

Humanist CommonSense

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A CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION (AHA) AND AN AFFILIATE OF THE COUNCIL FOR SECULAR HUMANISM (CSH)

Palestine!

**Come out & join us on Tuesday,
May 18, 7 pm at the Lakeland
UUCU (see map pg. 11)**

PALESTINE ... AN ANCIENT AND MODERN ENIGMA. Is it a country? A state? Dueling theocracies? What ancient and current histories bind and divide it? Why does it seem so mysterious to most of us—but crystal clear to America's far-right evangelical Christians?

Despite the fact that most U.S. citizens know little about Palestine—in all of its manifestations—much of Washington's foreign policies and even use of our taxpayer monies are involved in these middle eastern lands and their unending disputes.

Since we are thus by force involved with Palestine and its neighboring countries, should we humanists take any part in encouraging and/or contesting America's actions across the eastern oceans?

You won't want to miss out on Dr.



Joyce Chumbley's fascinating presentation as she speaks about **PALESTINE!**

Joyce Chumbley earned her Ph.D. in Drama and Theatre Arts from the University of Hawaii. As a researcher, writer

and activist, for over three decades, she has been involved in education, the arts, and progressive environmental, social, and political issues from her Florida base.

She co-edited *Thomas Paine: In Search of the Common Good*, a compilation of papers that were presented at the U.N. in celebration of International Human Rights Day 1987 by contributors representing seven nations,

Freedom Wall

By James W. Williamson, M.D.

[Dr. Williamson, a member of our chapter and longtime Humanist advocate, is a retired cardiologist and currently lives in Orlando. Editor of a magazine for physicians, CENTRAL FLORIDA PHYSICIAN, he has contributed articles to various freethought publications and regularly submits letters to the ORLANDO SENTINEL. He served on the boards of Humanists of Florida and Atheists of Florida. E-mail: jwingw@aol.com]

DEMOLISHING THE WALL BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE in order to establish a Christian theocracy is the ultimate goal of the Christian Right. Since they believe their version of Christianity is infallible and the only true means of salvation, they can't understand why their religion shouldn't be an integral part of our lives and our government as well. They believe they are doing us a favor by saving our souls and think by Christianizing the world they are preparing it for Christ's Second Coming.

To tear down the wall, fundamentalist Christians flagrantly twist facts. They claim our first presidents were Christians as well as most of our other founders, that the essential documents our country was founded on incorporated Christian precepts, and that the founders didn't really intend to establish a strict separation between Christianity and the government. I'll review

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Utilitariansim

By Robert P. Tucker, Ph.D.

[Dr. Tucker, a founding member of our chapter, received his Ph.D. in Theology from the University of Chicago. He was chair of the Dept. of Religion and Philosophy, Yankton College, Yankton, SD, and former professor of Philosophy and Bible at Florida Southern College, Lakeland.]

"FLOAT LIKE A BUTTERFLY, STING LIKE A BEE"—he used to be "Cassius Clay," now he's "Mohammed Ali"! [6]

Do you remember that little doublet about the butterfly and the bee? At one time it was a self-description loudly proclaimed by a man who is known the world over as the heavy-weight boxing champion. For a long time, he beat all comers. Indeed, because his knock-out record was so good, he went around saying, "I am ...The Greatest!"

Those last two words are also used almost every time someone describes the ethical theory of "Utilitarianism." Its goal is to achieve "the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people." Although others had the idea before him, British philosopher *Jeremy Bentham* formulated it into a systematic theory of ethics and thus became rightfully known as the "Father of Utilitarianism." [4:139]

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CALENDAR

May–September 2010

May 10..... Humanist Dinner

New Location—Fred's Southern Market: See Info & Map on p. 11

May 18..... Regular Meeting

June 14..... Humanist Dinner

June 22..... Regular Meeting

July 12..... Humanist Dinner

August 9..... Humanist Dinner

No regular meetings in July & August

September 13..... Humanist Dinner

September 21..... Regular Meeting

More Wrangling over Lakeland Political Prayer

LAST MONTH, AN ARTICLE IN *COMMON SENSE* told the story that an atheist protest at a Lakeland City Commission meeting had grabbed front page coverage in the *Lakeland Ledger*. Well, the atheists are continuing to get a lot of press in Lakeland.

Continuing its coverage of this issue—a recent *Ledger* article opened with the startling news that “Emotions flared and police were called to the Lakeland City Commission meeting Monday, partly to keep a man who shouted at a group of atheists from tangling with them.” (Rick Rousos, April 5, 2010). The reporter added: “The atheists are threatening to sue the city.”

The story stated that five atheists attended the Commission meeting (noting that this was the third meeting for some of them in recent weeks) to petition that the prayers at the start of their city government meetings is in violation of the constitutional separation of church and state.

Lakeland’s Mayor Gow Fields then told the petitioners that he and fellow Lakelanders object to outsiders’ hijacking” their city meetings. The *Ledger* quotes Fields: “They’ve been given ample time to make their case,” later saying that the plan of the atheists is to be “rude, disruptive and disrespectful.”

But members of the Atheists of Florida (based in Tampa) contend that invoking God’s name does not belong at City Hall. Thus, during the Pledge of Allegiance, they all stood and loudly recited it with everyone else—but skipped the “under God” addition.

At the end of the meeting, when it came time for public comment portion, the Mayor invoked a rule he said was used occasionally during city meetings—that only one person from each group can speak.

After EllenBeth Wachs, the Lakeland chapter’s local director, had spoken, the group’s president, John Kieffer, tried to speak. But he was stopped when Fields called a recess and ended the meeting.

In protest, Kieffer, who said he was a Vietnam veteran, was “outraged” at

the denial of his right to speak.

Further adding to the furor, Lakeland citizen Richard Geringswald loudly challenged the atheists. The *Ledger* noted that: “The meeting threatened to turn into a rumble when Geringswald took a seat next to an atheist trying to be recognized by Fields. Geringswald said atheists have no right to speak.”

