before they stone her

By the way—these people do not execute virgins should they commit a crime, so they rape them first

Editor's comment

Here is an excerpt from a letter written by long-time atheist activist Margaret Downey to American Airlines, which apparently played Christian music to the cabin on a plane in which she was flying.

In total we had to listen to three songs about a religious doctrine we find disturbing. I'm sure that a Jewish family, a Hindi family and nontheist people such as my husband and I were equally offended that American Airlines was promoting the Christian doctrine in a space that could not be escaped from. We were a captive audience!

I expect my airlines to remain neutral in matters of religion. This is why I will not fly Alaska Airlines. They promote and proselytize Christianity at every opportunity.

Please confirm that this type of religious incident will not happen again when I use American Airlines. Please also explain who was responsible for the religious promotion on this flight — the pilot and/or the staff.

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