

# secular idaho

Free Thought April 2018 Humanists of Idaho  
Idaho Society of Reason, BUUF Humanists, Sages

## President's Message

**April is election month for HOI, and all board positions are on the ballot. Members should receive ballots by email shortly after the first of April.**

Please return them promptly. Votes will be counted and election certified at the HOI special board meeting on April 30<sup>th</sup>. Also on the ballot are a couple of ballot measures. The first is for the membership to decide whether the Media Coordinator (formerly Newsletter Editor) shall continue as a board member. This position was added to the board in the summer of 2017, pending approval of membership at the next general election. This move would expand the newsletter editor position to include all media, including social media. The second ballot measure is seeking approval of the membership to expand the duties of the Charitable Coordinator board position to include coordinating non charitable events, and rename the position Events Coordinator.

A recent poll of Meetup members showed that 45% prefer getting news and event updates from our newsletter, while 55% prefer getting same from social media. This even split was a factor in favoring the expansion of Newsletter Editor to a more comprehensive Media Coordinator. We hope to expanding our reach going forward through a variety of media.

At our last meeting, the board approved participation in this year's PRIDEFest, participating in the parade, as well as having our booth up in the park. We will be calling for volunteers for both parts around late may/early June. The Festival will be June 15 and 16. Check the May newsletter for more details, or visit the PRIDEFest Website: <http://www.boisepridefest.org/facebook-event/boise-pride-festival-2018/>.

The board also approved organizing a Human Rights Day event for December 10<sup>th</sup>, coordinating with local organizations and government agencies. Details and plan specifics should come out in the fall, in the newsletter and on our Facebook/meetup pages.

This is my last President's Message, as I am retiring at the end of April. I have enjoyed my 13 years on the board, our charitable efforts, and the many events we have been involved in. I wish success to the new President, and leave with the hope that HOI will flourish under new leadership and changing times. Freethought is on the rise in America, and Humanism will have a key role in shaping our country's future.

D G Van Curen President, Humanists of Idaho

**Candidates for HOI Board as of 3/30/ 18. Write-ins will be accepted.**

### **President**

### **Patricia Acks**

My view is of HOI is as a welcoming, supportive space for those desiring a secular life. In today's political and social climate, it is more important than ever that we come together to explore our shared humanity. I want HOI to become an important voice in the community. I will work toward a dedicated meeting place where all secular groups can meet and hold events. As Humanists we should give back, participate in public service, our own or with other non-profits. I also support cooperation with progressive faith groups to further Humanist principles. such as working to end faith-healing exemptions for parents of minor children and ensuring civil protections for LGBTQ of Idaho.

### **Vice President**

### **Josh Bernard**

I have been a member of HOI/ISOR for over five years. This group is my second family. I will work to support the president and the other elected officials to reach the goals we envision as a group. I believe the time has come for a physical location we can call home, We can promote our visibility and attract others. We can continue to promote an atmosphere where reason, while informed by science, and inspired by art and motivated by compassion, will bind us together.

### **Secretary**

### **Robert Franklin**

I have been an active contributor to the Idaho Society of Reason for several years. Since the merger of HOI and ISOR, I have participated in planning and cooperation. I will participate in shaping an active vision for the future. I have years of experience in civic organizations, including the Idaho Anne Frank Memorial committee, editor of TTC's "Diversity" newspaper, Idaho Voices of Faith for Human Rights, and as a volunteer in the "Clowns of Idaho" group. With support of HOI I lead the International Human Rights Day event this December.

### **Media Coordinator**

### **Karen Sesek**

If elected, I will promote our meetings and mission via various media platforms and forums, including but not limited to Facebook, Meetup, local web calendars, web pages and emailed newsletter.

### **Treasurer**

### **Paul Rolig**

I have held this position since 2010. I safeguard organization funds, currently at Idaho Central Credit Union. General funds are held in a checking account. The Permanent Building Fund is in a Certificate of Deposit and a savings account. Books may be inspected by member request. I maintain our annual registration as an Idaho non-profit corporation, file a state sales tax return and IRS form 990-N to maintain our IRS 501(c)(3) tax-exempt certification. I look forward to promoting Idaho's leading humanist organization..