At this point, the Lakeland police were called to keep order.

According to the paper: “... the 911 call came from a secretary at the urging of City Manager Doug Thomas.

“With police on hand to make sure things got no uglier, Mayor Fields banged his gavel and took a recess, ending the meeting.

“Fields said giving time to the group included meeting with some of them last week in his office. ‘They wanted to twist things. They said they were going to sue, and they walked out,’ he said.”

EllenBeth Wachs, the Lakeland chapter director, confirmed that they plan to sue the city for gutting the line between church and state, and for prohibiting free speech.

The *Ledger* noted that three people were allowed to speak in defense of the city while only one—Wachs—was allowed to speak for the atheists.

Read this article at <http://www.theledger.com/article/20100405/news/4055056?p=all&tc=pgall>

UPDATES

TWO WEEKS LATER, ON APRIL 19, 2010, the *Ledger* reported that Richard Geringswald, president of Jamaica Bible Seminary (the citizen who denounced the atheists two weeks prior), opened the City Commission meeting with a moment of silence ... then immediately launched into a prayer for God to guide the commissioners to good decisions, asking God to “grace us with your vision and wisdom.”

According to *The Ledger*, the city’s officials claim that pre-meeting invocations are done on a rotating basis by religious leaders who volunteer to do so.

However, *The Ledger* observed, city records indicate that no clergy members other than Christian have prayed in the last 15 months; all meet-

ings in 2009 and to date in 2010 have been led by Christian clergy.

Geringswald pointed out that the atheists should be satisfied with his moment of silence before the meeting.”

EllenBeth Wachs, Lakeland chapter director of the Atheists of Florida, retorted: “... a moment of silence is fine, but not as a prelude to a prayer, which doesn’t belong in government meetings.”

A WEEK LATER, ON APRIL 23, 2010, *The Ledger* continued its City Commission prayer articles with a story about future invocators ... to wit, the City of Lakeland had updated its 2010 list of invocation speakers for City Commission meetings.

The Ledger reported that “Cantor Victor Geigner of Temple Emanuel, the sole Jewish synagogue in Lakeland, is scheduled to appear May 3, the first clergy member of a non-Christian faith to offer the invocation at commission meetings in more than 15 months ... Geigner said he was pleased to have the opportunity to lead a moment of spiritual reflection. ‘I think it’s a good thing to be as inclusive as we can be,’ he said.

“A speaker from another religious group not considered Christian, Lakeland’s Unitarian Universalist Congregation, is scheduled for Sept. 20.”

The paper revealed that city workers had mailed out about 400 queries to religious leaders in Lakeland and nearby communities, e.g., Winter Haven, Bartow, Auburndale and Polk City, having located possible places of worship by scouring the phone books for churches, temples, synagogues and mosques.

From a recent interview, *The Ledger* quoted *Ledger* Charles Haynes (senior scholar with the First Amendment Center, a nonpartisan educational foundation) about invocation practices by local government bodies.

Haynes claimed: “The practice of inviting citizens to pray to start a public meeting does not violate the First Amendment, But the invitation process needs to be fairly open and there should be a good-faith effort to include all religious communities.”

In February, the board of Temple

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What is Respect? What Does it Mean to Respect Religion or Theism?

If Irreligious Atheists Should 'Respect' Religion, What Does That Mean?

Ed. Note: With controversy swirling about the legality of the National Day of Prayer, we're likely to hear this demand loud and clear from the theists.

By Austin Cline, About.com Guide

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO 'RESPECT' someone's religion or religious beliefs? Many religious theists insist that their religion deserves to be respected, even by non-believers, but what exactly are they asking for? If they are simply asking to be let alone in their beliefs, that's not unreasonable. If they are asking that their right to believe be honored, then I agree. The problem is, these basic minimums are rarely, if ever, what people are asking for; instead, they are asking for much more.

The first clue that people are asking for more is demonstrated by the fact that no one who asks to be let alone is denied this and few Christians in the West have any trouble with their right to believe being infringed upon. The second clue that people are asking for more is how they accuse atheists of "intolerance" not because atheists are infringing on anyone's right to believe, or because they are going around badgering others, but rather because atheists are being very critical of the content of those beliefs. It can be argued, then, that what religious believers are *really* asking for is deference, reverence, high regard, admiration, esteem, and other things which their beliefs (or any beliefs, opinions, ideas, etc.) are not automatically entitled to.

Simon Blackburn describes this as "respect creep." Few if any irreligious atheists have a problem with "respecting" religion if we simply mean letting believers go about their rituals, worship, religious practices, etc., at least so long as those practices don't negatively impact others. At the same time, though, few irreligious atheists will agree to "respect" religion if we mean admiring it, having high regard for it as a

superior way to live, or deferring to the demands believers make on behalf of their beliefs and practices.

According to Blackburn:

People may start out by insisting on respect in the minimal sense, and in a generally liberal world they may not find it too difficult to obtain it. But then what we might call respect creep sets in, where the request for minimal toleration turns into a demand for more substantial respect, such as fellow-feeling, or esteem, and finally deference and reverence. In the limit, unless you let me take over your mind and your life, you are not showing proper respect for my religious or ideological convictions.

Respect is thus a complex concept that involves a spectrum of possible attitudes rather than a simple yes or no. People can and do respect ideas, things, and other people in one or two ways but not in others. This is normal and expected. So what sort of "respect" is due to religions and religious beliefs, even from irreligious atheists? Simon Blackburn's answer to this is, I believe, the correct one:

We can respect, in the minimal sense of tolerating, those who hold false beliefs. We can pass by on the other side. We need not be concerned to change them, and in a liberal society we do not seek to suppress them or silence them. But once we are convinced that a belief is false, or even just that it is irrational, we cannot respect in any thicker sense those who hold it—not on account of their holding it.

