

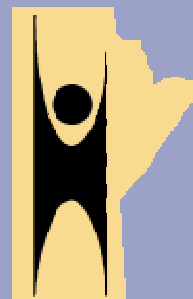
Manitoba Humanist



“Love Grows Brains”
- Mary Gordon,
founder of Roots
of Empathy

Published by and for the
Humanist Association of
Manitoba

*“We are beyond
belief”*



www.mb.humanists.ca

March Meeting – The Roots of Empathy

The speaker at our March Monthly Meeting is **Leanne Boyd**, the Manitoba Contact for the Roots of Empathy program.

Roots of Empathy is an evidence-based classroom program. Its stated mission is to build caring, peaceful, and civil societies – child by child – through the development of empathy in children.

The program was founded in Canada in 1996 by Mary Gordon, an internationally recognized educator, social entrepreneur, and child advocate, and today has reached more than 270,000 children in 11,000 classrooms worldwide. Roots of Empathy also has a sibling program,

Seeds of Empathy, designed for early childhood settings.

At the heart of the program are classroom visits by an infant and parent. Through guided observations of this loving relationship, children learn to identify and reflect on their own thoughts and feelings and those of others (empathy). Independent evaluations consistently show children who receive Roots of Empathy experience dramatic and lasting effects in terms of increased pro-social behaviour (sharing, helping and including) and decreased aggression.

See page 5 for meeting details.



*March 8th is
International
Women’s Day*

HAM'S FEBRUARY MEETING – WHEN “RITES” ARE WRONGS



Marilou McPhedren and Jeff Olsson

Wow! Marilou McPhedren lit a fire in many of us who listened to her oration on Human Rights.

In particular, she gave us insight into two very important cases that highlight how the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms impacts all of us. These are cases that she was involved in, so she was able to provide first-hand knowledge.

The first case she talked about involved the efforts by a Muslim lawyer in Ontario to introduce a “sharia court” in Ontario, using the province’s Arbitration Act. This “faith-based” arbitration, could have been used by couples trying to settle marital disputes or a marriage breakdown.

Originally, the Attorney General of Ontario would only consider the impact and limit on the community’s religious freedoms, which are indeed guaranteed in the Charter. However, as Ms. McPhedren pointed out, this ignored the equality rights that should also apply to the Muslim women in that community. The Canadian Congress of Muslim Women objected to the Sharia court. They wanted to have equality with every other Canadian woman, to have their cases heard in a provincial court.

The other case that she talked about was the case against the polygamist leaders of the FLDS community in Bountiful, British Columbia. In January 2009, the RCMP arrested and charged Winston Blackmore and James Oler with the criminal offence of practicing polygamy. And again, the case may pit the community’s right to

religious freedom against the rights of the women.

That case brings up two interesting points:

First, polygamy itself is currently illegal, according to Canadian law. But, is that correct? Certainly, many of us would agree that what occurs between consenting adults – as long as they’re not harming anyone, or infringing on someone else’s rights – should be their own business. What’s the harm? However, one issue it raises is certainly all the legalities surrounding multiple members of a partnership. What about custody rights of any children? Pensions? Wills and Estates? Survivor benefits?

In addition, many of the women involved WANT to be a third or a fourth wife. They believe in the rules set out by their interpretation of their religion. However, what about the rights of the younger women involved? It’s not strictly being dealt with in the court case, but while adults certainly have their right to do what they want, some of the women involved in the polygamous marriages are 12, 13 or 14 years old. And many of them have actually been “trafficked” across the U.S./Canada border. At that age, they’re far younger than our age of consent.

HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW YOUR RIGHTS & FREEDOMS?

One of the interesting topics that Marilou raised was our Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It occurred to me – how many of us really know what the Charter contains? What impact does it have on us?

So, here is a link to an on-line, interactive site about the Charter, in case you’re interested in learning more about it: www.charterofrights.ca.

And, here’s a brief quiz on the Charter itself:

Q: *When was the Charter introduced?*

A: It was signed into law on April 17, 1982.

Q: *Does the charter include a reference to God?*

A: Yes it does. The Charter begins with: "Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law."

By the way, in 1999, MP Svend Robinson brought forward a failed proposal before the Canadian House of Commons that would have amended the Charter by removing the mention of God, as he felt it did not reflect Canada's diversity

Q: Both Canada and the United States have guaranteed both sexes equal rights.