### **Events Coordinator**

### **Aria Dawn Avalon**

As Events Coordinator I will assist in making arrangement for events, solicit and filter solicitations for speakers, arrange locations for off-site events, and communicate with charities and locations for charitable and fundraising events.

**70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Event****Universal Declaration of Human Rights  
HOI Leads Preparations**

The Humanists of Idaho are kicking off a committee of diverse sponsors to begin preparations marking International Human Rights Day on Dec. 10, 2018. This year, 2018, marks the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration which was established by the United Nations in 1948. The ideals of human rights are a key principle of Humanism.

Celebrations will be held throughout the world and Boise, Idaho will be no exception. “An event like this takes lots of planning, that’s why we are starting now,” said Robert Franklin, who is spearheading efforts on behalf of the Humanists of Idaho. “We will seek a downtown Boise venue for a 90 minute celebration on Monday, Dec. 10, 2018 with local speakers,” Franklin said.

Volunteers are needed to help with the planning team. HOI hopes to get volunteers and sponsors from the City of Boise, Boise Parks and Recreation, Ada County, the State of Idaho in addition to various human rights organizations, like the Wassmuth Center for Human Rights, and various faith groups.

If you would like to volunteer, send an email to [humanrightsdayidaho@gmail.com](mailto:humanrightsdayidaho@gmail.com) and check out the new Facebook page at “Human Rights Day Idaho” which is under construction.

Boise is home to one of the few locations in the world where the entire text of the Universal Declaration is carved in stone. The tablets are located at the Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial. Vandals destroyed some of the work last year, but the tablets should be back in place within a few months.

As “one of the world's most profound and far-reaching international agreements,” the Universal Declaration proclaimed the inalienable rights of every human being regardless of race, color, religion, sex, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. It is the most translated document in the world, available in more than 500 languages.

NOTE: The United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights has added sexual orientation and gender identity to its policies in 2016.

**Robert Franklin, [HumanRightsDayIdaho@gmail.com](mailto:HumanRightsDayIdaho@gmail.com)**

**Idaho Society of Reason with Humanists of Idaho**

Meetings are held 2nd Sundays in Boise, 4th Sundays Nampa, starting with a noon potluck. Watch for details, changes at <https://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Idaho/>

**A few Global Issues and Farewell**

editor Jeanette Ross

**Ten years ago**, in the April 2008 issue of Secular Idaho, our president’s message from then-board president Paul Rolig looked across oceans and cultures with a distinctly humanist perspective. I am sharing his thoughts because they seem prescient today and they are the model I wish to amplify and leave with those taking leadership positions in our only vehicle for advancing the humanist perspective in Idaho.

Paul and other HOI leaders in 2008 sought out opportunities to hear voices seldom heard in Boise—or from national leadership at that time. The focus at that time was United States participation in a part of the world whose history and political structures were little understood then—or now. The perspectives that then-President Rolig brought to our attention and warnings of consequences of our intervention have proved apt, the consequences even more extreme than foreseen at the time.

What is our role as humanists? We have had leaders of our own, who gathered the information and wisdom available to provide us with guidelines. First, there is our style, our habits of taking a thoughtful long view. We are skeptical toward given ‘truths’ at the same time that we value the opinions and traditions of others.

We have documents assembled by others with our way of looking at the world—several under the rubric of Humanist Manifestos, plus the International Declaration of Human Rights that comes to us through the United Nations. And we have ongoing reflections on our best choices so far from historians like Stephen Pinker. We have resources if we have the will to consider them and dedicate ourselves to finding some way to contribute.

This is my final issue of Secular Idaho News. I am setting off again into the world as it is, an older and still interested visitor. I leave the future of HOI in your laps. Good luck.



**Humanists of Idaho**, a chapter of American Humanist Association & Council for Secular Humanism, is a nonprofit corporation promoting ethical, democratic, and naturalistic Humanism through public awareness, education and community involvement. See the meetup page or Facebook for calendar of events.

