

# THE COWTOWN HUMANIST      MAY 2005

JOE KLEEHAMMER'S TRANSFORMATION FROM CONSERVATIVE  
CHRISTIAN TO LIBERAL THEME OF APRIL 13 MEETING

TRICE/RUHS DEBATE GOD'S EXISTENCE AT MAY 11 MEETING

TONY HERNANDEZ OUR SPEAKER AT JUNE 8 HoFW SESSION

FROM CHRISTIAN CONSERVATIVE TO A LIBERAL OUTLOOK

Before 15 Humanists at our first meeting at the Friends of the Fort Worth Public Library bookstore on April 13, our speaker, Joe Kleehammer, related his spiritual odyssey from Christian fundamentalism to a liberal philosophy. Joe grew up, he said, in a not very devout family that attended church rather sporadically but when it did, it was usually at one or the other of the fundamentalist churches where they lived. As a lad he followed an orthodox-approved path, for example, in becoming an Eagle Scout. However, as he grew older, he came to have doubts about conventional views of his time and place. In particular, his reading of the scriptures raised questions in his mind about their validity as eternal truths. For example, Romans 13.1 says that "the powers that be are ordained of God." How do you square that with the justice of the American Revolution, which was against a power presumably ordained by God? There is also a passage in one of the letters of Paul that calls on servants to be obedient to their masters, a passage that was used to justify slavery right up through the American Civil War. What right to suffrage, much less equal rights, would a woman have if "the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man"? [1 Cor. 11.8] How does one justify the doctrinal intolerance reflected in Galatians 1.9: "If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed." Joe said that he was also troubled by the doctrine of the Trinity: How could a divinity be other than a unity?

At one point in his life Joe had considered Christian ministry as his chosen profession. Doubts raised about the validity of much of New Testament theology persuaded him to abandon that ambition. Study and soul-searching were eventually to lead him to a humanist philosophy and recognition that other religions and philosophical systems incorporate elements of truth.

Joe now serves as one of the pastors at the North Texas Church of Humanists.

**HoFW NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS**

MAY MEETING: This month's meeting will be held on Wednesday, May 11, 7:00 p.m., at Friends of the Fort Worth Public Library bookstore, 5332 Trail lake Drive, located in the Wedgeworth shopping center just off Wedgemont Circle. From I-20 take Granbury Road south to Wedgemont Circle. Make a left-turn onto Wedgemont Circle and then left again into the Wedgeworth shopping center.

We will lead off the meeting with the election of officers for the 2005/2006 cycle. Nominations for any of the four elected offices will be welcomed.

MAY SPEAKERS: Don Ruhs and Dick Trice will review the arguments for and against the existence of God. The philosophically-minded may wish to refresh their memories on the principal arguments made by religious philosophers for the existence of the Deity: 1) the ontological argument, 2) the cosmological argument, 3) the argument from the eternal truths, 4) the argument from the pre-established harmony, which may be generalized into the argument from design (its modern efflorescence: the Intelligent Design argument that only an overarching intelligence could have set the so-called cosmological constants with values such as to make human life possible in the universe.) A sophisticated discussion of the forgoing can be found in Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*, beginning on page 585. A copy is to be found at the Friends bookstore.

JUNE SPEAKER: Tony Hernandez will be our June speaker.

PRE-MEETING DINNER: 5:30 p.m., at Johnny Carino's Italian Restaurant, 5900 South Hulen Street (in front Wal-Mart's and across from Krispy Kreme).

REMINDERS: Dues are owing since March (if you haven't already paid): \$18 for individual memberships, \$24 for persons receiving the Newsletter by regular mail; \$24 for couples; \$30 for couples receiving by regular mail.

Donations of canned food for Westside's food for the poor program will be appreciated.

### **YOUR OFFICERS AND HOW TO REACH THEM**

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## LEGAL FRONT

*I blame the Congress over the last 50 to 100 years for not standing up and taking its responsibility*

*given to it by the Constitution. The reason the judiciary has been able to impose a separation of*

*church and state that's nowhere in the Constitution is that Congress didn't stop them. The reason*

*we had judicial review is because Congress didn't stop them. The reason we had a right to privacy is*

*because Congress didn't stop them.*

--Tom Delay to the *Washington Times*

## HUMAN INVENTORY CONTROL

It was inevitable that the radio tags that let cars breeze through toll plazas would get placed on, or in, people. The sole elementary school in a California town 50 miles northwest of Sacramento raised hackles far and wide this past January when it tagged students with the same technology used to determine the whereabouts of cattle and to keep tabs on toilet paper rolls at Wal-Mart. The Brittan Elementary School in Sutter required seventh- and eighth-grade students to wear a badge that sported a name, a photograph and a radio tag containing identification data the could be read automatically at attendance time. Purportedly, the radio-equipped badges would have also helped improve safety and prevent vandalism. [Following student objections, the program was suspended.]