We may respect them for all sorts of other qualities, but not that one. We would prefer them to change their minds. Or, if it is to our advantage that they have false beliefs, as in a game of poker, and we are poised to profit from them, we may be wickedly pleased that they are taken in. But that is not a symptom of special substantial respect, but quite the reverse. It is one up to us, and one down to them.

Respecting religion in the sense of tolerating it is usually a fair request; but such minimal respect isn't what religious believers usually want. After all, there is little danger in America of most religious beliefs not being

tolerated on a basic level. Some religious minorities may have legitimate concerns in this regard, but they aren't the ones making the most noise about getting respect. Religious believers also don't appear to be interested in simply being "let alone" to go about their religious business.

Instead, they seem to want the rest of us to somehow admit or acknowledge just how important, serious, admirable, valuable, and wonderful their religion is. That's how they regard their religion, after all, and sometimes they seem unable to understand why others don't feel the same way. They are asking for and demanding much more than they are entitled to. No matter how important their religion is to them personally, they cannot expect others to treat it in the same way. Religious believers cannot demand that nonbelievers regard their religion with admiration or treat it as a superior way of living.

There's something about religion, religious beliefs, and theism in particular which seems to increase a person's sense of entitlement and the demands they make on behalf of it. People can act brutally in the pursuit of political causes, for example, but they seem to act even more brutally when they believe that they have religious or even divine sanction for that cause. God becomes an "amplifier" for whatever happens to be going on; in this context, even more respect, deference, and reverence is expected for religious beliefs and claims than other sorts of beliefs and claims which a person might have.

It's not enough that people in the religious community want something; God also wants it and wants it for them. If others don't "respect" this, then they are attacking not just the religious community, but also God—the moral center of their universe. Here, "respect" can't possibly be thought of in the minimalist sense. It can't simply be "tolerance" and instead must be thought of as deference and reverence. Believers want to be treated as special, but irreligious atheists should treat like them like everyone else and, perhaps more importantly, treat their religious claims and opinions like any other claim or opinion.

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specific evidence to help you refute these claims.

The religious beliefs of the first four United States presidents will be a good starting point since these remarkably talented individuals provided crucial leadership in the creation of our form of government.

All were strongly influenced by the European Enlightenment, a movement that promoted scientific thinking and religious tolerance. Most of the members of the Enlightenment were Deists, a minimalist religion that promoted the idea of a non-anthropomorphic god, a vague idea of a first cause or a god of nature. Deists thought this pseudo-god created the Universe and then retired to allow it to operate naturally. They did not believe in miracles or of any humans, such as Jesus Christ, possessing divine powers. Many historians have classified these presidents as Deists.

The first four presidents were highly intelligent, comprehensively well educated, (Washington had less formal education than the other three)—including the classics and scientific knowledge of the time—and they were men of exemplary character. All of these attributes imminently qualified them to create a government structure that has endured and been a model for the rest of the world. (I feel a bit depressed when I compare these giants against some of our recent presidents: I believe we should start critically reviewing what has gone wrong with the selection process).

Although the first four presidents did not believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ and had serious misgivings about much of religion in general, they were tolerant and friendly in their dealings with religious figures. They all believed in complete religious freedom for everyone and stressed that this freedom was only possible when the government remained entirely neutral toward religion.

George Washington (1732-1799), the first president of the United States (1789-1797), was the hardest

to read of all the early presidents concerning his religious beliefs. He realized how contentious the subject of religion was, especially in public office, and simply tried to keep his true feelings to himself. It is understandable that some have regarded him as a Christian since he was a vestryman in the Episcopal Church, which he attended sporadically, less so as he became older.

This superficial appearance of Christianity is countered by considerable evidence:

He never took communion, even though Martha did, which required the family carriage to make a return trip to the church to pick her up. Most Christians took communion at some time;

In his time church attendance was often a social obligation rather than an indication of a person's true beliefs;

In his writings he never referred to Jesus Christ;

There is no evidence he expressed belief at any time in conventional Christian dogma;

His father was a Deist;

The Reverend Doctor James Abercrombie, rector of the church Washington attended with his wife, in reply to a question about Washington's religion, said: "Sir, Washington was a Deist";

Thomas Jefferson noted in his private journal in February, 1800: "I know that Gouverneur Morris, who claimed to be in his secrets, and believed himself to be so, has often told me that General Washington believed no more in that system [Christianity] than he did." (Gouverneur Morris was the principal drafter of the Constitution, a member of the Continental Congress, a senator from New York, a minister to France, and a freethinker);

Reverend Bird Wilson, an Episcopal minister, in an interview in 1831, stated concisely: "I have diligently perused every line that Washington ever gave to the public, and I do not find one expression in which he pledges, himself as a believer in Christianity. I think anyone who will

candidly do as I have done, will come to the conclusion that he was a Deist and nothing more."

John Adams (1735-1826) was the first vice-president of the U.S. and the second president (1775-1801). He played a prominent role in the committee that drafted the Declaration of Independence and then exerted strong leadership in persuading the Second Continental Congress to adopt it.

Although he seemed to enjoy going to the Unitarian Church and described himself as a "church going animal," he was a Deist, and a weak one at that, as revealed in his voluminous and erudite (sprinkled with quotations in multiple languages) correspondence with Thomas Jefferson. Quotes from multiple sources attest to his religious beliefs:

In a letter to his brother-in-law, Richard Cranch, in explaining why he rejected the ministry, Adams wrote: "The frightful engines of ecclesiastical councils, of diabolical malice, and Calvinistical good-nature never failed to terrify me exceedingly whenever I thought of preaching";

Views of Religion by Rufus K. Noyes records this statement: "When philosophic reason is clear and certain by intuition or necessary induction, no subsequent revelation supported by prophecies or miracles can supercede it";

Adams made this observation in a letter to Thomas Jefferson: "I almost shudder at the thought of alluding to the most fatal example of the abuses of grief which the history of mankind has preserved—the Cross. Consider what calamities that engine of grief has produced";

Another letter to Jefferson contained this statement: "There exists, I believe, throughout the whole Christian world, a law which makes it blasphemy to deny or doubt the divine inspiration of all the books of the Old and New Testaments, from Genesis to Revelation. In most countries of Europe it is punished by

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fire at the stake, or the rack, or the wheel.... Now, what free inquiry, when a writer must surely encounter the risk of fine or imprisonment for adducing any argument for investigating the divine authority of those books?"