## April 2008 Secular Idaho News, updated

Jeanette Ross

In his President's message, President Paul Rolig reported that he and other HOI leaders attended a lecture by Dr. Hanan Ashrawi, a member of the Palestinian Legislative Committee. Dr. Ashrawi spoke of the miles of impenetrable walls and military checkpoints proposed for construction throughout Palestine, most aggressively pursued by now four-term Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

As predicted, and with support from major decision-makers in our country, these walls have severely limited movement of Palestinians in their own lands, leading to vastly increased suffering and mutual hostilities.

Paul looked at another disastrous intervention by the United States, the toppling of the dictatorship and his political structure in Iraq, "on the pretext of protecting our country from weapons of mass destruction" which evidence later showed were imaginary. We bought the bluster and produced ongoing violence, which we perpetrated and incited, in the process engaging in actions that violated international treaties and agreements, including the Geneva Convention rules of war.

As Paul Rolig astutely summarized, "It will take many decades for this country's best leaders to rebuild the role of this country and regain the trust and respect of others in the world." And look around—where are the 'best leaders' today?

For a related perspective, consider two essays in [The Fourth R](#), the journal for members of the Jesus Seminar. The Roman Catholic Church enforced its control of Rome's empire by turning a historical figure, a nonconformist who called on his people to purify their hearts and care for the needy among them, into a god whose sacrifice demanded absolute loyalty and obedience to religious authority.

The Jesus Seminar took as its role the deconstruction of this Christ and rediscovery of the much more admirable Jesus. Then those assembling the sacred texts reinforced their message with some crazy, the book of Revelation.

## Officers for Humanists of Idaho through April 2018

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<b>Newsletter</b>	Jeanette Ross
<b>Charitable giving</b>	open

Watch for New officers as of April 2018 elections

**Secular Idaho News** has been published by HOI as part of yearly membership (\$25), family memberships (\$45). Distribution through this issue by Paul Rolig roligpd@gmail.com. Mailed news subscription were \$15/year; electronic copies gratis. PO Box 44913 Boise ID 83711-0913. *Editor has been* Jeanette Ross Event calendar at [www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Idaho](http://www.meetup.com/Humanists-of-Idaho); web <http://humanistsofidoaho.angelfire.com>/ Watch for changes as of Mary 2018

Robert Bates writes of how Israeli's hard-liners, led then and still by Benjamin Netanyahu, have gained the support of many evangelical Christians. Why, you might wonder? Start with their sense of losing influence, losing control of their country—and their commitment to a literal reading of their sacred books, including the book of Revelation. And this satisfies any yearning for revenge they may feel with the comfort that all those who offend them will be punished, without mercy. They can look forward to violence that ends history with a bloody orgy that precedes final rule by their creator.

This promise is found in the book of Revelation, a letter written by a self-described prophet during the time of Roman emperor Diocletian, which mashes together all the dire visions and predictions of Hebrew literature into a series of grotesque and extreme disasters, led by the historically gentle rebel, Jesus of Nazareth, and his god. All this disruption, including dragons, seven-headed goats and volcanic eruptions, will fall upon the vast majority of earth's land and inhabitants, those not among the 144,000 protected ones celebrating in the new Temple build on Mount Megiddo, near Jerusalem. And so the declaration of Jerusalem as official center for the Jewish nation, recommended recently by Donald Trump, can be seen as furtherance of an evangelical dream of the end of times. Never mind that the book of Revelation is essentially unreadable, the obvious outpouring of a disturbed mind. There's a lot of that going around.

## Cyrus the Great and Friends Jeanette Ross

One of the more interesting discussions to come out of my class on the roots of Humanism was related to the history of Persia. What brought this to mind was another lecture that Paul Rolig mentions in his April 2008 president's message. Paul heard Marjane Satrapi, graphic artist whose autobiography had just become an animated film titled "Persepolis" after the name given to the Persian empire by Alexander the Great.

Satrapi tells her own story in context of all the cultures that have contributed to what is now Iran. In our class we considered whatever has led in the direction of humanist principles today. We found many, starting with the Code of Hammurabi, the uniform laws, harsh as they could be, which protected individuals from biased and arbitrary law.