...Public education and debate about the proper framework for protecting electronic privacy is desperately called for because we are beginning to see the floodgates open. The U.S. government is pushing aggressively ahead with plans for radio tags in passports, which will store personal information and be readable remotely by anyone, whether a customs official at a desk or a terrorist standing

nearby. The Department of Homeland Security has already strapped more than 1,700 immigrants applying for permanent residency with ankle bracelets to prevent those who may be ordered for deportation from fleeing. The respite for the student-tagging business, moreover, may be short-lived. InCom, the company that outfitted Sutter students, has received calls from many other school districts interested in implementing similar programs.

Some segments of U.S. society have always had a visceral aversion to a national identity card. Those instincts are sound and should be reinforced. Widespread adoption of human-tracking devices should never be embraced without serious and prolonged discussion at all levels of society. (Scientific American editorial)

### BANNING MILITARY RECRUITERS AT COLLEGES

The Supreme Court said May 2 that it will settle a pivotal battle over whether colleges can ban military recruiters from campuses without losing federal funds. The case pits free speech and academic freedom against the power of the purse and the need for a strong national defense. A coalition of 31 law schools says forcing them to accommodate military recruiters also forces them to endorse the Pentagon's discrimination against gays and lesbians, at odds with the schools' anti-discrimination policies. They say a 1994 law that threatens to cut federal funding for colleges that ban military recruiters violates their rights to choose what ideas they embrace or support. Other employers who discriminate are also banned from recruiting. The 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia agreed with the law schools and declared the law unconstitutional. (Knight Ridder)

### BUSH BACKS ABORTION MEASURE

President Bush is urging the Senate to take up a bill passed by the House the week of April 25-29 that makes it a federal crime—complete with possible fines and jail sentence—for doctors or other adults to help patients under 18 evade parental-notification requirements by crossing state lines for an abortion. The bill creates two federal crimes each of which carry a \$100,000 fine, one year in jail or both. The bill's first section covers the transport of a minor for an abortion. The second requires the abortion provider to notify a minor's parent or legal guardian if she lives in a state with a parental involvement law. For the bill voted 216 Republicans and 54 Democrats. The bill makes an exclusion if the abortion is necessary to save the life of the minor. The House passed similar bills in 1998, 1999 and 2002, but none passed the Senate. (WP)

### CHURCH & STATE

*[Americans] attributed the peaceful dominion of religion in their country mainly to the separation*

*of church and state.*

*--Alexis de Tocqueville*

#### CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS TO ACT ON RELIGIOUS RIGHT AGENDA

"In this Congress," Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist told the Family Research Council's "Washington Briefing" in March, "we're going to continue to work on issues that are important to you, to me, above all to America's future. That includes good judges, the sanctity of marriage, and, I just mentioned, the culture of life, as well as protection for the unborn." Others appearing at the three-day conference included House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, Senator Sam Brownback (R.-Kan.), U.S. Rep. Bobby Jindal (R-La.), and newly appointed FCC Chairman Kevin Martin. (Senators Mel Martinez (R-Fl.) and Tom Coburn (R-ND) were scheduled to appear as well, but had to cancel due to a day-long series of special budgetary votes in Congress.) Frist promised to coordinate with the FRC to ensure that a Senate vote on the Federal Marriage Amendment is scheduled to achieve maximum influence at the polls. (C&S)

#### FAITH-BASED PRISON PLAN QUESTIONED

Tom Green County (San Angelo) commissioners have signed off on a proposal to build a privately operated "faith-based" prison, billed as the first of its kind in bringing institutionalized Christianity into the cellblock. Proponents say the prison, run by employees with a "Christian world view," would help criminals learn to be law-abiding citizens. They say it would help reduce the number of Texas inmates, believed to be as high as 40 percent, who eventually return to jail. But there is a hitch: Texas prison officials say they do not want to join the venture for fear of violating the constitutionally mandated separation of church and state. "I'm worried that this might just be the flavor of the month: the belief that, if you turn them on to Jesus, they'll stop committing crimes," commented Rob Boston, spokesman for Americans United for Separation of Church and State. "It's a state promotion of religion, even if it's done through back-door channels." (FWST)

#### CHURCH'S HALLUCINOGENIC TEA GETS SUPREME COURT REVIEW

The U.S. Supreme Court has accepted a case involving a church's ritual use of a tea containing a hallucinogenic drug outlawed by the federal government. In *Gonzalez v. O Centro Espiritu Beneficente Uniao do Vegetal*, the justices will decide whether the federal government can penalize a Santa Fe, N.M., church for its use of hoasca tea. The tea contains the chemical DMT, which is barred by the Controlled Substances Act. In 2003 and 2004, the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the church. In a concurring decision, Judge Michael W.