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) was the third president of the United States (1801-1809) and author of the Declaration of Independence. He was probably our most brilliant president and a prototypical Renaissance man, with a prodigious array of talents and accomplishments.

Jefferson chose this epitaph for his tomb: "Here was buried Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence, of the statute of Virginia for religious freedom, and the father of the University of Virginia." It is highly significant that he included the Virginia religious freedom statute and omitted his two terms as president. This statute clearly outlined the church-state separation concept and served as the model for the Constitution. His epitaph confirms how important he thought this separation was.

In his religious beliefs he is usually classified as a Deist, but at times he sounds almost like an atheist. Of the four presidents, his views on religion are the most extensively documented. Here are a few quotes that express his beliefs in his own words:

In a letter to Ezra Stiles, Jefferson wrote: "I am of a sect by myself, as far as I know;"

Writing in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson observed: "Millions of innocent men, women, and children, since the introduction of Christianity, have been burnt, tortured, fined, and imprisoned; yet we have not advanced one inch toward uniformity. What has been the effect of coercion? To make one-half the world fools and the other half hypocrites. To support roguery and error all over the earth";

Jefferson, in replying to a letter of John Adams, stated: "If by religion we are to understand sectarian dogmas, in which no

two of them agree, then your exclamation of that hypothesis is just, 'that this would be the best of worlds if there were no religion in it'";

He wrote in a letter to Dr. Woods: "I have recently been examining all the known superstitions of the world, and do not find in our particular superstition one redeeming feature. They are all alike, founded upon fables and mythologies";

Corresponding with John Adams, he noted: "The day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the Supreme Being as his father, in the womb of a virgin, will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter";

Even Jefferson's belief in God seems a bit shaky in this statement in a letter to Peter Carr: "Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion. Question with boldness even the existence of a god...."

James Madison (1751-1836) was the fourth president of the United States (1809-1817), and has often been called "the father of the constitution." Also, more than any other person, he can be considered responsible for making the Bill of Rights part of the constitution. He helped draft the constitution of Virginia and insisted on its providing separation of church and state.

He was a Deist but without much depth of conviction. Here are a few quotes that reflect his attitude toward religion:

In a letter to William Bradford, Jr., he observes: "Ecclesiastical establishments tend to great ignorance and corruption, all of which facilitate the execution of mischievous projects."

He notes in another letter to Bradford: "Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprise";

Addressing the Virginia General Assembly about religious assessments, he said: "Experience witnesseth that ecclesiastical

establishments, instead of maintaining the purity and efficacy of Religion, have had a contrary operation. During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What have been its fruits? More or less in all places, pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution";

Writing in a letter objecting to the use of government land for churches, he explains: "The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries."

Clearly, our first four presidents were not Christians, and the god they believed in was consistent with a Deism one. In fact, the Reverend Dr. Wilson, who was almost a contemporary of our early statesmen and presidents, and extensively researched their religions, stated that the founders of our nation were nearly all Infidels, and that of the presidents elected up to his time, not one had professed a belief in Christianity. The presidents that he was referring to were the four I have discussed plus, in order, James Monroe, John Quincy Adams, and Andrew Jackson.

Some fundamentalist Christians claim that our government is founded on the Declaration of Independence, and that this document proves the founders' intent was to incorporate Christian principles because of the mention of God. Of course, this contention is nonsense. First, our nation is founded on the Constitution and not the Declaration of Independence. Second, the Declaration of Independence, approved by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776, and written by Thomas Jefferson, does not contain any references to a Christian anthropomorphic god. I checked the document and found four references that could be construed as being to a Deist-type entity. One reference is to "Nature's God," another to "Creator," still another to "Supreme Judge of the world," and finally one

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Utilitarianism

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His theory was soon significantly modified by *John Stuart Mill* and, since Mill was born on May 20, 1806 and died on May 8, 1873, I want to use those dates as my excuse this month for sharing with you this review of Utilitarianism—which eventually became one of the most important theories of ethics in all of Western history and, in my opinion, should and does continue to be today. It was adopted and adapted by many other influential thinkers, including especially Mill (whom you may know because of his famous defense of the rights of women [7]); *G.E. Moore* (one of the founders of modern “meta-ethics”; and last but not least, almost all successful *American politicians*. [3:233-256]

Equally significant, Utilitarianism became the theory of choice for most of the citizens in most of the *democracies* throughout the Western world. Though many could not grasp all of its intellectual subtleties, they could intuitively perceive the rightness of its general principle—the “*Principle of Utility*”—which states that actions are “good” if they tend to achieve the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people, and actions are “evil” if they don’t.

In a moment I am going to tell you more about Bentham and his ethical theory. But first, I want to remind you that there is a crucial difference between “*private, personal morality*,” and “*public, social ethics*.” That difference makes clear the real value of Utilitarianism within a world where people like Jerry Falwell and groups like the “Religious Right” want to force their private, personal, moralities upon the rest of us as public, social ethics. In my much earlier article here on abortion, I provided a lengthy example of this crucial difference. [11] Here is the basic idea, again, in a nutshell.

Private, personal morality works this way: if women discover that they have unwanted pregnancies, and need to decide what to do, we Humanists would (I hope!) recognize [1] that they have a natural right to seek advice from whatever sources each one personally deems relevant.

