

## THE COWTOWN HUMANIST      OCTOBER 2005

GWEN GIPSON TO SPEAK ON CONSTITUTIONALITY OF ROE V. WADE

AT OCTOBER 12 MEETING

Gwen Gipson, a software engineer holding degrees in both English literature and computer science, will be our guest speaker on October 12. Her topic will be "The Constitutionality of Roe v. Wade."

More than 25 million American women have had abortions since the Supreme Court decided Roe V. Wade and Doe v. Bolton in 1973. Often kept secret, even from close friends or family members, the experience cuts across all income levels, religions, races, lifestyles, political parties and marital circumstances. Though abortion rates have been falling since 1990, to their lowest level since the mid-1970s, abortion remains one of the most common surgical procedures for women in America. More than one in five pregnancies end in abortion.

The steepest decline has been among teenagers. Researchers attribute the drop in teenage abortion to reduced rates of pregnancy, as a result of better access to contraceptives—including the three month Dyso-Provera injection—and abstinence. Conversely, for poor and low-income women, rates rose in the 1990s, possibly in response to the 1996 welfare overhaul, which reduced support systems for women who carry their fetuses to term. At every income level studied by the Gutwachter Institute, Afro-American women were more likely to terminate their pregnancies than white women. More than half of all women having abortions have had children, a percentage that rose in the 1980s but has not changed since 1990, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Since 1992, when the Supreme Court recognized states' authority to restrict abortion as long as they did not create an "undue burden," states have enacted 487 laws restricting patients or providers, in many cases calling for mandatory counseling, waiting periods and parental consent for minors. The result is a patchwork of laws and regulations that vary from state to state, some of which may come before the Supreme Court.

In surveys, Americans largely support these restrictions, even if they say abortion should be legal. This fall, the Court will consider whether New Hampshire's parental notification statute creates an undue burden because it does not include an exception to protect the health of the woman.

Threats against abortion clinics are on the decline, in part because of sterner laws to protect clinics. But picketing has remained steady, at 80 percent of clinics. (NYT)

SUGGESTED READING: *Abortion: The Clash of Absolutes*, by Lawrence Tribe. Professor Tribe of Yale University is one of our most distinguished constitutional scholars. He was considered for appointment to the Supreme Court by the previous administration.

*Becoming Justice Blackmun*, by Linda Greenhouse. All who watch PBS's *Washington Week in Review* will know the author, the NYT's legal correspondent, as an insightful observer of American legal institutions. Justice Blackmun, a conservative when he entered the Court, became in time its most liberal member and the author of *Roe v. Wade*. May John Roberts follow in his footsteps!

## HoFW NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

**SEPTEMBER MEETING:** Our last meeting featured attorney Alan Bowling who spoke on "Living Wills, Powers of Attorney and the Right to Die with Dignity." The many questions he fielded from our audience of 23 Humanists attested to a very practical interest in these subjects by our membership.

**OCTOBER MEETING:** This month's meeting will be held on Wednesday, October 12, 7:00 p.m., at Friends of the Fort Worth Public Library Bookstore, 5332 Trail Lake Drive, located in the Wedgworth Shopping Center just off Wedgmont Circle North. From I-20 take Granbury Road South to Wedgmont Circle North. Make a left-turn onto Wedgmont Circle North. You will see a CITGO station on your left. Turn left there again into the Wedgworth Shopping Center. Coming west on I-20, you may take the Trail Lake Road exit and approach the shopping center from the southeast.

**PRE-MEETING DINNER:** Our pre-meeting dinner will be held at Jason's Deli at 5000 Overton Ridge Road (near Costco's). Turn right off S. Hulen St. (going south) and continue a couple of blocks. Jason's will be on your right. Dinner time: 5:30 p.m.

**NOVEMBER PROGRAM:** James Ward Lee will be our speaker at our November 9 meeting. Topic: TBA. Professor Lee's most recent publication was *Adventures with a Texas Humanist* (2004). Lee is an emeritus professor and former chair of English at the University of North Texas. He is a past president of the Texas Folklore Society and author of many articles, books and reviews. His humorous essays have made him a popular speaker and writer. Whatever the topic he chooses, you can count on it being entertaining.

**GOT TOO MANY BOOKS?** Our hosts will be happy to take any marketable books off your hands. Proceeds help to keep a fine institution in business and to provide us with a great meeting place.

**TREASURER'S REPORT:** The Association had income of \$114.00 and expenditures of \$66.03 for a net gain of \$47.97 in June to \$835.15.