McConnell wrote that the government had failed to show a compelling interest. "Congress's general conclusion that DMT is dangerous in the abstract," he said, "does not establish that the government has a compelling interest in prohibiting the consumption of hoasca under the conditions presented here." (C&S)

#### ECTOR COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD OKAYS BIBLE COURSE

Ector County (Odessa) school trustees have voted unanimously to add an elective Bible class to their high school curriculum. Hundreds of people, most of whom support the proposal, packed the school board meeting April 26. More than 6,000 people had signed a petition supporting the class. The class will be designed by the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools, based in Greensboro, N.C. The group says the courses are not about Christian proselytizing or preaching.

"The fact that something is happening doesn't mean it's legal," said Judith Schaeffer, deputy legal director of People for the American Way. "It can't teach the Bible. It can teach about the Bible." (AP)

#### GEORGIA LEGISLATURE DERAILS FAITH-BASED FUNDING

Georgia lawmakers have defeated one of the governor's top priorities when they blocked a "faith-based" constitutional amendment in the Senate. Democrats, now a minority in the Georgia General Assembly, blocked Gov. Sonny Perdue's Faith & Family Services Amendment, arguing that it could have opened the door to the public funding of private schools. Perdue's proposal, similar to the Bush administration's initiative, would have allowed religious groups greater access to state social services funds. Democrats complained that the wording of the proposed amendment was so broad as to allow a private school voucher program. (C&S)

#### APPEALS COURT UPHOLDS 'JUDEO-CHRISTIAN' PRAYER POLICY

A federal appeals court has upheld a Virginia county's prayer policy that discriminates against religious minorities. On April 14, a three-judge panel of the 4<sup>th</sup> U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals unanimously ruled that "Judeo-Christian" prayers before a Virginia county board of supervisors do not violate the First Amendment. Cynthia Simpson, a Chesterfield County resident had asked to be placed on the board's list to give an invocation at its meetings. When the board discovered that Simpson was a Wiccan, she was denied because only invocations "consistent with the Judeo-Christian tradition" were welcome.

"This is a terrible decision," said Barry W. Lynn, American United executive director. "It allows government officials to engage in rank discrimination against

religious minorities that they don't approve of. [Presumably, the decision will be appealed]. (C&S)

#### A MEGACHURCH'S LEADER SAYS MICROSOFT IS NO MATCH

With a thundering charisma that makes him a hero to some and a gay-bashing bully to others, the Reverend Kenneth Hutchinson has taken on the white mayor of Seattle, the black Kings County executive and the Washington State Legislature in his mission to stop the legislation of gay marriage. He claims to be the person who forced Microsoft, situated near his 3,500 strong Antioch Bible Church offices, to withdraw its support of a gay rights bill before the state legislature, one it had supported the two previous years. [Microsoft CEO Steve Baumer assured Microsoft employees May 6 that the company would back such legislation in future years.] Dr. Hutchinson had threatened to organize a national boycott of Microsoft if it backed the legislation this year. The anti-discrimination bill was defeated by one vote in the State Senate on April 21. Although Microsoft denies Hutchinson played any role in their decision, a gay legislator thinks otherwise: "I think he was successful in throwing a ball at them and they fumbled." (NYT)

#### 'INTELLIGENT DESIGN' BILL INTRODUCED IN PENNSYLVANIA

Pennsylvania lawmakers are considering a bill that would allow "intelligent design" (ID) to be taught in public school science courses. The bill would amend state education law to allow school boards or officials to open science courses to instruction on ID. The bill follows a lawsuit brought against the Dover Area school district for its decision last year to require biology teachers to present ID as an alternative to the scientific theory of evolution. (C&S)

#### PENNSYLVANIA LEGISLATORS DEBATE 'IN GOD WE TRUST' BILL

Pennsylvania legislators are debating a bill that would require the display of "In God We Trust" posters in public schools. Mississippi and Virginia already have laws mandating the posting of the national motto in public schools, and several other states have debated the matter as well. (C&S)

#### MICHIGAN LEGISLATORS WANT TEN COMMANDMENTS DISPLAYS

The Michigan House of Representatives have voted 74-34 in favor of a bill that would permit Ten Commandments displays on government property. The measure would allow such displays as long as they include other religious and historical documents that have influenced U.S. law. The Michigan Senate will not consider the proposal until the U.S. Supreme Court rules on two pending Commandments cases. (C&S)