The sources selected by Roman Catholic, Muslim, Buddhist or secular atheistic women would all differ—and that is to be expected, and to be accepted.[2] Having consulted their varied fonts of wisdom, we would hope that these women would next thoroughly examine their own consciences; and then finally, [3] having given serious thought to all alternatives, we would anticipate that they would make a decision as to whether or not to have an abortion, to go to term and keep their babies once born, or to go to term and give up their children for adoption. Whichever choice each made, we Humanists would support and defend as her right and privilege as a free and responsible adult human being.

On the other hand, things are very much different with *public, social ethics*. In this arena the decisions being made are not personal or private. They are not about problems a single individual is trying to solve for him—or herself—alone. They are, instead, about matters of public, social policy, and their determination affects the entire citizenry. Taking our example into the public social realm, we would not have women merely deciding about abortion for themselves. These people would now be both men and women and the decisions they would make would determine what everyone in our society could or could not do. These people would sit in positions of power. They might be the President of the United States, the justices of the U.S. Supreme Court, members of Congress, state governors, judges, etc. What would be perfectly appropriate criteria for their making private, personal, moral decisions about their own problems would now not at all be appropriate criteria for their making decisions about public, social ethics: how you and I and everyone else would handle our problems.

No Protestant wants legislation determined on the basis of what some pope says. No Catholic wants Billy Graham dictating public policy. No Muslim wants the society to be run upon a Jewish interpretation of things. No Jew wants the Koran to be enforced. No religious believer wants an atheist making decisions for him; and no atheist wants a theocracy to

be instated.

These facts should make it clear that “morality” is one thing, and “ethics” is something entirely different. *Morality* has to do with making personal decisions about the private behavior of single individuals. *Ethics* has to do with making public decisions about the social behavior of masses of people. *The criteria which are appropriate for moral judgments are not the same as those which must be used for making ethical judgments.*

Religion—as a system of unprovable and nonuniversally held metaphysical beliefs—*satisfies and comforts most people at the level of private, personal morality*. America honors and defends its role in the U.S. Constitution’s First Amendment guarantee of religious freedom (which is a two-edged sword cutting in the directions of both freedom *of* and freedom *from* religion).

But, in a pluralistic democracy, such as the United States—where there are millions of people who practice hundreds of different religions and where there are also secular atheists who practice no religion—in that setting, *religion does not work as the basis of public, social ethics*.

Something else is needed, something that is purely *secular* which can have *universal application*. Which brings us back to Utilitarianism.

There is a famous photograph I wish I could have reproduced here. It shows the celebrated remains and shrunken head of Jeremy Bentham as they have been preserved for display in a portable closet. [To see it on-line, go to: http://bearspace.baylor.edu/EImer_Duncan/www/Jbentham.600px.jpg] He was certainly something of a character. Among his many achievements, he helped to found University College in London. Its purpose was to provide higher education to persons whom Oxford and Cambridge would not consider. Further, unlike those schools, it required no religious test for admission.[2:24] Bentham left much of his estate to that college on the proviso that his preserved body continue to be allowed to attend meetings on campus! [5:74]

A precocious child, Bentham was

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Utilitarianism

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learning Latin grammar by age four. His father wanted him to become a lawyer, but Bentham became more interested in philosophy and ethics. Even so, he was very dissatisfied by the state of British jurisprudence and spent much of his time and wrote many of his books on legal and political matters. He also tried valiantly, but failed to reform England's prison system. [2:22f.]

Bentham was not so much a humanitarian moved by compassion as he was a rationalist roused to indignation at what he considered to be the irrationality of the British legal and political systems of his day. [2:22] This rationality led him to reject religion and any belief in a deity. It also caused him to believe strongly in equality, which in turn caused him to oppose monarchy and hereditary aristocracy, and to advocate complete democracy, including the right to vote being extended to women.[11:776]

As far as ethics was concerned, Bentham was dissatisfied with the great amount of uncertainty and arbitrariness that seemed so much a part of most ethical systems, especially those which were grounded in religion. When he looked around for something better, he came across the general idea of "Utilitarianism" in the writings of *Joseph Priestley* (d.1804). That remarkable man became world famous as the discoverer of oxygen. But, he and several other philosophers had already discussed the Utilitarian Principle. Bentham did not invent it. What Bentham did was to formulate it completely so that it became a universal ethical system. [2:20f.]

In order to make Utilitarianism as rational and scientific as possible, Bentham decided that it must be based upon something entirely *empirical* (as opposed to the metaphysical beliefs of religion) and that it must be *quantitative*. [3:224]

The empirical foundation he wanted came to him in the form of *psychological hedonism*. It seemed indisputable to Bentham that all human beings are motivated by their

desire for pleasure and by their aversion to pain. These drives are built into us by nature itself so that we can automatically recognize that *whatever causes us pleasure and prevents pain is "good," while whatever lessens pleasure or increases pain (unnecessarily) is "evil."* [An example of a beneficial necessary pain might be having a tooth's cavity filled.] By living according to this "Principle of Utility," we are able to make ourselves happy. [1:226]

In order to quantify the process of ethical judgment, Bentham argued that *each pleasure and pain could be assigned a greater or lesser numerical value*. On a scale of 1-to-100, for example, a compliment might get a plus 10, whereas a huge inheritance might get a plus 80. A bad toothache might get a minus 7, but an arrow through one's side might rate a minus 95 or better!

By doing the math in this *ethical "calculus"* one could determine whether or not an action produced the greatest amount of pleasure for the greatest number of people. If it did, it was deemed ethically "good"; if not, it was ethically "evil."

Bentham provided *seven major criteria by which pleasures and pains were to be analyzed*. These included:

1. Intensity: How much pleasure or pain does an action cause?
2. Duration: How long do the pleasures or pains last?
3. Certainty or uncertainty: How sure are we that an action will produce pleasure or pain?
4. Propinquity or remoteness: How near or far from an act do pleasures or pain appear?
5. Fecundity: How fruitful is an action in producing pleasure or pain?
6. Purity: Does pleasure or pain appear alone or does the action mix both together?
7. Extent: How many people are affected? [1:230]

As time passed, other thinkers improved upon Bentham's Utilitarianism.