We shifted to a homeland of the Aryan people, where one reformer, Zoroaster, remodeled his religious tradition in ways that have continued, literally, definitions of both good and bad. Zoroaster set forth two gigantic powers, all good and all evil, against each other, both sides recruiting soldiers for a final apocalyptic battle in the end of times. Qualities he assigned to the good team remain admirable: to hold a long-term vision of what works best for the most people; to be patient, truthful, transparent in word and deed, to honor your promises, to formulate these promises in contracts.

Zoroaster's evil powers are out for personal gain whatever the cost; they are impatient, unimaginative, dehumanizing and using everyone and everything around them. They are stupid mean. I leave analogies to you, only point out how this dichotomous definition of reality has been since reified, raised up to be sacred truth.

We then attended to Cyrus the Great, first Persian king who set the style, and allowed the many benefits, of a generous treatment of adversaries. One of his actions led toward freeing the Hebrew leadership that a previous commander had brought into what is remembered as the "Babylonian captivity." You may have heard of it. The examples for good administration and generosity toward fellow humans, which Cyrus made his practice, led to an entirely new direction to the now justice-seeking Jewish nation.

And for long-term consequences, even after disruptions by Alexander the Great, can be guessed by comparing the stability of Eastern Orthodox Roman Catholicism, which had a thousand stable years while western Europe experienced repeat invasions, terror and assassinations, then the gem-encrusted, arthritic hand of the Roman Catholic Church and the deadening stability of the feudal system. And now consider the war-like sounds emitted from the twittering fingers presently leading the government under which we suffer. Which god, should there be one, could be in charge here?

## What We Call Ourselves, Now Jeanette Ross

The word we use to describe ourselves, as humanists, is comparatively new in human history, but the essential underlying impulses, toward compassion and the seeking of meaning, have been essential to our survival as a species.

What we mean by humanism is a blend assimilated from many sources, from tribal and cultural shared understandings to a personal code, a way for societies to work for mutual best interest on an increasingly inter-connected planet. It can be a practice or a perspective, a way of looking at the world that implies mutual obligations, a reliance on reason, facts tested and verified as basis for a set of values codified in law.

These qualities are implicit and explicit among philosophers, leaders of religious traditions, students and writers of human history. They are embedded in family relationships, in scientific investigation, comparative language and religions. We name these as fields of study: archeology, anthropology, economics, sociology, physical and biological sciences, mathematics and now many more, including the expressive arts, architecture, sculpture, music, dance, drama, painting, poetry, literature.

Cooperative work across cultures, in all these areas, from hunting parties to writers, researchers and artists, have led to advancement in health, wealth and stability as communities, regions and between nations as we have found areas of common agreement and commitment to extending the benefits of what we now call human rights across the globe.

This has expanded, globally, to include earth-care.

A humanist impulse was essential to the early development of trade as well as to the small, mutually supportive villages that were essential to the development of agriculture in what is essentially desert country that required canals to channel water.

This cooperative spirit was acknowledged and a source of pride in Greek life starting in the 8<sup>th</sup> century bce. Hammurabi created the first formulation of laws, the basis for fair and equal use of power; the Persian empire beginning with Cyrus added the then-radical element of fair treatment of those defeated in war. One school of philosophy among Greeks and Romans emphasized personal balance and moderation.

From Neanderthal burial practices to Greek myths of Demeter and Persephone, then the medievalist Saint Francis to Sierra club's founding Pagan, a respect for the natural world and expression of awe, with our without ritual, has become an imperative for some, placing the highest value on preserving the earth's own balance.

Religious humanists recognize a positive side and contribution in religious faith. In the last hundred years, secular humanists commit to maintaining a bright line between faith and governance.

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## Courage, Grace, Intelligence: Humanist legacy

Jeanette Ross

In his introduction to [The Humanist Frame](#), editor Sir Julian Huxley observes how powerful are the systems of ideas that lie, unquestioned, under our collective lives. Most of us are irritated when faced with challenges to what we accept without question.

Luckily for us, in democratic societies with norms of accepting new ideas, we have been gifted by a few persons who challenge our assumptions. Despite howls of despair and cries of impending doom, this does not interrupt the usual rules of nature with breakthroughs by upon unseen Powers.