A: Actually, no. Section 28 of our Canadian Charter states that "the rights and freedoms referred to [in it] are guaranteed equally to male and female persons. The U.S. has been unable to ratify their Equal Rights Amendment. While that proposed amendment had many critics, there was no comparable opposition to the Charter's section 28. Still, Canadian feminists had to stage large protests to demonstrate support for the inclusion of the section.

Q: Is the right to vote a fundamental freedom?

A: No. Our "Fundamental Freedoms" (section 2) only include freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, freedom of thought, freedom of belief, freedom of expression, freedom of the press and of other media of communication, freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association.

Q: What is the most widely translated document in the world?

A: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been translated into at least 375 languages and dialects.

In some countries and times, rights may have only applied to citizens of that society. And what the state bestowed, it could also take away. Which is why the concept of "inalienable rights" or "natural rights" is so powerful and important.

- Donna Harris

HAM'S DONATION TO HAITI

While it's been a few weeks since that enormous earthquake hit Haiti, and disasters continue to happen around the world (the earthquake in Chile just happened a few days ago), the people in Haiti will continue to need support for months and years to come.

At our last executive meeting, we decided to donate a further \$200 to Oxfam, on behalf of all of our members.

YOUTH FOR CHRIST WINS PUBLIC FUNDING

The Federal Government and the City of Winnipeg have agreed to publicly fund an evangelical organization's plans to "Christianize" the core area of Winnipeg. YFC is an organization that is well known for its evangelism, something akin to Campus Crusade for Christ. The idea that councilors could possibly ignore this fact speaks volumes about their intention towards aboriginal peoples in general.

As I listened to portions of the debate through the media yesterday I realized that there can be no reasoning with a Mayor like Sam Katz. Sam put forth the argument that aboriginal projects have already been well funded by the city and that this Christian rec center project would be just fine. He just cannot let go of the federal monies already promised for this project.

The point that Katz missed is that an aboriginal housing or friendship center project is not necessarily a religious one. There is no mandate for religious belief by its employees nor is there any prescription for religious beliefs to be monitored or changed by people who use aboriginal facilities. Youth for Christ stipulates that its volunteers be "christian" and that they be willing to evangelize and attempt to change the belief set of those who would use their facilities. Small "c" evangelism is still evangelism.

According to the CBC, "John Courtney, executive director of Youth for Christ, said the 50,000-square-foot, non-denominational facility

would be open to all Winnipeg youth. It would house an indoor skateboarding park as well as a performance-art studio and job-training center, he said.

"Proselytizing is one of those words that's attached to the radical side of religion," Courtney told council on Wednesday. "Do we think it's a good thing for any young person to embrace the Christian faith? Of course we do. Do we reject any services from kids that don't want to take that journey? Absolutely not."

The problem is that these are little kids we are talking about. Little people who are ill equipped to defend themselves against such evangelistic efforts. What little kid is going to be able to resist the full multimillion dollar, performance art, evangelistic effort put forth by YFC.

The assumption made by Courtney is that being a Christian is better than being who you already are, aboriginal or not. If your kids aren't already christian you'd better not send them there.

- Jeff Olsson, *Leaving Faith Behind* blog

BOOK REVIEW

Denialism - How Irrational Thinking Hinders Scientific Progress, Harms the Planet, and Threatens Our Lives

By Michael Specter. The Penguin Press, 263 pages, \$35

Vaccines don't cause autism. Organic food is not necessarily healthier to the consumer nor kinder to the environment. Genetically modified crops are fundamentally no different from domestic crops whose genomes have been modified by purposeful crossbreeding. Real risks exist, but nowhere near enough to suppress their use outright.

And all those vitamin jars and homeopathic remedies? For the most part, they're as effective as placebo.

Finally, racial discrimination has its place: responses to certain drugs differ according to

racial background, providing opportunities to improve effectiveness of individualized medical treatment.

American science and health writer Michael Specter contends that each of these conclusions is supported by solid evidence obtained with care and at great expense. But each of these conclusions is also rejected by many, whether passionate lay activists, wishful consumers, influential decision-makers or stubbornly politically correct academics: the denialists.

As Specter says, "Unless data fits neatly into an already formed theory, a denialist doesn't really see it as data at all."

Specter, a staff writer for the *New Yorker*, urges us to think about how denialism impedes our ability to tackle some of our most pressing problems -- food supply, land management, energy supply, and the cost and effectiveness of health care.

The tendency to adhere to a position adopted from a highly subjective and highly selective perspective results in a great deal of time and money sunk into noisy debates and superfluous research.