John Stuart Mill added a *qualitative* analysis to Bentham's quantitative procedure. Besides pleasures being better than pains, he argued that some pains can have more positive

value than some pleasures and vice versa. He illustrated this by saying that it is "better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied." [3:224]

Then, in the early part of the 20th Century, *G.E. Moore* modified the language of Utilitarianism. The terms "pleasure" and "pain" had frequently been misunderstood as referring only to physical experiences, even though Bentham and Mill had meant them to include the whole range of physical, emotional, and intellectual experiences. Moore replaced the words "pleasure" and "happiness" in the principle of Utility with the term "good." Thus, according to his "Ideal Utilitarianism," an action is ethically "right" if it "produces the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people"; and it is ethically "wrong" if it does not. [3:245]

Unfortunately, along the way, too, there have been several *infamous abuses of Utilitarian ethics*. When President *Richard Nixon* refused to turn over the Watergate Tapes on the grounds of "national security," what he was really doing was trying to hide his "egoistic ethic" under the camouflage of a distorted Utilitarianism. Similarly, when *Adolf Hitler* claimed that his "Final Solution" was for the greater good of the world, he was trying to disguise his egomaniacal prejudices under the mask of Utilitarianism. Thank goodness such perversions are usually transparent!

It could be argued that the *private, personal moralities* taught by such religious figures as Jesus, Buddha or Confucius are more profound and go far beyond the realm of Utilitarianism "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" is certainly the most sublime expression of private, personal morality the world has ever heard. It works well and is perfectly appropriate at the level of single individuals acting alone, able and willing to make the kinds of enormous self-sacrifice it entails.

But willingness to make such radical sacrifice is always rare and only the naive would ever expect that it would become common practice. Like it or not, the "real world"

Continued on p. 8

Utilitarianism

Continued from p. 7

is always controlled more firmly by the biological mandate of “survival of the fittest” than it is by the theological ideal of “love thy neighbor.” It does not matter whether this sad fact is explained as “Original Sin” or as the “natural evolution of the human race.” The result is the same: *private, personal moralities—especially religious ones—do not function well in the public, social arena. What is needed is some kind of secular theory which seeks out some common ground that people of all moralities and all (or no) theologies can share; and that is precisely what Utilitarianism is and does.*

As *Bertrand Russell* pointed out, “the Utilitarian ethic is democratic.”[10:780] Every time we inconvenience the few for the greater good of the many—as when we clear land to build highways by the “right of eminent domain”; every time we establish a policy based upon the will or needs of the majority, we are being both democratic and Utilitarian.

Insofar as it is democratic, Utilitarianism fits well with Humanism. But that is not the only Humanist principle which is found within

Freedom Wall

Continued from p. 5

to “Divine Providence.” Third, there is no mention of Christ or Christianity in the document.

Our Constitution is the document that defines the structure of our government, and its understanding is crucial to answering claims by fundamentalist Christians that our nation was founded as a Christian nation. James Madison, its where there are unrelenting efforts by fundamentalist Christians to destroy the wall.

It is ironic that the Enlightenment in Europe degenerated into the excesses of the French Revolution but that its principles became established instead in our country. The Enlightenment strongly influenced the thinking leading to the American Revolutionary War and strongly influenced our leaders in setting up our secular republic. We can only speculate what form of government we would now have if our government

Utilitarianism. It also values the worth and dignity of every person and includes them in its evaluation of the consequences of every action. It strives for justice and equity in human relations. It respects the right of conscience. It has as its goal world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all (and it also recognizes that special attention must be given to recognizing and upholding the rights of minorities when they come into tension with majority needs). There are even environmentally up-to-date versions of Utilitarianism which extend its coverage to include all living and nonliving things and the processes of the Earth itself. Utilitarianism is about as close to a purely rational, empirical, scientific ethic as anyone might imagine. For that reason especially, I would encourage all Humanists to become better acquainted with this profound approach to answering some of Life’s most difficult questions. It is, in my opinion, the theory which works best in the realm of public, social ethics and is the one theory which is most defensible as a truly viable alternative to all those private, personal, religious moralities so many fundamentalists, charismatics and evangelicals would

had been formed at another time with less enlightened leaders.

The founders of our country clearly meant for there to be a wall between any religion, including any form of Christianity, and our government. To maintain this essential separation, our citizens and watchdog groups need to be constantly alert in resisting these incursions.

But to ultimately remove the assaults against the church-state wall, it is essential that another wall eventually come down, a metaphorical one that exists in the frontal lobes of the brains of fundamentalists. This wall, constructed with a material called faith, separates a rational area where truth is decided with logic and evidence from a dark, irrational region where any type of religious belief, no matter how illogical, can exist. Only when this wall is gone will fundamentalist Christians realize their beliefs are not infallible and shouldn’t be imposed on everyone.

foist upon everyone else.

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Wrangling over Political Prayer

Continued from p. 2

Emanuel suggested to local government officials that they begin the meetings with a moment of silence, a way of being religiously neutral. Cantor Geigner said likely he would do this at the Lakeland City Commission meeting on May 3. “I think it will be nice if we can include everyone ... giv[ing] everyone the right to pray, to meditate, whatever they feel comfortable with. That is the basis of freedom,” he said.

Rob Curry, executive director of Atheists of Florida, replied that a new list of speakers doesn’t make things better. “It certainly doesn’t address the concern that we’ve raised, that it exposes citizens to a religious test. Either people have to stand up (with everyone else) or sit and be exposed.”

To view the schedule of invocators, visit their link at <http://www.theledger.com/article/20100423NEWS4235119?p=all&tc=pgall>



FOCUS ON FREEDOM

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AMERICAN ATHEISTS PRAISED A U.S. DISTRICT COURT DECISION that Barry A. Hazel Jr.'s constitutional rights were violated when he was compelled to attend religion-based drug and alcohol rehab sessions as a condition for qualifying for parole. Hazel had requested a secular alternative to the religion-based Alcoholics Anonymous, but was mistakenly informed that one was not available. When he refused to participate in the program, he was re-arrested.