One of the earliest to shock with a fresh perspective on the obvious was Thomas Paine, who was a journalist by instinct, came here with help from Benjamin Franklin in 1772 and quickly wrote the all-time best seller "Common Sense" arguing for a radically daring form of self government rather than an accommodation to the British system. He strengthened the spine and raised the hopes that brought us independence and our own experiment in democracy. Later he wrote "*The Age of Reason*," in which Wikipedia notes "he advocated [deism](#), promoted reason and free thought and argued against institutionalized religion in general and Christian doctrine in particular. He also published the pamphlet [Agrarian Justice](#) (1797), discussing the origins of [property](#) and introduced the concept of a [guaranteed minimum income](#). In 1802, he returned to the U.S. where he died on June 8, 1809. Only six people attended his funeral as he had been ostracized for his ridicule of Christianity." There's the price of being ahead of your time.

Underlying Medieval Europe's world view was earth at the center of a universe bending toward us, created and ruled by an omnipotent, omniscient and supposedly benevolent supernatural Being. Opposed to this was an Evil force, part of the human inheritance imagined to be an equally omnipresent and amazingly persuasive Force, present in any perceived choice or threat, only slightly less powerful than the Good. (Thanks, Zoroaster).

Thomas Jefferson and others were inspired by Tom Paine to create documents that stand as the source of government in US. Rather than denying the existence of self-dealing and power-seeking, they set up a system of competing powers. They believed in underlying rights to equality and freedom of opportunity, including religious belief and practice, setting us apart from other nation states at the time. These rights were gradually extended, to include those brought as slaves, after thousands read an 1852 novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe, "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Her ability to describe plantation life as humans with admirable human qualities, caught in an evil system, led readers in northern states to prefer war to enslavement.

Around this time, a young minister, Ralph Waldo Emerson, resigned to become an outspoken lecturer calling for an intellectual declaration of independence from all existing religious creeds and sources of authority. He honored an inner capacity to transcend conventions.

## The Scottish Enlightenment Jeanette Ross

Historian James Buchan, author of [Crowded With Genius](#), describes the rapid shift, in less than a hundred years, from Presbyterian control to openness to the possibilities of the modern world in Scotland. The story begins in 1697 when an 18 year old student at the University of Glasgow shares the pithy and cynical insights of Voltaire with alehouse friends. Moral laws are the imposition of narrow minds on young hearts, and all that stuff about the Trinity, the incarnation planting of a god's sperm in an unsuspecting virgin, all that is bunk.

This a time when the church had enforcers out on Sunday mornings forcing stragglers into church where they could learn the official doctrines forbidding, ironically, fornication. Young Aikenhead was tried and hung.

Without its consequences understood at the time, Scotland was made part of England's laws, allowing a backwater with difficult weather to match its grouchy theology to suddenly gain the advantages of international trade. Now ships were needed to take advantage, which required financing, and banks, plus workers earning wages building and sailing. The wool of hardy sheep could be traded for sugar, spices, rope, iron and silk, none of which could be produced in Scotland. Newly wealthy merchants had wives who required a house with a ballroom and silk gowns in which to entertain, serving foods never seen before, served, of course, by chefs on a wage. Soon enough Edinburgh had a sewer system (saving milady's shoes) and a hopeful air. Plus, it isn't easy for force sailors to sit through a sermon.

Francis Hutcheson was born of English parentage in Ireland just three years before Aikenhead's demise. His progress as a churchman was inhibited by the Irish connection and so he wrote and then taught moral philosophy at the University of Glasgow. He lectured in English rather than Latin and preferred empirical approaches to previously metaphysical subjects. He drew up this enumeration of human "senses," in addition to the usual five, "consciousness, by which each man has a perception of himself and of all that is going on in his own mind," a "sense of beauty," "a public sense," "a determination to be pleased with the happiness of others and to be uneasy at their misery;" a moral sense, by which we perceive virtue or vice, in ourselves or others;" a sense of honour, or praise and blame, "which makes the approbation or gratitude of others the necessary occasion of pleasure, and their dislike, condemnation or resentment of injuries done by us the occasion of that uneasy sensation called shame;" plus "a sense of the ridiculous." He taught that the moral sense most immediately affects our own actions and the actions of others, "approving those that are virtuous, and disapproving those that are vicious. "