**A WARM WELCOME TO A NEW MEMBER:** We added Mary Hunter of Red Oak, TX to our rolls in September. Mary teaches high school biology at Highland Park in Dallas. She is a long time humanist.

**REMINDERS:** Dues are owing since March (if you haven't already caught up on them): \$18 for individual memberships, \$24 for persons receiving the Newsletter by regular mail; \$30 for couples receiving the Newsletter by e-mail, \$36 for couples receiving the Newsletter by regular mail.

**A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR:** You will notice that the Newsletter has a rather different format this month. Some readers have commented that the Newsletter could be profitably shortened. It has also been suggested that many of the news items are redundant since our readership has access to publications, the internet and public libraries that keep them abreast of all that is going on of interest to Humanists. In response to these suggestions, reporting on contemporary events has been largely suspended as of this issue. In the past we have tried to address the core issues of concern to Humanists, viz., separation of church and state, keeping religion out of the public school systems, promotion of scientific explanations for natural phenomena, protection of civil, minority and constitutional rights, reform of the capital punishment system, a woman's right to choose, a just distribution of income, protection of the environment and respect for the norms of international treaties and conventions. We will continue to focus on these issues by supplying synopses or summaries of articles, books or dialogues that many of our members may not have access to. We hope that you will be better served by the new Newsletter. Your comments will be appreciated.

## YOUR OFFICERS AND HOW TO REACH THEM

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## JUDGE ROBERTS WOWS THE SENATORS

From *Bush v. Gore* to the Second Amendment to separation of church and state to abortion, he was masterful at saying a lot but avoiding answering the key questions.

--Erwin Chemerinsky, Duke law professor

Before the Senate Judiciary Committee Judge Roberts was ever tactful and polished in his responses. He even said a few things to please liberal ears, e.g., that he is no conservative ideologue, that the constitution grants a right to privacy, and that some of the founding document's wording could be open to modern interpretation. A far cry from Justices Scalia and Thomas, or so it would seem. But liberals will remember that Clarence Thomas didn't appear in his confirmation hearings as a right-wing ideologue either. He professed to have no opinion on *Roe v. Wade*, never having discussed it during his student days at Yale Law School, yet a few weeks later he showed himself a staunch opponent of legalized abortion. We will have to hope Judge Roberts is a man of greater candor.

## CHALLENGED BY CREATIONISTS, MUSEUMS ANSWER BACK

Young earthers and Intelligent Design proponents are apparently engaged in an organized effort to rattle docents at museums with exhibits on evolution. The docent at the Museum of the Earth at Ithaca, NY, for example, reported recently that a group of seven or eight creationists peppered her with questions from techniques for dating fossils to the second law of thermodynamics, their queries coming so thick and fast that she found it hard to reply.

In response to this kind of intimidation, museum directors around the country are adopting strategies to contend with challenges to the theory of evolution by a type of visitor that they say is growing common and sometimes aggressive. Among several working on evolution exhibits, Dr. Judy Diamond, curator of public programs at the University of Nebraska State Museum in Lincoln is working on one financed by the National Science Foundation that will be on long-term display at six museums of natural history from Minnesota to Texas. The program will train docents and staff members. "The goal is to understand the controversies, so that people are better able to handle them as they come up," she said. "Museums as a field have recognized the need to take a more proactive role in evolution education." Docents are being told that when they encounter religious fundamentalists, they should emphasize that scientists live by the rules of science. They seek answers to questions about nature, they look for explanations that can be tested by experiment and observation in the material world, and they understand that all scientific knowledge is provisional—capable of being overturned when better answers are discovered." Is it against all religions? "No, But it is against some religions." There is more than one type of creationist, "the thinking creationists, who want to know answers, and they are willing to listen, even if they go away unconvinced" and "people who for whatever reasons are here to bother you. To trap you, to bludgeon you." (NYT)

## DEBATING CREATIONISTS

Don't do it. The point is not whether or not you would "win" the debate. Winning is not what the

creationists realistically aspire to. For them, it is sufficient that the debate happens at all. To the

gullible public that is their natural constituency, it is enough that their man is seen sharing a platform

with a real scientist. "There must be something in creationism," they will say, "or Dr. So-and-so

would not have agreed to debate it on equal terms." Inevitably, when you turn down the invitation

you will be accused of cowardice, or of inability to defend your own beliefs. But that is better than

supplying the creationists with what they crave—the oxygen of respectability in the world of real

science.

