

Posting

December 9, 2009

Topic: Happy Human Light
By: HAT Webmaster

Here is the HumanLight website. The first celebration began in New Jersey and is starting to spread. You can send E-cards to friends from this website (look under COMMUNITY), which say:

"In this season, we celebrate the light of hope and reason
That emanates from everyone of us!
A positive vision of a peaceful and happy world.
Happy HumanLight!"

Tagged: Event, human light

Posting

December 9, 2009

Topic: Pro-life Nativity on City Property
By: HAT Webmaster

From the Torontoist

'...Displayed on city property in front of Old City Hall sits a nativity scene donated to the people of Toronto by the Lay Catholic movement Gethsemane Ministries. While Gethsemane takes responsibility for erecting the crèche itself, the statues are 'Donated by Campaign Life Catholic in honour of the efforts of Pro-life hero Fr. Ted Colleton.'... The Campaign Life Coalition — Campaign Life Catholic's umbrella organization — works at all levels of Canadian government to 'restore the right to life.' The CLC defines itself as the political wing of Canada's pro-life movement...and their scope includes municipal government.

The nativity scene in front of Old City Hall is not only displayed on city property, but also runs an extension cord into a City-owned building, powering the continuously lit display with taxpayers' money. (sic) Whether the City simply neglected to trace the origin of the donation and was unaware of the pro-life message that the crèche came weighted with or whether they believe that the scene's place on city property is justified remains unknown: no one that Torontoist spoke with from the City was able to comment. Sure, it's the season of giving, but should our local government accept and display politically inspired gifts?..."

Tagged: Christians, City/State, News

Posting

December 4, 2009

Topic: Encyclopedia of Life

By: HAT Webmaster

You can contribute your own data. Watch the Nova special on E.O.Wilson, who invented the term biodiversity on Youtube.

Tagged: biodiversity

Posting

November 24, 2009

Topic: Happy Darwiniversary! Origin of Species is 150

By: HAT Webmaster

Today is the 150th anniversary of the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, the scientific landmark that reshaped the way we see the natural world. Don't forget to raise your glass tonight to wish Origin a very happy birthday.

While a lot of Canadian creationism happens via homeschooling (particularly in Saskatchewan), here is a picture of the little Creationism Museum in Alberta

However, the Lethbridge Herald comes to the rescue with a nice little piece on new fossil discoveries and evolution, as did the Morden Times in Manitoba.

But who knew "fossil rustling" was such an increasing problem? Professor Philip Currie of the University of Alberta, an eminent Canadian scientist who is chairman of the ethics committee of the Society of Vertebrate Palaeontology, said: "This is a huge international problem that affects most of us who do research in the field. I do a lot of work in China and Mongolia, where highly significant fossils, including new species of animals, feathered dinosaurs and birds, are regularly smuggled out illegally and sold at big international fossil shows and over the web."

The US civil rights watchdog People for the American Way has an interesting Creationism Timeline about the spread of Creationism and attempts to keep Darwin out of the public schools in the US. Here is another article on the rise of Creationism in Turkey, funded by creationism organizations in Seattle and Texas.

There is always work to be done - let's keep the fires of science burning bright, and celebrate Darwin's publication anniversary. Here is the Beagle Blog - a daily text from Darwin's Journal - for your final reading enjoyment today:

We wish you a happy Darwiniversary, and of course look forward to seeing you at our forums, events, and our next monthly meeting, on Saturday, Dec 12, 1:30-3pm, OISE, 252 Bloor St. west, in room 2-295, to hear Speaker Rick Phillips talk about the Symphonies of Beethoven.

Tagged: Creationism, Darwin, Event, evolution, origin of species

Posting

November 23, 2009

NEWS: JURIST - Paper Chase: US only holdout on UN child rights treaty after Somalia announces intent to ratify

By: HAT Webmaster

Tagged: Convention on Children's Rights, News, United Nations

Posting

November 10, 2009

ARTICLE: NASA disproving 2012 conspiracies

By: HAT Webmaster

AFP: The world is not coming to an end on December 21, 2012, the US space agency insisted Monday in a rare campaign to dispel widespread rumors fueled by the Internet and a new Hollywood movie.

Sony Pictures's latest big screen offering "2012" arrives in theaters on Friday, with a 200-million-dollar production about the end of the world supposedly based on myths backed by the Mayan calendar.

The doomsday scenario revolves claims that the end of time will come as an obscure Planet X -- or Nibiru -- heads toward or collides into Earth. The mysterious planet was supposedly discovered by the Sumerians, according to claims by pseudo-scientists, paranormal activity enthusiasts and Internet theorists.

Some websites accuse NASA of concealing the truth on the wayward planet's existence, but the US space agency denounced such stories as an "Internet hoax." "There is no

factual basis for these claims," NASA said in a question-and-answer posting on its website.

If such a collision were real "astronomers would have been tracking it for at least the past decade, and it would be visible by now to the naked eye," it added. "Obviously, it does not exist." "Credible scientists worldwide know of no threat associated with 2012," NASA insisted.

Initial theories set the disaster for May 2003, but when nothing happened the date was moved forward to the winter solstice in 2012 to coincide with the end of a cycle of the ancient Mayan calendar.

But NASA insisted the Mayan calendar in fact does not end on December 21, 2012, as another period begins immediately afterward. And it said there are no planetary alignments o

Tagged: 2012, Article, Opinion, apocalypse

Posting

November 9, 2009

EVENT: Watts Lecture on Evolution, Nov 19

By: HAT Webmaster

Watts Lecture featuring Professor Evelyn Fox Keller

Nov 19, 2009 7:00pm

Location: AC223, ARC Lecture Theatre, University of Toronto Scarborough, 1265 Military Trail

"In this 150th year since the publication of Darwin's "On the Origin of Species" the debate continues...