Hutcheson taught both Adam Smith and his good friend David Hume. Adam Smith studied trade and its benefits, producing the [Wealth of Nations](#). Hume was a great cook and conversationalist who asked for evidence that miracles could interrupt natural order. A farmer, James Hutton, found fish fossils in the Salisbury Crags and in 1785 delivered a paper disproving Noah's flood. Evidence and searching questions became a norm.

## On Civilizing the Natives Jeanette Ross

In the first book of economics, The Wealth of Nations, published in 1776, Adam Smith set out the attractive notion that removing impediments to trade would equalize wealth, out of competition between equals. Add in Lloyds of London insuring for loss, plus Newton's newly formulated Laws of Motion and the complicated world looked, at least temporarily, like a kind of rational scheme. But the costs of industrialized world were adding up. Industry employed workers kicked off the land, but wages and safety were not protected. Karl Marx saw the damage done to the many poor needed to keep the looms running; Das Kapital was published in 1867.

Observing this, with accumulation of wealth as the new pursuit and no evidence of a god's intervention, Fredereich Nietzsche concluded that as useful as the illusion of gods might have been at one time, any gods that may be no longer ruled. Hope had no focus. What was needed was a singular new leader to inspire emotions that dominated reason—one who would inspire with new promises and identify enemies when faced with obstacles. We need a new savior, he said; the old god, Zarathustra, has probably weakened with pity, too exhausted to help his bumbling humans. Governments use their new wealth to take control of countries that had advantages in climate or resources that could increase the opportunities of those with nerve and funds to take over the defenseless in Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa.

At the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, prosperity for society's leaders in England and the United States had a shared myth of themselves as civilized—read Christians who knew how to use a knife and fork and dress for dinner. Those who had not reached this blessed state were inferior and taking control of them saved their souls, did it not? In England, the principles behind the Magna Carta were gradually stretched to cover other white male landowners. But not the Irish, declared to be lacking civilized impulses and incapable of following the law, so they could not own land on their own island.

In the new States, a written document summarizing the ideals and arguments made by John Stuart Mills and Locke were organized into a founding document. Those producing this document, using it to create a union of states, recognized their debt to earlier peoples—Taoists, Confucianism, Buddhism; Greek thinkers Democritus 470, Anaxagorus and Protagorus. They declared liberty and franchise (limited), a vote to choose leaders and the right to purchase land and follow one's chosen religious faith, to be a proper foundation. These humanist principles have been continuously reinterpreted and expanded to cover previously disenfranchised groups.

Two major forms of pressure—cotton harvesting equipment less than the cost of a slave— and the Puritan faith in the power of education, led to schools, including public schools (for immigrant children, to teach proper behavior) and Harvard University. Gradually those so educated questioned accepted beliefs. But the college education in the Humanities were becoming less relevant in an industrial world. Few could afford or preferred the Greek Humanitas, a balanced life as source of happiness. Maybe after retirement.

***BUUF Humanists meet for conversation 3rd Sundays, 11:15 am, in the Boise Unitarian Universalist Fellowship library. April 15 Dan Kerr will speak about the continuing influence of Zoroastrianism as a world view. We also continue plans for a Humanist summer service..***

***BUUF Sages meet 9:30am, 2nd Thursdays, March 8 and 22, 9:30am, at the Kopper Kitchen, near the Boise airport.***

## Can Humanism Counter Disillusionment? JRoss

One way to look at humanism is seeing it as a summary of the philosophy of capable, confident people. How do we do what we believe is good and right? And how do we know what that is? We start with conjecture coming out of Greek colonies, communities scattered around the eastern Mediterranean, looking for pleasant climates and easily intimidated natives. These communities were built on assumptions that they could run their own affairs and raise wine and grain to sell to somebody at a profit. Democritus is rightly considered an exemplar. Raised in Thebes in a privileged family, he traveled, sought out and learned from the most respected thinkers of his time, then dedicated his life to serious study on the underlying form and order of life, from the most basic elements. He contributed to atomic theory and agreed with others who were philosophically inclined that a good life benefitted from and was expressed in "contentment" or "cheerfulness." He was called, even then, the laughing philosopher, and lived to be ninety.