--Stephen Jay Gould's advice to Richard Dawkins

Some evolutionists are flummoxed that Michael Ruse, a philosophy professor at Florida State University, prolific author and frequent participant in public debates between creationists and evolutionists, has not taken Gould's advice. To be sure, he has performed very ably, on the occasions I have heard him, in deflating creationist nonsense. (Among his debating opponents have been Dr. Philip Johnson, a Berkeley Law School professor and ardent supporter of ID, and William Dembski, former director of Baylor University's Michael Polanyi Center (notorious for its young earthers and old earthers alike). In the process, he has very likely helped to make creationism and Intelligent Design theory respectable with the thinking public. Further to the dismay of many in the scientific community, he has acceded to the creationists' charge that evolutionism involves metaphysical claims and, in that respect, its underpinnings are no different than religion's. [Irving Kristol: Secular humanism is more than science, because it proceeds to make all kinds of inferences about the human condition and human possibilities that are not in any authentic sense scientific. Those inferences are metaphysical and in the end theological.] To his credit, he was one of the expert witnesses in the Arkansas case in which a federal court ruled ID a religious, not a scientific theory, thus having no place in the public classroom.

Ruse has just published another book in an attempt to achieve a rapprochement between science and religion, or if not a rapprochement, at least a narrowing of the breach. I have not read it, however, I thought many of our readers would be interested in knowing how he sees the great divide having arisen. The following interview with an editor of the American Scientist Newsletter is heavily condensed and edited. (My thanks to John Johnson for alerting me to an excellent source of news on scientific developments of interest to the layman.)

### *The Evolution-Creation Study:*

In my book, I trace the present conflict between evolution and creationism back to the Enlightenment. I argue that at the beginning of the 18th century there was something of a crisis of faith—could it be that God did not exist? There were two basic responses—back to God and faith, Providence, and forward with reason and human knowledge, Progress. This explains on the one hand the rise of Methodism and Pietism [a German religious movement], the First Great Awakening in America, etc., and on the other hand, the French philosophes Voltaire and Diderot, as well as the British (often Scottish) thinkers like Adam Smith and David Hume. Evolution became part and parcel of the Progressivist movement, especially in places like London and Edinburgh. Both sides were obsessed about the future—the faith types about what God expects of us and what he promises (heaven or hell), the reason types with how much better we humans can make society and knowledge, etc. Future obsessions like these are known as eschatologies. These revolve around Revelations, where the talk is of a thousand year period (the millennium)—a good period here on earth—followed by the Last Judgment. Premillennialists think that Jesus is going to return before the millennium to lead his troops. At that point, the good are in luck and the bad are not. Trying to put the world to rights now is impossible (due to original sin) and pointless. Postmillennialists think that Jesus will come only after the millennium—to make the ideal world a reality, and hence we have the obligation now to try to prepare for the millennium—to make the ideal world a reality. Sitting around and waiting is not the way to go—rather, roll up your sleeves and use your God-given talents to make things better. When you have done this, then Jesus will come.

From the beginning the Enlightenment was allied with one rather than with another reading of the Bible. As the years went by the premillennialists (especially in America) became more literalist. The postmillennialists (again especially in America) became more metaphorical. The question was about what the future was going to be like and what our obligations now are.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century we have people like Edward O. Wilson [Nobel prize winning biologist at Harvard] who treat evolution as a secular religion. They are secular humanists with evolution at the center of their theology. It gives a world picture, it gives moral directions, etc. Then there are Christians like Teilhard de Chardin, for whom evolution is part and parcel of their Christianity. [Richard] Dawkins clearly thinks that his Darwinism is incompatible with Christianity. On the other hand, he does not want to tie in the course of nature with morality—as does E.O. Wilson—so I would be hesitant to call him a secular humanist.

In a way, after the Revolution, one might have thought that religion would decline. Most of the founding fathers were deists or less—Jefferson, Franklin, even Washington did not take communion. But the new country needed norms and guides, and the Protestant preachers stepped up to the plate. They and their strongly bible-based religion filled the gaps. After the Civil War the North became the home of postmillennialism and the South became the home of premillennialism, turning to the Bible for consolation. It is the red versus blue syndrome.

One thing that worries me is the belief by many Darwinists that their position implies atheism. If it does, then I think the creationists have a good point—Darwinism is getting close to religion. In which case, does it not violate the constitutional separation of church and state? But Darwinism does not imply atheism—it does not imply God either. But that is another issue. I'm not keen on the notion of evolutionary progress and I don't think you can get morality from the course of evolution. In my book, I try to give the creationists position fairly and with historical sympathy. Also, I do suggest that my fellow evolutionists often exacerbate the problem and that they should be more careful in what they say and not so hostile to all those with whom they differ.