One of the most striking features of the nature-nature debate is the frequency with which it invites two apparently contradictory claims: first, that it has finally been resolved, and second, that it refuses to die. What is it about this topic that causes so much trouble? What is it that so stubbornly resists resolution?

In this talk, Professor Fox Keller will explore the many ways in which we become enmeshed by the tangle of meanings that make up the nature-nature debate.

Professor Evelyn Fox Keller received her PhD. in theoretical physics at Harvard University, and worked for several years at the interface of physics and biology before turning to the history and philosophy of science. Professor Emerita of History and

Philosophy of Science in the Program in Science, Technology and Society at MIT, Fox Keller is the author of more than 10 books (e.g., *The Century of the Gene*; and *Making Sense of Life*), and the recipient of many awards and honorary degrees. Her latest book, *The Mirage of a Space between Nature and Nurture*, is forthcoming.}

Past Watts Lecturers

Rt. Hon. Lester B. Pearson~Lord Annan~ Gerhard Herzberg~Raymond Moriyama~Hon. David Lewis~Rt. Hon. John G. Diefenbaker~Mordecai Richler~ J.M.S. Careless~Hon. Flora MacDonald ~ Alfonso Garcia Robles~ Hans Kung ~ David Suzuki ~ Hon. Stephen Lewis ~ Bob White ~ Hon. Thomas R. Berger ~ Edwin Mirvish ~ Georges Erasmus ~ Judy Rebick ~ Major-General Lewis MacKenzie ~ Itzak Shelef and Abdullah Abdullah ~ Dr. Roberta Bondard ~ David Phillips ~ Roberta Jamieson ~ Mark Tewksbury ~ Bob Rae ~ Preston Manning ~ Joe Schlesinger ~ James Orbinski ~ Dr. Sheela Basrur ~ Dr. Vandana Shiva ~ Professor Jean Clottes ~ Hon. Louise Arbour

Tagged: Event, evolution

Posting

October 27, 2009

EVENT: "War Child" at Hart House
By: HAT Webmaster

CONSCIOUS ACTIVISM DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL FREE SCREENING: WAR CHILD
Tuesday, November 3, 2009: 6.30 pm
Where: Library, Cost: FREE

Emmanuel Jal's remarkable story from child soldier to hip-hop messenger of peace. "Left home at the age of seven/one year later I'm carryin' an Ak-47." For hip hop artist Emmanuel Jal, a former child soldier in Sudan's brutal civil war, these lyrics are hardly empty posturing. They are the bitter reality of a young man who was "forced to sin" but determined to "never give up and never give in." Today, wounded but still hopeful, he fights a new battle: bringing peace to his beloved Sudan and building schools in Africa. This time, his weapon is a microphone. See why audiences from New York to Berlin to London rave about the award-winning film, *War Child*, and have embraced the hip-hop artist with a terrifying past and a gentle soul. Interspersing original interviews, live concerts, and rare footage of Jal as a seven year-old boy, *War Child* will make viewers cry, laugh, dance, and celebrate the power of hope.

Tagged: Event, Film, child soldiers

Posting

October 24, 2009

BROADCAST: Discovering Ardipithecus Program
By: HAT Webmaster

The Atheist Media Blog (see link in the right column) has posted the Discovery Channel program "Discovering Adripithecus" on their media blog. You can watch the whole thing in 9 minute segments (and it's available in Canada, not blocked)

Tagged: News

HAT Monthly Meeting

October 24, 2009

EVENT: HAT monthly meeting with Gar Mahood
By: HAT Webmaster

Date: Saturday Nov. 14, 1:30-3pm
Gar Mahood, Non-Smokers' Rights
OISE, OISE, 252 Bloor St. West, Room 8-214

Gar Mahood is the Executive Director of the Non-Smokers Rights Association. The NSRA has as its mission to promote public health by eliminating illness and death caused by tobacco, including second-hand smoke. The NSRA is known in Canada and worldwide for its effective health advocacy. It has been the force behind several world initiatives involving both environmental tobacco smoke and preventing Canadian kids from becoming future statistics of the tobacco epidemic. Gar will look at current issues and health care cost recovery. As always, these events are FREE and open to all.

Tagged: Event, HAT event, HAT, HAT event

Posting

October 13, 2009

Contest: 6 days left for Darwin Now Competition
By: HAT Webmaster

Don't forget to enter the Darwin Now competition at New Scientist. All you must do is tell us in no more than 50 words what selection pressure imposed by humans will produce in the animals of the future. The prize is attendance at the "Origin Day"

celebrations in London on 24 November, with travel from anywhere in the world plus luxury hotel accommodation. The competition closes on 19 October.

Tagged: Darwin, Event, evolution

Posting

October 10, 2009

Events: Quirks and Quarks: Free program Oct 15
By: HAT Webmaster

The 10 Biggest Unanswered Questions in the Universe: a Quirks Public Event

In conjunction with the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics, Bob McDonald will be hosting a panel with 10 of the world's most prominent physicists. They'll each be presenting their nomination for the 10 Biggest Unanswered Questions in the Universe. Then we'll ask the members of the studio audience to vote on which one they think is the most important for physicists to solve.

If you want to be part of that audience, we'll be at Glenn Gould Studio, here at the CBC Broadcasting Centre in Toronto, Thursday morning, Oct. 15, at 11am. No tickets are required, but come early if you want to get a seat. And if you can't be there, don't worry - we'll be broadcasting the event later in the season on Quirks & Quarks.