Cyrenaics taught that pleasure, an intrinsic good, experienced as enjoyable physical sensations, in accord with neighbors, meeting one's obligations while contributing to the good for others. They encouraged us to pursue pleasure and avoid pain, while abiding by laws and customs. Epicurus taught that a virtuous life produces tranquility, freedom from fear and bodily pain.

This doesn't mention the slaves and locals working for a handout. Fast forward to the past century, when conveniences like electricity relieved the drudgery of daily life. The human costs of industrialization and an enormous gap between rich and poor led to what we now call the Progressive movement in the US and elsewhere. A group of philosophers and Unitarian ministers codified what they believed to be a vision of a better way to live. This was a Humanist Manifesto, first of several.

But those who felt left out were captivated by a couple of Nietzsche's supermen, and another and more horrifying war engulfed Europe. Several decades later, the early home to our dominant religious faith and first civilization disintegrated under multiple pressures, including US shock and awe in Iraq.

## Toward a Secular Perspective J Ross

Secular humanism, especially in its muscular posture, with sharp elbows out while monitoring the public sphere for inevitable incursions by the dominant religious faith, is a recent phenomenon. The documents establishing our system of governance protect what is still considered heresy. When Corliss Lamont speaks of materialist humanists, who began speculation about the building blocks of existence in 6<sup>th</sup> c bce, he notes that as Thales, Anaximander and Heraclitus theorized about water, air and fire as substances, they avoided reference to any ultimate cause, as protection from prosecution by authorities.

Still, speculation continued. In 4<sup>th</sup> bec Democritus suggested that the universe is composed of particles moving in an orderly way. A century later, Epicurus suggested that random variation in such elements could make human choice possible; he saw the damage of fear in human interactions.

Avoiding trouble was easier for the first historians. History-making is evidently a human enterprise, based upon a capacity to gather facts. And there is a practical benefit. Determining what did not work allows us to learn from past experiences, our own and that of others. Greek historians Herodotus and Thucydides, established the model for investigation for facts, thoroughness, objectivity, insightful selection of focus and accuracy that has inspired historians since. Historians starting with Thucydides personally investigated events and conditions that led to conflict; the long view is a gift of history.

**Protagoras**, 5th bce, recognized as a skeptic and wandering philosopher, was clearly agnostic when he said, “Man is the measure of all things, of things that are that they are, of things that are not, that they are not.” Then Diogenes Laertius: “As to the gods, I have no means of knowing, either that they exist or do not exist.” Athenian authorities objected to this, banished him and burnt any of his works they could find.

Plato in his **Republic**, 380 bce, describes how Socrates interrogated his companions, obliging them to explicate the sources and arguments that could defend their opinions. When authorities considered this too close to sacrilege, Socrates chose death over recanting, thus living his principles.

Generally, after this, those who shared a search for meaning in life did not yet address the issue of existence of gods. Instead they established a goal, a style of personal accommodation through a balanced life. Aristotle was the first great naturalist philosopher. In 4<sup>th</sup> bce he gave himself the task of organizing and clarifying logic and also provided a foundation for science with his systematizing of life forms in the way we still use today, in our dictionaries. He believed in understanding the process, the ways things happen, in the natural world and the human-created sphere.

Later, Benedict Spinoza took on the same task with a focus on ethics, developing a complete philosophy without reference to a deity. He was ostracized for his lack of religious faith.

## One Declaration and Several Manifestos JR

In his introduction to The Humanist Frame, Sir Julian Huxley observes how powerful are systems of ideas that lie under collective lives. We are typically irritated by challenges to what we accept without question. Those educated and rewarded by the gifts of industry and technology can ignore tribal assumptions regarding breakthroughs by unseen Powers. Underlying Medieval Europe’s world view was earth at the center of a universe “created and ruled by an omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent supernatural Being.” Opposed to this was an Evil force, part of the human inheritance when in the presence of a perceived threat, only slightly less powerful than the Good. (Thanks, Zoroaster).