*America's Environmental Report Card: Are We making the Grade?* By Harvey Blatt, 238 p. (2005)

The dustcover blurb suggests that this book "should be required reading for politicians at local, state, and federal levels, regardless of party affiliation or positions on environmental policy." I would suggest that it should be required reading for all American adults. Unless pressured by the voters, the politicians are most unlikely to act regardless of the need to do so. Although polls show that a majority of Americans rate environmental issues high in their list of concerns, environmental policies frequently fail to resonate at election time. Discussion of environmental matters was merely perfunctory during last year's presidential debates and did not figure prominently on the campaign hustings of the two major candidates. That environmental initiatives often involve large outlays of taxpayers' money on which there is no immediate return or they involve the protection of remote ecologies (viz. Alaska's north slope) are undoubtedly among the reasons environmental issues tend to get slighted by the politicians. It's not that we do not know how to tackle these issues. For, as Blatt avers:

...the ways to end or seriously curtail environmental pollution are known. Scientists know how to solve most problems of environmental pollution or degradation. The problems are political. Are Americans concerned enough to stop pollution if it increases their cost of living? Will they vote for politicians who promise to be hard-nosed on this issue? Sooner or later they will have to. There is no other choice.

But very possibly not yet. We have a president elected and re-elected whose environmental record is perhaps the worse of any president since before Teddy Roosevelt. The thrust of his administration has consistently favored producer interests over environmental protection. Enforcement of the Clean Water and Endangered Species Acts have been relaxed, national forests have been opened up more fully to logging, enforcement standards at the Environmental Protection Agency have been seriously eroded, emission limits on power plants have been curtailed. Internationally, the Bush administration has disdained cooperation with other nations to curb carbon dioxide emissions as one measure to slow down global warming. (Bush refused to support the Kyoto Protocol on the grounds that developing countries such as China and India had no obligations to reduce their carbon emissions under the treaty, moreover, that the measures called for would cost American jobs, a claim for which there is no convincing evidence. Probably his most important reservation was unsaid: He was not about to see America's flexibility to act constrained by any new international agreements.)

Blatt lays down a very persuasive case for acting expeditiously, particularly as relates to the ever growing use of chemicals, the toxification of the subsoil and of underground aquifers, rising levels of air pollution (it'll get steadily worse as China, India and other developing countries speed up their industrializations) and the exhaustion of our water supplies. Just making the wasters and polluters pay the full costs of what they taking from or adding to the environment would be a big step forward. For example, water is virtually free for most users even as it becomes in most parts of this country ever more scarce. In the San Joaquin valley the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers supplies water to farmers at about ten percent of its cost and hugely subsidizes it to producers in Arizona and other places in the West. American beltlines suggest that it is about time to stop subsidizing food production. Disposal of nuclear wastes—not to downplay what to

do about the ever rising mountains of garbage generated by our economy—is an issue still unresolved after decades of arguing about it. Should we build more nuclear power plants before we have found permanent burying grounds for the wastes that are already on hand in temporary storage locations? How many Americans are aware that Hanford, Washington, is the dirtiest place on earth—586 square miles of nuclear waste that is seeping toward the Columbia river from improperly installed storage bins? It may take as much a trillion dollar, yes \$1,000,000,000,000, to clean it up, says Blatt.

Who is our biggest polluter? You probably would not have guessed that it is the U.S. military (followed by the chemical industry). And our most profligate polluter is subject to no outside oversight, not by the Environmental Protection Agency, not by any other authority inside or outside the federal government. Not by the Congress. Only a minute share of its \$440 billion budget goes to cleaning up the messes made, says Blatt.

What have we to look forward to? Not very much, at least for the near term. The recent energy bill was full of tax breaks for the coal and oil industries, the sources of most of our air pollution, and only modest support for renewable sources of energy such as wind, solar and hydrogen. Unless a lot of public pressure is forthcoming, this administration is certain to continue favoring producer interests, regardless of the environmental consequences. We will just have to hope that hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the prospect of similar storms for at least the coming decade will begin to wake up the voting public to the risks of messing with Mother Nature.

Harvey Blatt was professor of geology at the Universities of Houston and of Oklahoma for many years. Its many easily understood graphs and tables make *Report Card* an easy read.