Tagged: Event, Science

HAT Monthly Meeting

September 23, 2009

EVENT: Dr. Callum Brown at HAT and Knox
By: HAT Webmaster

Dr. Callum Brown will be speaking at the Monthly Meeting of HAT on Oct 17.
Saturday, October 17, 1:30pm - 3:30pm
Location: OISE, 252 Bloor St. West ROOM 8-214
Speaker: Callum Brown, FRSE "The Origins of Modern Humanists"

Professor Callum Brown is conducting research on the history of modern humanism in the English-speaking North Atlantic world since the end of the Second World War. The project explores the rise of modern Humanist sentiment and movements in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Ireland, USA and Canada, set in the context of rapid religious change. The aim is to explore through oral history the ways in which humanist/

sceptic/ freethinking ideas and outlooks have developed since the middle of the 20th century, and the impact on the lives of individuals - in terms of careers, family formation and moral issues.

He is also giving a free Special Lecture on "Gender and Christianity in Britain since the 1960s at Knox College.

Thursday, Oct 15. Thursday, 4:10 p.m.

Classroom 4 - Knox College 59 St. George St.

Dr. Callum Brown is professor of religious and cultural history at the University of Dundee, UK, and author of 10 books, including *The Death of Christian Britain* (2001, 2009). He is currently researching for two books, based on UK, Ireland, Canada and USA, on the history of modern humanism, and the demographic revolution of the late 20th century.

Tagged: Event, HAT event, HAT, HATevent, University of Toronto

Posting

September 11, 2009

Event: Richard Dawkins @ Isabel Bader Theatre

By: HAT Webmaster

Sep 29, 2009 at 7:00 PM EDT (6:15 PM DOORS) Indigo Books Meet & Greet: Featuring Richard Dawkins at Isabel Bader Theatre - Toronto, ON Tickets \$10 at TICKETWEB

Meet Richard Dawkins, bestselling author of *The God Delusion* and *The Selfish Gene*, as he talks about his latest book, *The Greatest Show on Earth: The Evidence for Evolution*.

Richard Dawkins is a world-renowned evolutionary biologist and author. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society and, until recently, held the Charles Simonyi Chair of Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University. His first book, *The Selfish Gene*, was an instant international bestseller, and has become an established classic work of modern evolutionary biology. He is also the author of *The Blind Watchmaker*, *River Out of Eden*, *Climbing Mount Improbable*, *Unweaving the Rainbow*, *A Devil's Chaplain*, *The Ancestor's Tale*, and most recently, *The God Delusion*.

For more information on Richard Dawkins, please visit richarddawkins.net.

Tagged: Darwin, Event, evolution

Posting

September 10, 2009

Event: CFI October Conference: TAREK FATAH

By: HAT Webmaster

TAREK FATAH TO GIVE KEYNOTE PUBLIC ADDRESS AT CFI CANADA'S UPCOMING OCTOBER CONFERENCE

OTHER NEWLY CONFIRMED PARTICIPANTS: MATHEMATICIAN JEFFREY ROSENTHAL, SASKATOON FREETHINKER LEADER KENDRA GETTY, AND CFI CANADA BOARD OF DIRECTOR PRESIDENT DR. CAROL PARLOW

Full details and registration: [Conference webpage](#)

Tarek Fatah is a secular Muslim Canadian political activist, writer and TV host. He is the author of *Chasing a Mirage: The Tragic Illusion of an Islamic State* which suggests that the idea of an Islamic state is merely a mirage that Muslims have been made to chase for over a millennium. The book was short listed for the prestigious Donner Book Prize. Tarek Fatah has joined CFRB 1010 as a co-host of the radio station's 3PM daily show. Fatah is the founder of the Muslim Canadian Congress.

Fatah's advocacy for a separation of religion and state, opposition to Sharia law, and advocacy for a liberal, progressive form of Islam have been met with considerable criticism from various Canadian Muslim groups. The Muslim Canadian Congress has been a long-time supporter and ally of the Centre for Inquiry.

Posting

August 14, 2009

News: Afghanistan passes barbaric law against women's rights

By: HAT Webmaster

Rehashed legislation allows husbands to deny wives food if they fail to obey sexual demands. [Guardian](#)

Afghanistan has quietly passed a law permitting Shia men to deny their wives food and sustenance if they refuse to obey their husbands' sexual demands, despite international outrage over an earlier version of the legislation which President Hamid Karzai had promised to review.

The new final draft of the legislation also grants guardianship of children exclusively to their fathers and grandfathers, and requires women to get permission from their husbands to work.

"It also effectively allows a rapist to avoid prosecution by paying 'blood money' to a girl who was injured when he raped her," the US charity Human Rights Watch said.

In early April, Barack Obama and Gordon Brown joined an international chorus of condemnation when the Guardian revealed that the earlier version of the law legalised rape within marriage, according to the UN. Although Karzai appeared to back down, activists say the revised version of the law still contains repressive measures and contradicts the Afghan constitution and international treaties signed by the country.

Islamic law experts and human rights activists say that although the language of the original law has been changed, many of the provisions that alarmed women's rights groups remain, including this one: "Tamkeen is the readiness of the wife to submit to her husband's reasonable sexual enjoyment, and her prohibition from going out of the house, except in extreme circumstances, without her husband's permission. If any of the above provisions are not followed by the wife she is considered disobedient."

The law has been backed by the hardline Shia cleric Ayatollah Mohseni, who is thought to have influence over the voting intentions of some of the country's Shias, which make up around 20% of the population. Karzai has assiduously courted such minority leaders in the run up to next Thursday's election, which is likely to be a close run thing, according to a poll released yesterday.

Human Rights Watch, which has obtained a copy of the final law, called on all candidates to pledge to repeal the law, which it says contradicts Afghanistan's own constitution. The group said that Karzai had "made an unthinkable deal to sell Afghan women out in the support of fundamentalists in the August 20 election".

Brad Adams, the organisation's Asia director, said: "The rights of Afghan women are being ripped up by powerful men who are using women as pawns in manoeuvres to gain power. "These kinds of barbaric laws were supposed to have been relegated to the past with the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001, yet Karzai has revived them and given them his official stamp of approval."