Frederich Nietzsche recognized the fierce anger and despair of those who suffered despite their faith in a god who ignored them. In Thus Spake Zarathustra, a madman insists that their God is either dead or omnipotent. In his history of the creation of the first humanist manifesto, William Schulz suggests that the first manifesto was written as an answer to Nietzsche. We humans must pick up the work formerly assigned to God. We must save ourselves from our own ignorance, short-sided self indulgence, lethargy. He dedicated his doctoral dissertation to interviews with surviving contributors to the first Manifesto.

It was meant, in 1933, as a religious document, a ‘coherent statement of humanist principles.’ It is the preferred personal label for about half of Unitarians, religious in the sense that it coheres and it ties together. UUs are committed. It is also an act of faith in the belief that good intentions can prevail. We are back, you may have noticed, to Zoroaster/Zarathustra.

The first Manifesto is a historical document, re-writes provided by the American Humanist Association, HOI’s parent organization. Paul Kurtz participated in and then led later statements now described as affirmations of shared principles. We are committed to applying reason and science to understanding, recognizing the damage done by applying our astounding machinery to destructive, repressive purposes. We believe in sharing the wealth although we don’t say that outright. We don’t come out and recognize the indecencies and short-sightedness of a capitalist system based upon profit for investors measured over a very short time frame. We avoid acknowledging the evil done by impulsive, ego-driven acts, the very definition of Evil.

Paul Kurtz’ affirmations combine language related to abstract qualities— to virtue, to ‘cultivation of moral excellence and “common moral decencies: altruism, integrity, honesty, truthfulness, responsibility.” at the same time as including libertarian as well as religious humanist commitments to protecting privacy— “Mature adults should be allowed to fulfill their aspirations, to express sexual preferences, exercise reproductive freedom, have access to comprehensive and informed health-care, and to die with dignity.” He has added visionary reform: “Renounce violence or force as a solution of differences. Use International courts...Work toward a world community that transcends national sovereignty, a trans-national form of governance.” He expresses the hopes behind creation of the United Nations., expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

**Some truisms** on the subject of economic behavior have faced revision lately. From Adam Smith, considering the start of the international trading system, it is self-evident that trade produces benefits for everyone so engaged, and those participating in the money economy will make rational decisions toward their own benefit. That was 1776, remember. So competition was a good thing and the converse was that the poor need an incentive to improve their miserable situation. Welfare makes us lazy. That was behind Bill Clinton's welfare reforms and underlies conservative objections to support for a living wage, public health services and any other government assistance to the poor. **Research now** shows that this assumption is simply not correct. A Mexican program, Prospera, "provided money to poor families on the condition that they send their children to school" and to doctor's appointments. Decades later, participating children earned more and contributed more in taxes than the cost of earlier assistance. The money was an investment with interest. Over time.

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Functional adults consider options, a range of choices and consequences. They expect to understand purpose, goals, best practices. They know their weaknesses, have a range of skills, track results of choices after identifying issues well. Those in management need these personal skills even as they work with employees who lack them, according to the authors of **Hidden Rules of Class at Work**. They offer help meeting work expectations, including working without direct supervision. Managers may become frustrated and resort to use of characterizing adjectives, personal attacks, attacks on motives of poor performers or adversaries. They may use coded, ritualized expressions, language with heavy violence/war implications. A better approach is to offer help with time orientation, goal setting. Managers should provide specifics for separating work from (more chaotic) private time. Space orientation helps: offer summary lists with bullet points. Avoid speeches that are nuanced expressions of complex ideas. This will make anxious workers and lower class nonverbals uncomfortable. 'Frozen' body styles signal upper class, authority figures. Those who elicit admiration may manipulate this. Pay attention to word choice, with vocabulary limited to 400-800 words. An 'adult' voice (Eric Berne's term, assuming equal statuses) is appreciated by other professionals but seems stiff, unemotional, smug to lower classes..