

# *The* Cowtown Humanist

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A Chapter of the [American Humanist Association](#) and allied with the [Council for Secular Humanism](#)

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## DAVID CROFT SPEAKS ON RELIGIOUS HUMANISM

## MCCLURE TO SPEAK ON RIGHT-TO-DIE ISSUES

## AMERICA'S ANTI-EVOLUTIONARY CRUSADE

### HUMANISTS HEAR DAVID CROFT ON RELIGIOUS HUMANISM AND FOUNDING OF HUMANIST CHURCH OF NORTH TEXAS

By Jim Cheatham

*Man is the measure of all things.*

-Protagoras

Or is he? Humanism traces its roots to Greece and Rome and was influenced by the Renaissance and the Reformation; modern versions originated in efforts to cope with the challenges of modern scientific discoveries, particularly the Darwinian revolution in biological science. Although strictly materialistic explanations seem to suffice for all naturalistic phenomena, even many of our greatest thinkers have been reluctant to give up belief in a transcendental and/or immanent deity. Hence, the split in Humanist ranks between religious and secular versions and even further divisions in each of

these to reflect differing religious backgrounds and political ideologies.

Unitarians have been in the vanguard, at least in America, in the debate over the bases for morality, ethics and spiritual well being. Breaking away from Congregationalists in 1825, they were to be strongly influenced by August Comte's positivist philosophy. Most Unitarians Universalists, David says, hold to a natural theology with the deity embodying nature or imbuing nature with divine power. For the theists in their ranks, something more is needed: Prayer to a Supreme Being. Rationalists, on the other hand, whether deists, atheists or agnostics, eschew the supernatural and urge reason as the prime source of knowledge and the only valid basis for ethics and morality.

In time, Unitarianism was to spawn various offshoots. In 1867 the Free Religious Association led by Ralph Waldo Emerson was formed from "non-Christian positivist theists." It was in turn to give birth to the New

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York Society for Ethical Culture in 1876. Various other Humanist societies were to follow. Among them were the First Humanist Society of New York, on whose board sat Albert Einstein and Julian Huxley, the Humanist Society of Friends (1939), International Humanist and Ethical Society (1952), Fellowship of Religious Humanists (1962), Society for Humanistic Judaism (1963), the American Humanist Association (AHA), and the Council for Secular Humanism (CSC). Other milestones along the way were the founding (and demise) of many Humanist publications and the issuance of three Manifestoes (in 1933, 1973 and 2000). A salient feature of the Humanist movement has been the debate whether or not humanism constitutes a religion. The courts have agreed with those organizations wishing to enjoy the legal privileges of such status; the CSC, in its ongoing debate with "Creationists", has emphatically rejected the notion that secular humanism is religion.

Within Unitarianism itself, the debate continues on how inclusive the Church can be of theists and secularists. In 1920 the so-called battle between the "God Men" and the "No God-Men" resulted in a *modus vivendi* in which intellectual integrity and religious fellowship for every one of moral purpose without regard to theological beliefs became the cornerstone of Unitarian practice. Later, lack of a religious or philosophical creed facilitated the entry of new religious movements such as neopaganism and new ageism to the chagrin of some humanists. More recently, newly installed President William Sinkford made a controversial call for more "God-talk" in the Church.

David voiced his own preference for the AHA among still extant Humanist organizations as more inclusive and with which his Humanist Church of North Texas may affiliate. It meets every third Saturday at 11:30 a.m. at the Denton Unitarian Universalist Fellowship building.

**Chairman's Corner**

by Russell Elleven



Hello Friends!

I look forward to seeing you all at our next meeting. It'll be a good one.

Each month I look forward to getting together with folks who like to share their ideas, share their time, and who remember to contribute canned food to our monthly meetings.

For those of you who have the inclination, I invite you to visit the website of the American Humanist Association ([americanhumanist.org](http://americanhumanist.org)). Once there click on "Chapters and Affiliates" and spend some time looking at what other chapters are doing. I'd love to hear your ideas of how we might improve our group. What can we do to make these more attractive to others who might share our worldview?

Let me hear your ideas. Thanks for sharing your time. Bring a can of food. -Russell

**PROFESSOR MCCLURE TO ADDRESS END-OF-LIFE ISSUES AT OCTOBER 21 MEETING**

By Jim Cheatham

Our speaker for the next regular monthly meeting will be Professor Phil McClure of the North Texas Hemlock Society.