Tagged: Afghanistan, News, Sharia

Posting
July 16, 2009

EVENT: Darwin Film, 'Creation' to open Toronto Film Festival

By: HAT Webmaster

"Real-life couple Jennifer Connelly and Paul Bettany will kick off the Toronto International Film Festival with the life story of Charles Darwin.

Bettany stars as the theory-of-evolution pioneer and Connelly plays his wife in "Creation," which opens the festival Sept. 10. The film is directed by Jon Amiel, whose credits include "The Core" and "Entrapment."

"Creation" premieres in the year marking the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth. Adapted from the book "Annie's Box," the movie centers on Darwin's struggle between science and God as he refines his theories amid his wife's deep religious conviction and grief over the death of his young daughter.

"The tension between faith and reason is prominent in contemporary culture, and this intimate look at Darwin puts a human face on a man whose theory remains controversial to this day," said festival director Piers Handling.

...Along with "Creation," the Toronto lineup will feature Jane Campion's "Bright Star," a drama about another 19th-century Brit, John Keats. "Bright Star," which premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in May, traces the love story of doomed poet Keats (Ben Whishaw) and a passionate neighbor (Abbie Cornish).

Other films announced by festival organizers include Matt Damon and Steven Soderbergh's whistle-blower saga "The Informant"; Ricky Gervais, Jennifer Garner and Tina Fey's fantasy comedy "The Invention of Lying"; Clive Owen's widower drama "The Boys Are Back"; Michael Douglas' womanizer tale "Solitary Man"; Neil Jordan and Colin Farrell's Irish fairy tale "Ondine"; Robert Duvall, Bill Murray and Sissy Spacek's Depression-era drama "Get Low"; and Tim Blake Nelson's comic story "Leaves of Grass," with Edward Norton in dual roles as twin brothers.

Tagged: Darwin, Event, Film

HAT Monthly Meeting

June 20, 2009

EVENT: Dr. Gail McCabe on Secular Rituals

By: HAT Webmaster

Saturday July 11, 1:30pm - 3:30pm

Location: OISE, 252 Bloor St. West ROOM 4-422

Dr. Gail McCabe: "Secular Rituals, Society, and Humanism"

Dr. McCabe is a scholar with interests in Ritual Studies, Social Psychology and a Sociology of the Body informed by Critical Cultural Analysis.

Her dissertation, "Morphing the Crone: An Ethnography of Crone Culture, Consciousness and Communities" expands a theory of how ritual and dramas are implicated in social life on earth and in cyberspace. She takes the position that humans and humanists, no matter where they locate themselves philosophically, physically or spiritually, are certainly not 'beyond belief.' On that account, humanists have everything to gain from an understanding about how these different aspects of culture give structure to social order and human communities.

Dr. McCabe holds appointments as an officiant from Humanist Canada. She is also a member of the University of Toronto Campus Chaplain's Association serving the secular community at the University of Toronto. She taught in the Sociology Department at Glendon College and more recently, was the Academic Advisor, Calumet College, York University. She currently teaches the Community Services Worker program at a private college in Mississauga. This event is free and open to the public.

Tagged: Event, HAT event, HAT, HATevent, Rituals, Secularism

Posting

May 16, 2009

NEWS: German Fossil Find

By: HAT Webmaster

German Fossil Found to Be Early Primate

By JOHN NOBLE WILFORD

Fossil remains of a 47-million-year-old animal, found years ago in Germany, have been analyzed more thoroughly and determined to be an extremely early primate close to the emergence of the evolutionary branch leading to monkeys, apes and humans, scientists said in interviews this week.

Described as the "most complete fossil primate ever discovered," the specimen is a juvenile female the size of a small monkey. Only the left lower limb is missing, and the preservation is so remarkable that impressions of fur and the soft body outline are still clear. The animal's last meal, of fruit and leaves, remained in the stomach cavity.

In an article to be published on Tuesday in PLoS One, an online scientific journal, an international team of scientists will report that this extraordinary fossil could be a "stem group" from which higher primates evolved,"but we are not advocating this."

The researchers said the specimen, designated *Darwinius masillae*, "is important in being exceptionally well preserved and providing a much more complete understanding of the paleobiology" of a primate from the Eocene period, a time when primitive primates were starting to branch into two lineages, the prosimians and the anthropoids.

As part of a heavily promoted publicity campaign, the skeleton will be displayed at a news conference on Tuesday at the American Museum of Natural History in New York; the History Channel plans a documentary on the primate at 9 p.m. on May 25; and Little Brown is bringing out a book. The Wall Street Journal published an article on Friday giving some scientific details of the discovery.

The specimen was excavated by private collectors in 1983 from the Messel Shale Pit, a shale quarry near Darmstadt, Germany, that has yielded many fossils of Eocene life, including other primitive primates. Jörn H. Hurum, a paleontologist at the University of Oslo and a leader of the research, said the site was "one of the real treasure troves of paleontology, like the Gobi Desert for dinosaurs."

The skeleton was divided and sold in two parts, one of which had dropped out of sight. When Dr. Hurum learned that the missing part was for sale, he arranged for its purchase by the Natural History Museum in Oslo and two years ago rounded up a team of German and American scientists to study the bones with CT imaging and other advanced technologies.

Speaking by telephone from Norway, Dr. Hurum recalled: "I realized at first it's a primate. It just screams primate: opposable big toes and thumbs, no evidence of claws. This is like the Archaeopteryx of primate evolution."

The scientists estimated that the primate was about 9 months old, the equivalent of a 6-year-old human. At maturity they suggest that it would have weighed two pounds and been two feet long, most of it tail. It had a broken left wrist, healing at the time of death, and may have drowned in the volcanic lake at Messel. It was, the researchers said, something like a combination "lemur monkey."

Philip D. Gingerich, a member of the team who is a paleontologist of Eocene life at the University of Michigan, said in an e-mail message that in the context of other fossil finds and DNA studies the primate should be considered for a place in the ancestral line leading to living higher primates, including apes and humans.

