

# The HUMANIST

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE HUMANISTS OF NORTHEAST FLORIDA

PO BOX 1143 ORMOND BEACH FL 32175

PUBLISHED MONTHLY

April 2007

**OUR GOAL IS THE APPLICATION OF REASON AND SCIENCE TO UNDERSTAND NATURE AND TO EXERCISE HUMAN COMPASSION TO SOLVE HUMAN PROBLEMS**

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## **MONTHLY ACTIVITIES CALENDAR**

**General Meeting : 04.14. 12:30 PM**  
Ormond Beach Library  
**Pre- Meeting Lunch : 10:30 AM Riviera C.C.**

**Board Meeting : 04.18. 10:00 AM**  
Ormond Beach Library

**Lunch / Bunch : 04.29. 12:00 Noon**  
Tomoka Oaks Country Club

***The Humanists of NE Florida***

will meet on Saturday  
**April the 14<sup>TH</sup>**

at **12:30 PM** at the Ormond Beach Library located at 30 S. Beach St. in Ormond Beach. The topic will be:

### **Important Local issues**

Our new schedule of every-other-month group discussions has brought much positive response from our members and guests. Therefore for the April meeting, we are trying to continue for the time being in this fashion. We are very fortunate to have our member "**Big John**" as our discussion leader. John is a well-known radio personality, who is very passionate and knowledgeable about local issues, particularly those concerning people in need. Please come and enjoy asking questions, making comments and talking back to John!

Our pre-meeting lunch on April the 14<sup>th</sup> will take place at 10:30 AM at the Riviera Country Club, located at Calle Grande Ave. in Ormond Beach. If you wish to attend the pre-meeting lunch, please give Mavis a call at (386) 677-3655.

**A brief coffee/social hour will again take place after this meeting. It will provide you with an opportunity to exchange thoughts with all the other members and guests**

### **March Meeting**

The March Meeting was attended by 45 members and guests and can be considered to have been another educational success. Stan Driban presented the history of the three major religions in the western

world - Christianity, Judaism and Islam. His method of presenting and comparing each on individual points such as death, creation, and injustice was informative and thought provoking. Considering the fact that the covered material encompassed so much information we think it will be advantageous to have a follow-up discussion at a future meeting.

### **May meeting**

The program and its exact topic for the month of May has at the time of preparing this newsletter not been established yet. The speaker at this meeting will be the Executive Director of the Humanists of Florida, **Heather Wellman**. Details of this meeting will appear in our May newsletter.

### **April Board Meeting**

The Board meeting for the month of April will be as usual on the third Wednesday of the month, which will be

**April the 18<sup>th</sup>**

at 10:00 AM. It will take place in the Ormond Beach Library and is, if agreed upon by the participants, followed by a luncheon at 12:30 PM in a suitable restaurant.

### **Lunch with the Bunch**

Lunch with the Bunch will be on the last Sunday of each month; in this case it will be April the **29<sup>th</sup>** at **12:00 NOON** at the Tomoka Oaks Golf & Country Club, located at 20 Tomoka Oaks Blvd., north of Granada on Nova Rd. in Ormond Beach. As usual it is always a casual, friendly get-together, which provides the opportunity to exchange those special and sometimes even trivial thoughts. Everybody is welcome – we love your company!! If you plan to join us, please call Mavis Hamilton and let her know of your intention, or just drop in. We are glad to see you.

### **Thoughts of the Editor**

**THE BIG PLACEBO**

**MEMBERS FORUM**

We are all more or less familiar with the so called placebo effects upon ill people who at times receive under controlled conditions sugar pills instead of the real medication to determine the effectiveness of new or experimental medication. The astonishing result is that people who receive a placebo believing they have received the real 'thing' reported at times an improvement of their conditions. I think it is very obvious that the person(s) in question are effected by auto-suggestion believing that it was administered medication for the purpose of making them feel better. I am inclined to believe that the same result is frequently achieved by praying for a single or a group of sick patients who are true believers. As long as they believe there are people who pray for their well-being there is also a chance that some improvement with some of them will take place. The emphasis is here, that the patients know there are people praying for them.. If the same amount of people would pray without the patients knowing about it, the result would differ from the one above. I like to call this effect a mental placebo. On a much grander scale the same effect is achieved by powerful and influential religious entities. They are telling their believers how to behave, get well and what to do to live better and eventually get into paradise. In hopes of achieving the ultimate happiness they, that is the believers, do almost anything that is suggested or demanded by the powerful servants of god. The reward is assured although nobody ever returned from paradise to report about it. How blindly people are prepared to offer their lives can be seen just by watching the daily news. The multitude of erected temples, churches, synagogues and mosques serve mainly as pacifiers and placebos for humanity. While I realize that many of those fulfill a historical purpose and induce people to honor traditional values, I can not help and think and ask how many people in this world had to give their lives, lead a life of slavery and had to part from their hard earned meager income to erect those " Placebo Monuments". Wouldn't it have been much better if mankind during their phase of enlightenment would have started to direct **their** efforts towards learning and acquiring the necessary knowledge to stop killing each other and provide a decent human life for everyone on this planet?

This is the fourteenth of a series of monthly articles under the heading: "Humanists and Freethinkers," contributed and created by Jim Strayer. Clinton Richard Dawkins (born March 26, 1941) is a British evolutionary biologist and popular science writer at Oxford University.

Dawkins first came to prominence with his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*, which popularized the gene-centered view of evolution. He has written several best-selling popular books, and appeared in a number of television and radio programs, concerning evolutionary biology, creationism, and religion.