Dr. Ed Buckner, President of American Atheists, said, "It is outrageous that any citizen be coerced into attending religious services or programs that 'push' religion in any form."

Ed. Note: See the notice for SOS meetings in the Tampa Bay/West Central Florida area on page 11. Last month's issue of *Common Sense* told the story of the start-up of this SOS chapter.

THE APPIGNANI HUMANIST LEGAL CENTER is awaiting the response of the Santa Barbara Metropolitan Transportation District (MTD)'s legal department after MTD rejected an advertisement submitted by the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara, which reads, "You Can be Good Without God." The advertisement was rejected without explanation, even though the MTD allows religious advertising.

"By permitting advertising that is supportive of religion but not allowing HSSB advertisements that support the nontheist point of view, the Santa Barbara MTD has unfairly discriminated against HSSB in violation of the First Amendment," said Bob Ritter, staff attorney for the Appignani Humanist Legal

Center, legal arm of the American Humanist Association. "The bus system would be within bounds to exclude entire groups from advertising as long as the policy is evenhandedly enforced. But in this case it seems MTD has arbitrarily and unfairly decided that some messages of a religious nature are acceptable, but others are not."

THE APRIL 15 RELIGIOUS FREEDOM RULING by U.S. District Court Judge Barbara B. Crabb of the Western District of Wisconsin—striking down the 1952 federal statute designating a yearly National Day of Prayer—is being applauded by freethought organizations throughout the nation.

Judge Crabb's decision granted summary judgment to the plaintiffs in *Freedom From Religion Foundation [FFRF] v. Obama*. FFRF originally filed the lawsuit in 2008 against the Bush administration to prevent the government from declaring the National Day of Prayer.

In a 66-page opinion, Judge Crabb said the observance violates the "establishment clause" of the First Amendment, which creates a separation of church and state adding:

I understand that many may disagree with that conclusion and some may even view it as a criticism of prayer or those who pray. That is unfortunate. A determination that the government may not endorse a religious message is not a determination that the message itself is harmful, unimportant or undeserving of dissemination.

[National Day of Prayer] goes beyond mere 'acknowledgment' of religion because its sole purpose is to encourage all citizens to engage in prayer, an inherently religious exercise that serves no secular function in this context. In this instance, the government has taken sides on a matter that must be left to individual conscience. . .

In a press release from Center for Inquiry, President/CEO Ronald A. Lindsay called the decision "a long overdue recognition by the federal courts that the government should stay out of the prayer business entirely. Determining which religious

exercises to engage in—if any—is a matter best left to the conscience of the individual. The government should not tell us to pray—or tell us not to pray. We can decide for ourselves."

Robert Paul Reyes (a liberal newspaper columnist for a small town in the Bible Belt, and substantial contributor to online publications including *AmericanChronicle.Com*, *MensNewsDaily.Com* and *Bleacher Report.Com*) observed astutely:

This divisive observance is a slap on the face to pagans, atheists, Hindus, and everybody else who doesn't belong to a monotheistic faith. A secular government of a pluralistic society shouldn't be in the business of endorsing religion, and make no mistake about it, the National Day of Prayer is an endorsement of monotheistic religions.

The wise judge didn't rule on the efficacy or necessity of prayer, she's merely stating the obvious: The government shouldn't be encouraging citizens to engage in any religious activities.

Though the ruling can't take effect until all appeals are exhausted (the Justice Department has already filed an appeal), that's not stopping both prayer advocates and staunch church-state separationists from firing off letters and e-mails, even planning to put up billboards to convince state and local leaders across the country to see things their way.

Religious advocates have sent letters to local officials telling them their participation is perfectly legal. The Freedom From Religion Foundation is preparing a counter-campaign of letters to mayors and governors imploring them not to take part in any prayer events.

ADDENDUM: Watch for news of happenings here in central Florida as separate and concerted efforts of various freethought societies take action on the National Day of Prayer—from attending to protesting to communicating constitutional concerns at these flagrant government-in-religion violations.

AHA Defines Humanism

[As published in *THE HUMANIST* magazine, a bi-monthly publication of the American Humanist Association (AHA), 1777 T Street NW, Washington, DC 20009.]

"Humanism is a rational philosophy informed by science, inspired by art, and motivated by compassion. Affirming the dignity of each human being, it supports the maximization of individual liberty and opportunity consonant with social and planetary responsibility. It advocates the extension of participatory democracy and the expansion of the open society, standing for human rights and social justice.

Free of supernaturalism, it recognizes human beings as a part of nature and holds that values—be they religious, ethical, social, or political—have their source in human nature, experience, and culture. Humanism thus derives the goals of life from human need and interest rather than from theological or ideological abstractions, and asserts that humanity must take responsibility for its own destiny."



Definitions of Humanism

[From the website of *Humanist Network News*—Ed.]

Humanism is:

"...seeking, without religion, the best in, and for, human beings." *Chambers Pocket Dictionary*

"...a doctrine, attitude, or way of life centered on human interests or values; especially: a philosophy that usually rejects supernaturalism and stresses an individual's dignity and worth and capacity for self-realization through reason." *Merriam Webster Dictionary*

"...a non-religious philosophy, based on liberal human values." *Little Oxford Dictionary*

"...an appeal to reason in contrast to revelation or religious authority as a means of finding out about the natural world and destiny of man, and also giving a grounding for morality... Humanist ethics is also distinguished by placing the end of moral action in the welfare of humanity rather than in fulfilling the will of God." *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*

"The rejection of religion in favor of the advancement of humanity by its own efforts." *Collins Concise Dictionary*

"A system of thought that centers on humans and their values, capacities, and worth." *American Heritage Dictionary*

What do Humanists believe?