Tagged: News, Paleontology, evolution

Posting
April 21, 2009

NEWS: Gore Vidal is Honorary President of the AHA

By: HAT Webmaster

Gore Vidal Accepts Title of American Humanist Association Honorary President

(Washington, D.C., April 20, 2009) Humanist leaders are pleased to announce that Gore Vidal -- preeminent novelist, essayist, and playwright who is frequently described as America's best-known public intellectual -- has accepted the honorary presidency of the American Humanist Association.

"We're delighted and privileged to have Gore Vidal as our honorary president," said Roy Speckhardt, executive director of the American Humanist Association. "Vidal is a sharply intelligent advocate for individual liberty, separation of church and state, and reason and rationality. He has a reverence for earthly inquiry--as opposed to doctrine or dogma -- that embodies the mission of the AHA. We're very excited about working with him."

Vidal has had a long literary and intellectual career that has inspired and never shied away from controversy. A lifelong advocate for progressive values, he has time and again challenged conventional wisdom. He is an outspoken critic of the radical religious right's influence over public policy, and in recent years has spoken out against civil liberty abuses perpetrated by the Bush administration.

"With his great literary work and vocal positions on important issues, Vidal has in fact been advancing humanism for decades," said AHA president David Niose. "Now, as the AHA's honorary president, he will surely draw even more public attention to the humanist life stance."

Vidal succeeds the late Kurt Vonnegut as AHA honorary president. Vonnegut held the post from 1992, when he took the reins from Isaac Asimov, until his death in 2007. Vonnegut wrote a chapter about humanism in his last book *A Man Without a Country*, where, in his characteristically sarcastic style, he showed how he didn't take much stock in divinely revealed "truth."

In a letter addressed to the AHA executive director, Vidal wrote:

"Of course, I have been very much aware of the AHA for some years. I knew and admired Isaac Asimov and his work. As for Kurt, I would be most honored to succeed my old friend as honorary President of the Association: Although he himself is hardly easy to replace, I will do my best to fill the great gap. I think my "religion" is the same as his and yours and does not derive from cloudy divinity, but from a man in Athens called Socrates who once observed: "The unexamined life is not worth living." So, I would like to help the AHA to encourage others to realize that life, no matter how shadowed by

superstition, is worth living, and the AHA is always in a position to encourage much needed "examiners."

Tagged: AHA, News

HAT Monthly Meeting

April 20, 2009

EVENT: John Robert Colombo, May 10

By: HAT Webmaster

HAT Humanist of the Year: John Robert Colombo

"St. Socrates: Some Thoughts on Humanism"

Sunday, May 10, 1 – 3 pm

OISE, 252 Bloor St. west, Room 4-422

"St. Socrates: Some Thoughts on Humanism from John Robert Colombo." This will be a far-ranging discussion with the recommendation of some specific applications. Colombo is the author/compiler/translator of over 200 books. His current title is "A Far Cry," a collection of poems, and coming this fall is "The Big Book of Canadian Hauntings." The Toronto-based author and anthologist is best known for "Colombo's Canadian Quotations." For this he is known as the Master Gatherer and the Canadian Bartlett. He hosted Space Television's "Unexplained Canada" TV series. He holds an honorary doctorate from York University, is a recipient of the Harbourfront Literary Prize, and is a Member of the Order of Canada.

At this meeting, John will be awarded the HAT Humanist of the Year Award.

Tagged: Event, HAT event, HATevent

Posting

April 11, 2009

Article: The Science of Religion

By: HAT Webmaster

CBC Quirks & Quarks April 11, 2009 "The Science of Religion"

Over the next week or so, Christians around the world will be celebrating Easter, while some Buddhists will celebrate the New Year and Jews will mark Passover. And while these religious festivals are happening, a few curious scientists will be asking, why? Is there something about human psychology or evolution that has made religious worship

a nearly universal part of human culture? Science can't say whether gods are real, but it might be able to suggest why people believe in them.

(note: Quirks & Quarks is heard on Saturdays on CBC Radio One from 12:06 - 1:00pm with a rebroadcast Monday evenings at 11:06pm, and also on Sirius satellite radio. You can also listen to the MP3 audio files or subscribe to the podcast, [HERE](#)

(thanks to Maria for the tipoff!)

Tagged: Article, CBC, Opinion, Religion

Posting

April 10, 2009

Humour: Twittering the Crucifixion

By: HAT Webmaster

WWJT - zomg-y-hv-u-4skn-me

Trinity Church on Wall Street is twittering the Crucifixion. La Figa at Firedoglake.com has the post:

"What would Jesus tweet? Trinity Church on Wall Street is delivering a three hour twitter feed of the Passion Play, plus online Stations of the Cross--it's a contemporary recreation of Christ's last hours on earth. w00t!

via @_Peter_of_: is waiting in the courtyard of the High Priest Caiaphas. I ran scared when the officers came but I need to see how this ends

SPOILER ALERT: He rolls away the stone and there are 2,000 more years of war.

(as our Voltaire Quotation says today: "God is always on the side of the big battalions")

Tagged: Opinion, Religion, humour

Posting

April 7, 2009

HAT: Letter re G. Goodyear to PM Harper

By: HAT Webmaster

Dear Prime Minister Harper,

The Humanist Association of Toronto would like to express our dismay at the remarks last month made by the Hon. Gary Goodyear concerning the theory of evolution. When asked about his belief in regard to the biological theory, he at first declined to answer on the ground that he considered it a matter of religion. His subsequent statement that he did believe in evolution does not reassure us for two reasons. First, his clarification "that people are always evolving" leaves much doubt that he was referring to the biological theory explaining the diversity of life forms. Second, and most importantly, he has never to our knowledge retracted his implication that evolution is a matter of religion.