Dawkins is an outspoken atheist, humanist, and skeptic. Dawkins' impassioned defense of evolution has earned him the appellation "Darwin's rottweiler."

Dawkins has edited a number of journals and has acted as editorial advisor for several publications. He writes a column for the Council for Secular Humanism's *Free Inquiry* magazine and serves as a senior editor. He has also been president of the Biological Sciences section of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, is a Humanist Laureate of the International Academy of Humanism. In his scientific works, Dawkins is best known for his popularization of the gene-centered view of evolution – a view most clearly set out in his book *The Selfish Gene* (1976). As an ethologist, interested in animal behavior and its relation to natural selection, he advocates the idea that the gene is the principal unit of selection in evolution. Dawkins is a prominent critic of creationism, describing it as a "preposterous, mind-shrinking falsehood." His book *The Blind Watchmaker* contains a critique of the argument from design, and his other popular science works often touch on the topic. On the advice of his late colleague Stephen Jay Gould, Dawkins generally refuses to participate in formal debates with creationists because doing so would give them the "oxygen of respectability" that they want. He argues that creationists "don't mind being beaten in an argument. What matters is that we give them recognition by bothering to argue with them in public." In a December 2004 interview with Bill Moyers, Dawkins stated that "among the things that science does know, evolution is about as certain as anything we know." When Moyers later asked, "Is evolution a theory, not a fact?", Dawkins replied, "Evolution has been observed. It's just that it hasn't been observed while it's happening." Dawkins went

***Our Good Neighbor***

on to say, "It is rather like a detective coming on a murder scene after the event took place. And you ... the detective hasn't actually seen the murder take place, of course. But what you do see is a massive clue ... Circumstantial evidence, masses of circumstantial evidence. Huge quantities of circumstantial evidence."

Dawkins is an ardent and outspoken atheist, he is an Honorary Associate of the National Secular Society, a vice-president of the British Humanist Association and a Distinguished Supporter of the Humanist Society of Scotland. In his essay "Viruses of the Mind" (from which the term "faith-sufferer" originated), he suggested that his gene theory might explain characteristics of organized religions, such as the belief that punishment awaits non-believers. In 2003, The Atheist Alliance International instituted the Richard Dawkins Award in his honor. Dawkins is well known for his contempt for religious extremism, from Islamism terrorism to Christian fundamentalism.

Dawkins continues to be a prominent figure in contemporary public debate on issues relating to science and religion. He sees education and consciousness-raising as the primary tools in opposing what he considers to be religious dogma.

"Many of us saw religion as harmless nonsense. Beliefs might lack all supporting evidence but, we thought, if people needed a crutch for consolation, where's the harm? September 11th changed all that. Revealed faith is not harmless nonsense, it can be lethally dangerous nonsense. Dangerous because it gives people unshakable confidence in their own righteousness. Dangerous because it gives them false courage to kill themselves, which automatically removes normal barriers to killing others. Dangerous because it teaches enmity to others labeled only by a difference of inherited tradition. And dangerous because we have all bought into a weird respect, which uniquely protects religion from normal criticism. Let's now stop being so damned respectful!" Dawkins has ardently opposed teaching intelligent design in science lessons. He has described intelligent design as "not a scientific argument at all but a religious one." Dawkins' works include the publication in September 2006 of his book *The God Delusion*.

***AN INVITATION***

*to participate in a discussion concerning and*  
**COMPARING RELIGIOUS BELIEFS.**

It is a program providing an opportunity for the expression of beliefs of community leaders from different religious perspectives. Participants will be asked to consider several discussion items, using a round table discussion format, and time will be allotted for questions from the audience. Examples might include: "My spiritual journey." "What does the concept of divinity mean to you?" "What is the origin of moral guidelines?"

**When:** Saturday morning, April 28, 2007, 10:00-12:15.

**Participants:**

- Father Phil Eqitto,** Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church
- Bob Stevenson,** Coordinator, Center For Inquiry
- Reverend Jim Willis,** Port Orange United Church of Christ
- Reverend Bud Murphy,** Unitarian Universalist Society

**Moderator Dan Kennedy**

**Where:** Unitarian-Universalist Society  
 56 N. Halifax Dr Ormond Beach, Fl  
 386-677-6172

For more information: **Dan Kennedy**  
**386-672-2556, jodan16@juno.com**

**Membership Application –and Renewal**  
**Humanists of Northeast Florida**  
**Dues per calendar year: Regular \$25.00. Family \$35.00, Patron \$100.00.**

*Optional*

**Name:**.....**Birth date:**.....

**Address:**.....

**Phone :**.....**e-mail:**.....

**To be paid by check or money order to the**  
**Humanists of Northeast Florida**  
**PO Box 1143, Ormond Beach, FL 32175**

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY**  
**WISHES**  
**TO ALL THE WONDERFUL**  
**MEMBERS AND FRIENDS**

**WHO ARRIVED IN THIS WORLD**

**During the months of April and May**  
**many years ago !!!**

Marjorie DASH	04.20
Gordon WILLIAMSON	04.21
Walter KONAK	04.22.
Richard SIEGEL	04.23
Gabriele BOKELOH	05.10
Maria LINDSAY	05.12
Sandy MUNDINGER	05.18
John KING	05.17
James DASH	05.20
Harald PODGORA	05.29
Mavis HAMILTON	05.30

SOMEBODY MISSING ???  
 Please let us know !!!

**THE BOARD OF 2007**

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**Please note**  
**OUR WEB SITE:**



<http://northeastflorida.humanists.net/>