The national organization, now known as End-of-Life Choices, supports "every person's right of choice and

dignity in the final chapter of their lives." The organization, which receives no government funding, oversees and manages political and legislative activities aimed at changing the law so that dying patients can choose peaceful death as part of the continuum care at the end of life. The organization's foundation is non-profit and initiates and carries out educational, research and patient advocacy activities to help adults plan for a peaceful death. Programs for members include the Caring Friends and Patient Advocacy. The foundation also publishes and distributes books, tapes and other educational material explaining the full spectrum of end-of-life choices as well as a quarterly magazine (CHOICES).

**MORE ON CHOICES**

We should drop the classical sanctity-of-life ethic and embrace a quality-of-life ethic instead. That is, we should say that personal integrity is more important than biological survival. We are not vitalists, for whom the highest good is being alive. But to say this—to say that biological life is not sacrosanct and there are more valuable things than being alive—is to make a break with established religion and medical piety.

Joseph Fletcher, *The Humanist* (1974)

**THE PATRIOT ACT VS. OUR CIVIL LIBERTIES**

The Greater Fort Worth ACLU, Tarrant County League of Women Voters, and First Jefferson Unitarian Universalist Church present an educational forum covering the USA PATRIOT Act.

**Tuesday, November 4, 2003, 7 to 9 p.m.,** First Jefferson UU Church, 1959 Sandy Lane, Fort Worth

Panelists will present a history of the Act, a Muslim's perspective on the Act, and Homeland Security's enforcement of the Act. A moderator will field questions for the panel following the presentations.

Co-Sponsors include the Arlington League of Women Voters and Westside UU Church.

## More on Religion

### RULINGS NIX BOY SCOUT SUPPORT

A federal judge ruled on July 31 that the city of San Diego acted improperly when it leased 18 acres of Balboa Park to the Boy Scouts for one dollar a year. "It is clear the Boy Scouts of America's strongly-held private, discriminatory beliefs are at odds with values requiring tolerance and inclusion in the public realm," ruled U.S. District Judge Napoleon Jones, Jr.

A federal appeals court on July 10 ruled that the State of Connecticut may exclude the Boy Scouts of America from the State Employee Charitable Campaign because of Scoutings' anti-gay policy. (Freethought Today, 9/03)

### PRISON FELLOWSHIP CROWS PREMATURELY

Supporters of President Bush's faith-based initiative cheered when a study came out indicating that graduates of Charles W. Colson's Prison Fellowship program returned to prison at a lower rate than members of a control group. Analyzing the study in the online magazine Slate, UCLA's Professor of Public Policy Mark Kleiman found that Prison Fellowship started out with 177 volunteer prisoners in its InnerChange program, but that only 75 of them graduated. To be counted as a graduate, an ex-inmate had to get a job. Prison Fellowship counted only these 75 in its study. Kleiman said that when all 177 participants were looked at, the results show that InnerChange participants actually

returned to prison at a higher rate than non-participants. (C&S, 9/3)

### THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND AMERICAN LAW

When Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore's 2.5-ton sculpture of the Ten Commandments was wheeled out of the courthouse, the furies of hegemonic Christianity were unleashed. Supporters protested, Moore spoke passionately, and commentators echoed the notion that the Ten Commandments are the sole source of American law and therefore never should have been removed.

The primary problem with the claim that the Ten Commandments are the sole source of American law is that the facts simply do not support it. To the contrary, there are many, varied sources for American law. At most, some elements of the Ten Commandments play a supporting role. ([Writ](#), 9/11)

### MADISON ON CHURCH AND STATE

What influence in fact have ecclesiastical establishments had on Civil Society? In some instances they have been seen to erect a spiritual tyranny on the ruins of the Civil authority; in many instances they have been upholding the thrones of political tyranny; in no instance have they been seen the guardians of the liberties of the people.

--James Madison,  
"Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments"

### EVOLUTIONARY STUDIES OCTOBER 8 AT WESTSIDE

Video presentation of Lecture 9 was shown at Westside Unitarian Universalist Church on the second Wednesday of the month. The lecturer, Edward J. Larsen, has a law degree from Harvard, and an M.A. and Ph.D. in the history of science from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He currently holds a joint appointment in the history department and law school at the University of Georgia, where he teaches the history of science to undergraduates, and health, science, and technology law to law students. He knows his brief. Following is a description of the lecture:

**Scope:** Decades of popular concern over the theory of evolution erupted during the 1920s into a crusade by conservative American Protestants against teaching evolution in public schools. The crusade was part of their larger effort to defend traditional beliefs and values against liberalism in the church and secularism in society. Crusaders met immediate opposition from religious liberals and a broad array of secularists. The battle was joined over the theory of evolution because both sides viewed it as central to religious liberalism and scientific secularism.