In his role as Minister of Science and Technology, Mr. Goodyear is responsible for funding scientific research in Canada. At the very least, a minister in that position ought to respect the ability of the scientific community to answer questions of a scientific nature. That he should regard one of science's greatest accomplishments as a religious matter, rather than a scientific one, is troubling. While the theory of evolution remains controversial in some circles, it has been the consensus of the scientific community for over a century and has become the foundational paradigm of the biological sciences.

We therefore urge you to demonstrate your government's commitment to science by either firing Mr. Goodyear or transferring him to another portfolio where his inability to distinguish a scientific paradigm from a religious doctrine will be less relevant. Canada's science research programs ought to be overseen by a cabinet minister who fully appreciates the achievements of science.

Sincerely,

Moses Klein

for the Humanist Association of Toronto

cc:

Marc Garneau, Liberal Party critic for Industry, Science and Technology

Jim Maloway, NDP critic for Science and Technology

Robert Vincent, Bloc Quebecois critic for Science and Technology

Humanist Association of Canada

Centre for Inquiry - Canada

Natural Science and Engineering Research Council of Canada

Royal Ontario Museum

Dr. Brian Alters, Director, Evolution Education Research Centre

Tagged: Opinion, evolution, harper

Posting

March 24, 2009

EVENT: Reminder, Innis Lecture, April 18
By: HAT Webmaster

Join Humanist Canada (HAC) on Saturday April 18 at Innis Town Hall at the University of Toronto campus for a lively and thought-provoking symposium on the evolution of ethics. Five prominent speakers, from both the Christian and Humanist communities, will discuss and debate some of the hottest issues today including: abortion; gender; homosexuality; animal rights; and biotechnology. Our panel of award-winning speakers includes: Christopher diCarlo (critical-thinking activist, professor of Philosophy of Science and Bioethics); Michael Coren (Christian writer, radio and TV host); George Dvorsky (futurist, transhumanist, animal rights activist); Tony Costa (public speaker, Campus for Christ); and Jean Saindon (professor of Natural Science and Technology).

Tickets are \$15 for HC members, \$25 for non-members, and \$10 for students. Delicious appetizers, desserts, and drinks are included. Speaker profiles and registration details are on the Humanist Canada website at: HumanistCanada.com. Please register by April 15.

Tagged: Event, HAC, HC

Posting

March 21, 2009

Article: FAC transit ads on TTC
By: HAT Webmaster

Doug Thomas of SOFREE comments on the FAC ads.

A while ago the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) began to display ads placed by the Freethought Association of Canada (FAC) repeating those on the London, England transit system – “There Probably Is No God. Stop worrying and enjoy your Life.”

The TTC did not insist on the word probably, but FAC chose to include it because FAC felt a better debate would result. At the same time Humanist Canada (HC), aka the Humanist Association of Canada ran an ad saying, "We Can be Good Without God," in a high-traffic Toronto subway station.

Local fundamentalists reacted predictably. Apparently attacking non-believers is fine, but any glimmer of a positive presence from those same non-believers is not. According

to Kathy Meidell, Executive Director of HC, they have received dozens of negative phone calls and emails mixed in with new inquiries about HC and applications for membership.

A panel discussion, regarding the ads, on TV Ontario's (TVO) "The Agenda" was revealing. The pro participants included Justin Trottier, president of FAC, Dr. Robert Buckman, author of *We Can Be Good Without God*, and Greta Vosper, chairperson of the Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity.

Kathy Shaidle, conservative Catholic blogger (*fivefeetoffury*), and Dr. Jordan Peterson, a professor of psychology at the University of Toronto, responded on the con side. The pro side emphasized the notion of promoting dialogue and of moving nonbelievers more into the mainstream of ethical debates. The con side seemed to emphasize the fears of chaos threatened by such ads...

...So, the ads sparked debate. Religious fundamentalists have responded in predictable ways – fear and loathing. However, Trottier, Buckman and Vosper are correct; positive dialogue is occurring. One United Church responded with an ad of its own: "There probably is a God. Stop Worrying and Enjoy Your Life."

Tagged: Article, FAC, IHS, SOFREE

Posting

March 18, 2009

News: Anti-Gay Evangelist appointed to Immigration Board

By: HAT Webmaster

Doug Cryer, former director of public policy for the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, has been appointed to the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB).

Cryer's appointment has many people worried because of statements that he made publicly in 2006 on *CanadianChristianity.com*, where he said that the church has a right to say that homosexual behaviour is sinful, just as it can say that adultery is sinful. "It is part of God's teaching," he said, though he was also critical of a church that mass-mailed a homophobic pamphlet which included an article titled *The Plague of this 21st Century: The Consequences of the Sin of Homosexuality (AIDS)*. "This kind of brochure helps to reinforce the negative stereotype of Christians," Cryer said at the time.

During his time at the Evangelical Fellowship, Cryer actively campaigned against same-sex marriage, arguing that it could have a "negative impact on children."...

(When) NDP immigration critic Olivia Chow submitted Access to Information (ATI) requests for the selection criteria, she was given pages of blacked-out notes that were unusable.

"He does not have any in-depth experience on any immigration and refugee issues," Chow says. "From his CV, he has no experience serving on the tribunal or connected with administrating the law, so I can't see how he would qualify to be an Immigration and Refugee Board member." Chow also suggests that Cryer's appointment is likely because he was a failed Conservative candidate, having run in the 2004 general election as the candidate for Wascana in Saskatchewan, and that he previously served as the legislative assistant to a Conservative MP.

Tagged: Human Rights, News

Posting

March 16, 2009

NEWS: Red Cross makes it official - US Tortured at Guantanamo

By: HAT Webmaster

US interrogators attached detainees to collars like dogs and used their leashes to slam them against walls, forced them to stand for days wearing only diapers, and tied detainees necks with towels and threw them against plywood walls, according to accounts in a secret 2007 report issued by the Red Cross to be printed in a New York magazine and leaked on Monday.