Humanists believe that life is a naturally occurring process in the universe, that humans and human consciousness evolved on earth in the same way as all other life on the planet, and that humans will share with all other life the same ultimate fate.

Humanists believe that the application of human reason and the scientific method are the best means for discovery of truth about the universe and ourselves. Humanists reject the notion that the application of intellect to all areas of human concern is in any sense vain or arrogant, and require that all claims to truth be supported by credible, verifiable evidence.

Humanists believe humanity alone is responsible for its own destiny. All values—spiritual, ethical and social—have their source in human experience, are products of evolving culture, and are subject to human critique and amendment. Humanists believe in the common moral decencies, including altruism, integrity, honesty, tolerance, compassion, and equal justice for all.

Humanists believe in individual liberty and responsibility, freedom of conscience and speech, and in free inquiry. They support separation of church and state, and are opposed to censorship.

Humanists believe each person has but one life to lead, here and now on this earth; each of us must make the most of it in terms of creative work and happiness, and by respect for and cooperation with others we can make this a better world.

HAWCF ... Vision & Mission Statements

The Following Vision and Mission Statements were approved by the membership on December 19, 2006:

Vision: *HAWCF membership to grow to more than 100 active members by 2010. Media sources in Lakeland are aware that HAWCF exists. Non-Humanists begin to see Humanism, science, and secularism as an ethical, nonthreatening alternative to sectarian supernaturalism. HAWCF has a committee structure of active members performing tasks related to our mission.*

Mission:

1) *Actively increase the public awareness of the Humanist, secular worldview as a rational alternative to views based upon supernaturalism.*

2) *Act as an informational, educational and social resource for members and others on all matters related to Humanistic, Rationalistic and Free-thought ideas.*

Common Sense is the newsletter for members and friends of the Humanist Association of West Central Florida (HAWCF). Its purpose is to report information and opinions of interest to members.

Its articles are the opinion of the respective authors only and not necessarily of HAWCF, AHA or CSH.

Permission to reprint articles in this newsletter is granted to all Humanist/Freethought groups provided proper acknowledgement is given. All others write for permission.

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What is HAWCF?

The Humanist Association of West Central Florida (HAWCF) is a chapter of the American Humanist Association dedicated to the promotion in our area of a rational worldview free from dependence upon supernatural belief systems.

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A chartered Chapter of the American Humanist Association and an Affiliate of the Council for Secular Humanism

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MEMBERSHIP

New Renewal

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<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$35	<input type="checkbox"/> Cardinal	\$1000
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I am interested in helping on the following activities

- Membership Recruit, welcome and orient new members to HAWCF
- Civic Action Promote Humanism within community and government
- Activities Develop and facilitate social activities for the membership.
- Programs Arrange/facilitate interesting programs for HAWCF meetings
- Hospitality Facilitate social, housekeeping and refreshment activities for HAWCF
- Education Develop/provide humanist educational & historical materials for HAWCF
- Newsletter Write for or edit HAWCF newsletter
- Publicity Publicize HAWCF and Humanist activities in the community

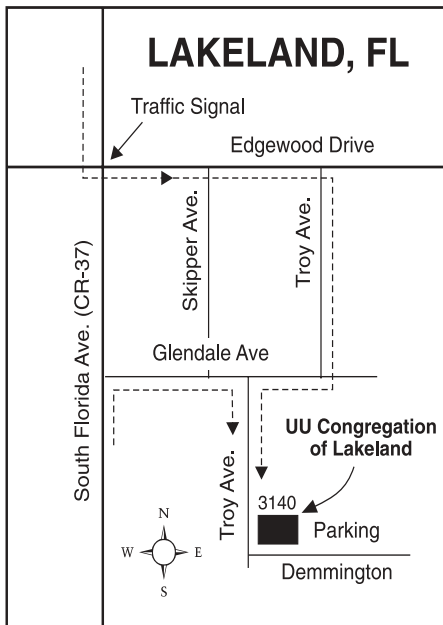
The Humanist Association of West Central Florida is a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational organization. Contributions are tax deductible as provided by federal and state law.

WHEN AND WHERE?

THE HUMANIST ASSOCIATION OF WEST CENTRAL FLORIDA usually meets on **the 3RD Tuesday of every month at 7 pm** (except July & August) at the UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION OF LAKELAND (UUCL), 3140 Troy Avenue, Lakeland.

See map below.

GUESTS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME!



HUMANIST DINNER!!

JUST A REMINDER: we usually hold an informal Humanist dinner gathering on the **2ND MONDAY OF EVERY MONTH at 6:15 pm.**



NEW LOCATION— WE NOW MEET AT

Fred's Southern Market ...

located at 2124 Harden Boulevard in Lakeland (just south of Beacon Road on the east side of the road).

See Map below.

PLEASE JOIN US...BRING YOUR FRIENDS!



SOS THE RATIONALIST SERVICE MOVEMENT KNOWN AS SOS ...

Secular Organizations for Sobriety ... is now available in west central Florida. SOS Tampa Bay is an alternative, science-based recovery method for alcoholics or drug addicts who are uncomfortable with the spirituality in 12-Step programs. Meetings are held on the last Wednesday of every month, 7:30–8:30 pm, at 3614 S Manhattan Ave., Tampa. Additional dates and locations will be added to meet local need. Visit the website at <http://sostampabay.org> or check it out on Facebook.

In Cyber Space:

WEBSITE ADDRESS:

<http://hawcf.org>

BLOG ADDRESS:

www.humanistcommonsense.blogspot.com

Please visit each of our sites. Comments or suggestions on either site are earnestly desired and should be brought up at meetings or made directly to webmaster Ken Schmidt:

kschmidt@tampabay.rr.com

Note: this newsletter can be printed from our website with adobe acrobat reader.

Inquiring Minds Want To Know...

May 2010



**PALESTINE ... What is it?
A country? A religious state?
How does it affect our lives?**

**Join us on Tuesday, May 18—for
a Timely Discussion on this Issue!**

See inside for exciting news.



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