The battle reached its public climax in 1925, when Tennessee's new law against teaching evolution was challenged by a schoolteacher named John Scopes. The nation watched as Christian politician William Jennings Bryan and agnostic lawyer Clarence Darrow dueled over the anti-evolution law in court. They helped make the issue into a flashpoint for public controversy.

## HUMANIST MEETING 2-FOR-1

The Regular HoFW Monthly Meeting is Tuesday, October 21 at 7:00pm at Westside UU Church.

The Board invites you to join us prior to the meeting at 5:30pm at Luby's Cafeteria, 5901 S Hulen Street, Fort Worth. Just north of the Hulen/Granbury Rd intersection.

## NEWS BRIEFS

### Texans Opposed to Gay Marriages

Texans, by a four to one margin, believe that homosexual behavior is morally wrong and oppose efforts to legalize gay and lesbian marriages, according to a Scripps Howard Texas Poll. The poll also showed strong opposition to the U.S. Supreme Court's watershed decision striking down anti-sodomy laws in Texas and 12 other states. A majority of 56 percent opposed the June 26 decision, compared with 32 percent in favor. "The numbers overall reflect that we have a difficult job and a lot of work here in the state of Texas," said Randall Ellis, executive director of the Austin-based Lesbian/Gay Rights Lobby of Texas. FWST, 9/5/03).

### Four Texas Nobelists Agree: Don't Mess with Textbooks

In an op-ed piece for the Dallas Morning News four Texas Nobel Prize scientists have urged members of the Texas Board of Education, who are currently deciding whether eleven high school biology textbooks are suitable for adoption by the state to "render a decision based solely on whether the texts are scientifically accurate" and to discount the objections from antievolutionists, which "have been refuted in great detail by scientists in testimony prepared for the state board and in analyses of the central arguments raised by opponents of the texts.

They observe, "those supposedly scientific challenges are directed selectively at the theory of evolution. ...Clearly, the motivation for the current challenges lies not in science, and the scientific classroom is not the proper forum for such a debate. The board is scheduled to render a decision at its November 6-7 meeting.

### Patriot Act II

President Bush is seeking broad new authority to allow federal agents—without the approval of a judge—to demand private records and compel testimony. The New York Times comments:

Rather than lash out at well-intentioned critics, the Bush administration should listen to those who are saying we need less Patriot Act, not more.

### The Poor Are Ever More Among Us

Census Bureau reports that the ranks of the poor rose by 1.3 million in 2002. The New York Times comments that along with growth in the poverty rolls to about 35 million, there has been an equally disturbing drop in the number of those impoverished families who are eligible for limited welfare actually managing to obtain that aid; years ago this nation chose to proclaim a "war" on poverty but priorities appear to have shifted. (NYT, 9/8)

### FRENCH DEBATE EUTHANASIA

The assisted suicide of a 22-year old paraplegic has stirred an emotion-charged debate among French politicians, the media and the public whether the current ban on euthanasia of any type should be modified. In a book published just two days before his death, Vincent Humbert, a 22-year old fireman who was tragically injured in a traffic accident three years ago, called for the legalization of euthanasia. Assisted suicide is outlawed in France but is permitted under certain circumstances in the Netherlands and Belgium. It is fully legal in Switzerland.

Late Wednesday, September 24, his mother injected sedatives into her son's intravenous drip sending him into a coma. His family then pleaded with doctors to let him die. "Liberation", the country's largest left-wing daily,

praised Ms. Humbert in an editorial headlined: "Let us end this hypocrisy." Government Ministers, including the Premier, have counseled against precipitous legislation; opposition figures are generally supporting a change in the ban. As of September 28, no action had been taken to prosecute Ms. Humbert. (NYT and Le Monde)

## WHAT CAN I DO?

By Michael Rivera

Much has been made of the USA PATRIOT Act in the two years since its becoming law. Whether you see it as a tramping of civil rights or a necessary tool in the fight against terrorism, there is no doubt that the landscape of criminal justice in the United States has changed considerably. In addition, there is mounting evidence that the Bush Administration is considering changing the law again to give even more powers to law enforcement in what has been dubbed Patriot Act II. Becoming informed about the laws that could affect our civil liberties is the first step toward making sound, reasonable judgments on whether to support or condemn their passage. I encourage everyone to attend the ACLU forum on the Patriot Act on November 4 at First Jefferson Unitarian Universalist Church.