The report -- issued by the International Committee of the Red Cross and kept secret for the last two years -- is the first first-hand document to legally say the Bush Administration's harsh interrogation techniques "constituted torture." They strongly imply that CIA interrogators violated international law.

The Red Cross was the only organization to get access to high-value detainees that were transferred to Guantanamo Bay from secret prisons US in 2006. It contains accounts from the prisoners, who were held in different locations but offered remarkably uniform tales of abuse at the hands of US agents.

Techniques amounted to "cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment," the report states. Such treatment is explicitly barred by the Geneva Conventions.

Tagged: CIA, Geneva Conventions, News, Torture

Posting

March 14, 2009

NEWS: CofHE reports Turkish Journal editor sacked for Darwin article
By: HAT Webmaster

The Chronicle of Higher Education reports The editor of a scientific journal published by Turkey's state-run Scientific and Technological Research Council has reportedly been removed from her post for commissioning a March cover story on Charles Darwin to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the naturalist's birth. The council's vice president, who is also a member of the magazine's editorial board, "removed the story from the journal and put an article about climate change on the cover instead," the Turkish daily newspaper Hürriyet reported.

Dozens of university students and professors protested the council's action outside its Ankara headquarters today, the Associated Press reported. The country's secularists suspect the governing party, which has its roots in political Islam, is seeking to raise the role of religion and promote the Muslim version of creationism.

Turkey occupies a "central position in the creationist movement" outside the United States, Hürriyet noted in an earlier article.

Turkey's main, secular opposition party has filed a parliamentary motion over the apparent censorship, but Hürriyet reported that the research council's president had "left the media's questions largely unanswered." —Aisha Labi

OPINION: Religion, Ponzi Schemes, and tribalism

Posting

February 28, 2009

News: News events shed light on role of religion as tribal identity
By: HAT Webmaster

Two recent US news events shed more light on the sociological role of religion as tribal identity in contemporary society.

1) We know that Madoff flogged his ponzi scheme to Jewish investors, in Florida and worldwide, who trusted him. We now learn that "Sir Allen" Stanford and James Davis not only sold his 8 billion security fraud to Southern Christian leaders, but "Mr. Davis was also known as a deeply religious man, opening many Stanford Financial meetings with a prayer that Stanford executives would make the right investment decisions,

according to another former financial adviser". It is pointed out that this is probably linked to the "Prosperity Gospel" proponents, such as Creflo Dollar and Joel Osteen. (aka Lottery Ticket Christians - God wants you to drive a gold mercedes.)

2)But the god-fearing seem also spend quite a bit on ungodly things. A Harvard Business Study (analysing credit card receipts) determined more online porn is watched by conservative and religious states. "Some of the people who are most outraged turn out to be consumers of the very things they claimed to be outraged by," Edelman says.

Humanists often have interesting and intelligent discussions about the history of religion, philosophy, ethics and the enlightenment, and other ways to look at religion as a liberal art. But sometimes it's important to note that religion less an intellectual, moral guide, than it is merely a class-based tribal identity, useful for selling insurance, finding a business partner, marrying your children inside the tribe, and selling pesticide; most of the pesticide companies, as well as the MLM home-marketing companies are run by Mormons in Utah - and most of your sushi comes from the Moonies, btw. The massive competing Korean churches in Queens NY are known for their business networking events - with entertainment by the Korean gospel choirs singing black spirituals... This isn't any different than my Irish catholic relatives antics as ward bosses in 1890, of course.

Considering the Christian States addiction to online porn, despite their railing against the decline in 'moral values' among their liberal neighbors, it's useful to examine the treatment of women when you analyse tribal identity among religions. We know that the more conservative religious communities forbid access to sex ed and family planning (but not to Viagra!). This is often a technique to keep women "barefoot, uneducated and poor" - and HOME, of course.

A Chinese muslim was asked on a BBC documentary why the tribe did not apply for electricity, like the city across the river. He answered: "if our women see these things, they will leave us". A secular muslim friend once told me that the utility of hijab is "to save your sister for your second cousin - before anyone on the outside gets a chance". It seems to have worked for few hundred years, and keeps the property in the family, and the women at home. Tidy, that.

However, there are rumbles, even in the cultural/religious tangle of FGM. See this disturbing article on the movement in Sierra Leone to free women from Female Genital Mutilation - and the tribal revenge enacted upon the brave reformers.

Speaking for myself only (SFMO), - the webeditor.

Tagged: FGM, News, Opinion, Religion, Tribalism

Posting

February 25, 2009

NEWS: AHA: Summum decision will allow new lawsuits
By: HAT Webmaster

In Wake of Summum, Humanists Will Target Ten Commandments Monuments
www.americanhumanist.org

In the wake of today's U.S. Supreme Court ruling in Pleasant Grove City v. Summum, 07-665, the American Humanist Association announced it has been given just what it needs to pursue the removal of 10 Commandments monuments on public property all over America.

"The unanimous decision of the Court is clear," said Bob Ritter, legal coordinator for the Appignani Humanist Legal Center of the AHA. "A permanent monument owned by a government entity and located in a public park is a form of government speech. Given this, such a monument isn't permitted to violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. And we humanists are ready to argue that 10 Commandments monuments in U.S. public parks are unconstitutional government endorsements of religion."

Justice Samuel Alito, in his opinion on behalf of the majority, wrote: "government speech must comport with the Establishment Clause. The involvement of public officials in advocacy may be limited by law, regulation, or practice."

Tagged: AHA, News

Posting

February 20, 2009

NEWS: Obama reverses US position on LGBT rights at UN
By: HAT Webmaster

UN DISPATCH by Marc Goldberg.