Specter identifies people like Jenny McCarthy, Cherie Blair, Prince Charles, Dr. Andrew Weil and several European and African politicians as fervent supporters of positions that persistently deny the best science we have.

Specter describes how some public health investigators have required protection from angry anti-vaccine protesters. The U.S. National Institute of Health spends over \$100 million annually for research into "Complementary and Alternative Medicine". One of the main promoters of this research, Iowa senator Tom Harkin, has voiced dissatisfaction that too often it disproves rather than validates the alternate approaches.

The book recounts more instances of this kind, providing just enough background about the relevant science to help the lay reader grasp the larger issues. It provides insight into the way ground-breaking life science researchers and

their detractors think about novelty, progress, responsibility and risk.

The stories are often eye-opening. Irradiation is routinely employed to spur mutations in the service of "conventional" crop research, even in countries that vociferously oppose genetically modified crops.

We get a glimpse into the frontiers of synthetic biology, a rapidly growing field in which specialized genomes drive cells to grow into molecular machines that perform tasks like drug manufacture and sugar-to-fuel conversion. Insiders think technologies flowing from this research will become ubiquitous before long. Designer pets, not to mention designer children, may take some getting used to.

The book is clearly polemical, and suffers somewhat from assuming the reader is already sympathetic to its position. Alternate perspectives aren't always shown in their best light.

It's also peculiar that a book on denialism would make only passing mention of denial of global warming, and none at all about efforts to suppress or dilute the teaching of evolution.

The treatment of scientific topics is uneven and sometimes clumsy. Narrative techniques like chronology hopping are sometimes more confusing than effective. (A surprising if not overly significant gaffe is referring to 2008 as the bicentennial of Darwin's birth, this in a book released in 2009!)

Specter seems to accept traditional notions of progress, and doesn't dwell on some of its deeper challenges. He only briefly mentions Thomas Malthus and there is no discussion of Jevons Paradox or the "crashing civilization" pattern of thinkers like Jared Diamond.

Still, serious, thoughtful, evidence-based conversations about our technological choices are crucial if we hope to navigate the future. This book adds to that conversation.

- Neil Schipper

UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, March 13, 2010

Monthly Meeting

Location: Room 3M60, University of Winnipeg
515 Portage Avenue

Time: Meet & Greet: 5:30 pm

Lecture: 6:00 pm

Q and A: 7:00 pm

Speaker: **Leanne Boyd**, Manager of Policy Development, Research and Evaluation, Healthy Child Manitoba Office

Topic: **The Roots of Empathy program**

March 8, 2010

International Women's Day

"Strong Women. Strong Canada. Strong World."

March 20, 2010

Bullshit Party @ The Olssons

77 Edmonton Street, 7:00 pm

Saturday, April 10, 2010

Monthly Meeting

Location: TBA

Speaker/Topic: Amnesty International

Saturday, May 8, 2010

Monthly Meeting

Location: TBA

Speaker/Topic: TBA

Executive:

Jeff Olsson, President
Neil Schipper, Vice President
Helen Friesen, Treasurer
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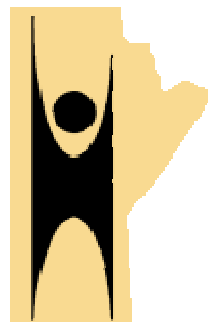
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We're on the Web!

See us at:

mb.humanists.ca



Yes, I would like to BECOME A MEMBER of the Humanist Association of Manitoba

New Member Renewal

Membership Category:

- Individual Membership \$25.00
- Individual Limited Income \$10.00
- Household Membership* \$45.00
- Household Limited Income \$15.00

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Province: _____

Postal Code _____

Telephone#: _____ Cell #: _____

Email address: _____

*Household Memberships: Please give the names of all additional Humanists in your household 18 years or over:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

DONATION (Tax receipts issued for all donations of \$10 or more)

I would like to make a donation to HAM of:

- \$10 \$20 \$30 \$50 \$100
- Other: _____

PAYMENT: Cheque Money Order
 Visa Mastercard Amex

Please complete the following if paying by credit card:

Account No. _____

Expiry Date: ____/____

Name on Card: _____

Signature: _____

Please make cheque or money order payable to:
Humanist Association of Manitoba and mail to:
*Humanist Association of Manitoba, 7 Pinehurst Lane,
Mitchell, MB, R5G 2J3.*

Or bring your form and the fees to any HAM meeting and give it to Helen Friesen, or any member of the executive.