Some Internet resources on the law are:

Summary of the USA PATRIOT Act from Vermont Senator Leahy:

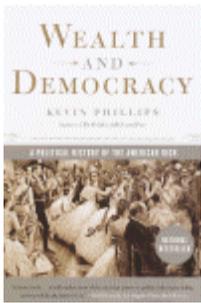
<http://leahy.senate.gov/press/200110/100401a.html>

Commentary from Professor Susan Herman, Brooklyn Law School:

<http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/forum/forumnew40.htm>

## BOOK CORNER

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*Wealth and Democracy: A Political History of the American Rich.* By Kevin Phillips

*I see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me and causes me to tremble for my country. As a result of the war, corporations have been enthroned and an era of corruption in high places will follow, and the money power of the country will endeavor to prolong its reign by working upon the prejudices of the people until all wealth is aggregated in a few hands and the Republic is destroyed.*

-Abraham Lincoln,  
letter written  
11/21/1864

Kevin Phillips is familiar to many as author of the prescient *The Coming Republican Majority* and columnist of the Los Angeles Times. Although he worked in the Nixon White House, he is no garden variety Republican. His ideological sympathies are with the now virtually dormant reformist wing of the party (now pretty well limited to John McCain) to which he assigns “the two greatest Republican presidents, Lincoln and Teddy Roosevelt.”

How has so much of the wealth and income of the nation become concentrated in so few hands? In fact, the U.S. has the most skewed distribution of any of the developed countries. Well, it isn't because of a simple working of the market, as the free market trumpeters would have us believe. “Laissez-faire is a pretense.” From the founding of the nation, Phillips tells us, government has had a prominent role in the distribution of income and wealth. Mostly in Federalist/Whig/ Republican administrations, the hand of government has tended to tilt more toward the haves, in Democratic administrations, mostly toward have-nots, although there are exceptions for both. (Cleveland, e.g., was an ultra-conservative, economically; the first Roosevelt, by contrast, was reformist in spirit if accomplishing not a whole lot in fact.) The bankers feasted during the years Alexander Hamilton headed Treasury; the industrial elite and particularly the railroaders benefited from federal, state and local

largess during the gilded age and again during the roaring 20s. Government procurement (as much of half of Civil War procurement may have been pocketed as profits), foreign economic policy and federal management of the banking system have mostly advantaged the economic elite.

For the last 25 years spending and tax policies have generally supported the concentration of wealth. Illustrative is the fact that between 1979 and 1989 the portion of the nation's wealth and income held by the top one percent nearly doubled from 22 percent to 30 percent. By the mid-90s some economists estimated that the top one percent had captured 70 percent of all earnings' growth since the mid-seventies. A Democratic administration did little if anything to reverse course. (Apparently Clinton's equalitarian instincts were chilled by the comment of his then Under-Secretary of the Treasury, Robert Rubin, that the success of his administration was in the hands of the bond traders.) Phillips warns that to allow this trend to continue will endanger our democratic institutions and lead to plutocracy.

This book is a great source for two centuries of data on income and wealth distribution. Phillips' warning about the current direction of the country warrants pondering.

## Call to Humanists

Is there something we forgot to mention in the newsletter? Do you have a comment or suggestion? E-mail Michael Rivera with:

- Newsletter story ideas.
- Photos for the newsletter.
- Events to include on the newsletter or Internet Group.
- Subscribe/Unsubscribe requests.

## HoFW Events

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### OCTOBER EVOLUTION STUDIES

The next installment of the Evolution series was Wednesday, October 8, from 7-9:15 pm at Westside UU Church, 6901 McCart Avenue, Suite 125, Fort Worth, Texas. The church is located on McCart Avenue between Altamesa Boulevard and Sycamore School Road.

### OCTOBER MEETING

The next regular HoFW meeting will be October 21 at 7:00 pm at West Side UU Church. Professor Phil McClure of the North Texas Hemlock Society will speak on End-of-Life Choices. Come to Luby's on South Hulen prior to the meeting for some dinner and conversation with the Board.

Please note that the date for the regular meeting was incorrect in the last issue of the newsletter – Sorry for the confusion, *mea culpa, mea culpa, mea culpa*. (MJR)

### BOARD MEETING

The next quarterly meeting of the Board of Directors is set for Tuesday, October 21, 2003 at 5:30pm at the Luby's Cafeteria on South Hulen.

### NOVEMBER EVOLUTION STUDIES

The November installment of the Evolution series will be Wednesday, November 12, from 7-9:15 pm at Westside UU Church.

### NOVEMBER HOFW MEETING

The regular HoFW meeting will be Tuesday, November 18 at West Side Unitarian Church. Speaker TBA.

### YOUR OFFICERS, AND HOW TO REACH THEM

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