In late December the United Nations General Assembly held a symbolic vote on a statement calling for the universal decriminalization of homosexuality. France spearheaded the resolution, which was a 13 point declaration "to ensure that sexual orientation or gender identity may under no circumstances be the basis for criminal penalties, in particular executions, arrests or detention." The statement received 60 votes in support, mostly from Europe and South America. Opposing the resolution, were

the United States, the Holy See, and members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. At the time, the Bush administration couched its objection to the measure in legal technicalities.

That was then, This is now: At the so-called "Durban Review Conference" on racism and xenophobia underway in Geneva, Europe again put forward language condemning "all forms of discrimination and all other human rights violations based on sexual orientation." According to UN Watch, "The Czech Republic on behalf of the E.U., with the support of New Zealand, the United States, Colombia, Chili on behalf of the South American states, the Netherlands, Argentina and a few others, took the floor in support."

The efforts to include language on discrimination based on sexual orientation ended up failing for lack of support from non-western countries. Still, it's relieving to see that the United States is now back on the side of the enlightened on this issue of basic human rights. (No information on Canada's vote).

Tagged: Gay marriage, News, United Nations

Posting

February 20, 2009

EVENT: Humanist Canada Innis Lecture, April 18
By: HAT Webmaster

Humanist Canada is launching its first lecture series this spring in the form of an exciting bicentennial Darwin Day celebration! This special event will be in the form of a debate series with speakers discussing such hot topics such as ethics, sexuality, genetic engineering, and immortality, as they relate to science, humanity, faith, and morality. The event will take place at Innis Hall at the University of Toronto campus at 6:30 pm SATURDAY APRIL 18, 2009

The debaters are Dr Christopher diCarlo and Michael Coren and the speakers include: Dr Jean Saindon, Assistant Professor, Division of Natural Science & Philosophy and George Dvorsky, board director at the Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies, who speaks on the scientific, political and social issues surrounding human biotechnology. Full details and registration information coming soon!

Tagged: Event, Univ of Toronto

HAT Monthly Meeting

February 19, 2009

EVENT: Justin Trottier and the Bus Campaign

By: HAT Webmaster

Saturday March 14, 2009 1:30 pm OISE Room 4 - 414

We are pleased to welcome Justin Trottier, Executive Director for the Centre for Inquiry Canada, who will join us to talk about The Bus Campaign: "There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life".

How and where did this campaign start? How did it come to Canada? What cities are involved? What kind of reactions, positive and negative, has the campaign generated? Is this in fact a form of "preaching?" Is this a good use of humanist money? Come and share your questions and comments.

Tagged: Event, HAT event, HAT, HATevent

**HAT Monthly Film & Discussion Group
January 28, 2009**

EVENT: Reminder, Innis Lecture, April 18

By: HAT Webmaster

Sun. February 22, 3:00-6:00 pm

FILM: Clarence Darrow

LOCATION: 216 Beverley Street

Henry Fonda stars in this one man show about the famous freethinking civil rights lawyer who defended, among others, John Scopes.

FREE and OPEN TO THE PUBLIC, as well as HAT members.

Sponsored by the Humanist Association of Toronto (HAT).

Tagged: Event, Film, HAT

**Posting
January 28, 2009**

Anniversary: Thomas Paine, b. Jan 29, 1737

By: HAT Webmaster

Quotes:

"Belief in a cruel God makes a cruel man".

"To establish any mode to abolish war, however advantageous it might be to Nations, would be to take from such Government the most lucrative of its branches".

"My country is the world, and my religion is to do good"

"My mind is my own church"

"One good schoolmaster is of more use than a hundred priests".

Tagged: Anniversary

HAT Monthly Meeting January 28, 2009

Event: Poetry at HAT monthly meeting

By: HAT Webmaster

Saturday February 14, 2009 1:30 pm OISE Room 3-311

George Miller, Poet Laureate of the Bohemian Embassy

George will delight us with a poetry reading culled from his three publications, Ladders to High Places, 30 Some Odd Poems, and Sancho, as well as new works. George was the founder of the Poetry Workshop at the Bohemian Embassy. 34 years later, the workshop is still going strong, rising from the ashes as the Phoenix Poetry Workshop at Harbourfront.

Note: This event is free, and open to the public, as well as HAT members.

Tagged: Event, HAT event, HAT, HATevent

Posting January 27, 2009

Article: Attenborough on Creationists

By: HAT Webmaster

Guardian. 27 January 2009

Sir David Attenborough has revealed that he receives hate mail from viewers for failing to credit God in his documentaries. In an interview with this week's Radio Times about his latest documentary, on Charles Darwin and natural selection, the broadcaster said: "They tell me to burn in hell and good riddance."

Telling the magazine that he was asked why he did not give "credit" to God, Attenborough added: "They always mean beautiful things like hummingbirds. I always reply by saying that I think of a little child in east Africa with a worm burrowing through his eyeball. The worm cannot live in any other way, except by burrowing through eyeballs. I find that hard to reconcile with the notion of a divine and benevolent creator."

Attenborough went further in his opposition to creationism, saying it was "terrible" when it was taught alongside evolution as an alternative perspective. "It's like saying that two and two equals four, but if you wish to believe it, it could also be five ... Evolution is not a theory; it is a fact, every bit as much as the historical fact that William the Conqueror landed in 1066."

Tagged: Article, Creationism, Darwin

Posting

January 27, 2009

News: Israel's Rabbinat Cuts Vatican over Holocaust-Deniers reinstated

By: HAT Webmaster

JERUSALEM, Canadian Press — Israel's chief rabbinat has severed ties with the Vatican.

The move is to protest a papal decision to reinstate a bishop who publicly denied six million Jews were killed during the Holocaust. Richard Williamson of Britain and three other bishops had been excommunicated 20 years ago after the late ultraconservative archbishop Marcel Lefebvre consecrated them without papal consent.

This story is developing rapidly. NY Times has more today.

And more about internal dissent at the Vatican.

Tagged: Holocaust, Israel, News, Vatican