## THE VATICAN DRAWS A LINE IN SPAIN

The Vatican's bold response to a bill in Spain that would allow same-sex couples to marry and adopt children offers some early signs of how Pope Benedict XVI's Roman Catholic Church plans to reassert its influence in Europe. On April 22, a day after Spain's lower house of parliament approved the bill, a senior Vatican cardinal called on Spanish civil servants to resist implementing the measure through civil disobedience, even if that meant losing their jobs. "A law as deeply inequitable as this one is not an obligation," said Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo of Colombia, the head of the Pontifical Council on the Family and a close ally of the new pope, in comments widely quoted in the Spanish press. Civil servants, he suggested, have a duty to refuse to marry same-sex couples, or process paperwork that would allow them to adopt children. "One cannot say that a law is right simply because it is a law," he added. Church observers are wondering if this marks the beginning of a more aggressive response to creeping secularism, which Pope Benedict has described as one of the greatest evils facing Europe. "I had never heard of such a direct call to civil disobedience," said the Rev. Josep-Ignasi Saranyana, professor of history at the University of Navarra. "We will have to wait and see if this will be the style of the new pope."

Few European countries have more enthusiastically embraced secular culture in the past 30 years than Spain, once a Catholic bastion and the birthplace of the conservative order Opus Dei. Spain jailed homosexuals until 1975, banned contraceptives and adultery until 1978, and outlawed divorce until 1981. (WSJ)

## RELIGION IN THE NEWS

### HOLY ORDERS

In his homily to his fellow-cardinals, on the first morning of their conclave, Cardinal Ratzinger had warned that modern society was threatened by a "dictatorship of relativism." But it might have been more accurate to say that it is threatened by a dictatorship of absolutisms, including his own. This is a world in the tightening grip of orthodoxy, of literal "truths" and crusading certainties, and early last week [April 18] it was the hope of many Catholics that the Church would begin to break that grip and return to them the right to exercise their own consciences on matters that do not concern faith so much as the realities of their intimate lives: sexuality, celibacy, choice, the use of condoms in AIDS-ridden Africa, the use of birth control in the favelas and shantytowns of Central and South America, the acknowledgement that stem-cell research might conceivably be a gift from God. ...Ratzinger maintained, with his friend and predecessor, that a well-ordered conscience is one that submits to the authority of the magisterium.

...During his first ten years as Prefect [of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith], the Jesuits were censured for challenging papal teachings on contraception, parts of their constitution were suspended, and their Vicar General, Vincent O'Keefe, a passionate advocate for social justice, was removed. The reactionary lay order Opus Dei was transformed into a "personal prelature" accountable directly to the Pope. The dioceses of progressive Latin-American bishops were gerrymandered out of existence, liberation theologians like Leonardo Boff were called to Rome and silenced as "Marxists" (they were, more accurately, Christian-communitarian evangelicals), and the priests they had trained, who were responsible for an ebullient Catholic revival in Latin America, were ordered back into the fold of tradition and obedience. The relative autonomy of the North American bishops' conference was ended, and its most progressive members—most famously Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, of Chicago—were marginalized.

If the Vatican's project in the eighties was to purge its clergy, its nineties project was to purge its teaching of ambiguity. The dogma of papal infallibility, which dates only from 1870, has been invoked just once since then, in 1950, when Pius XII proclaimed the "truth" of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. But in the years of John Paul II's papacy there was a conflation of the notion of infallibility and what the Church calls "definitive teachings." The result was that John Paul II's teachings often carried the imperative of infallibility, and Cardinal Ratzinger's theological imprimatur on those teachings, together with his power to enforce them, effectively ended the discussion.

In the past few days, Benedict XVI has promised the world dialogue and reconciliation, but at the same time he has reappointed the Vatican team that, with him, brought us the spectacle of suffering and death that ended with the funeral of John Paul...Most of the Cardinals wanted a continuum of that always spectacular reign. And they wanted a continued enforcement of its most conservative dicta—which may be why they are talking now about cutting their losses for the advantages of a smaller, "purer" Church. But, from what we know, the early Church was a place of risk and debate. They should remember that too. (Jane, Kramer, *New Yorker*)

#### HARDENING THE EDGES

For some Catholics, the unrepeatability of [John Paul's] papacy may also be a source of quiet relief. That is an understandable sentiment in regions where the Vatican has lent support to dictators or their clerical apologists, and in places where the church seems to have ignored or even exacerbated the problems of the most vulnerable, especially women.

...In many new ways, the pope did reach out to other religions, and to mankind as a whole. Compared with centuries past, his church has taken a kinder view of people outside its ranks. Yet it could not be said that he blurred the boundaries between belief and non-belief. He taught that man's principal woe was not poverty, or war, but the abandonment of the divine. That is a controversial view, to put it mildly. To the secular mind, the pursuit of happiness and liberty consists mainly of removing every obstacle to their enjoyment; for the likes of John Paul, all that is an illusion, and freedom lies in doing the will of God. Such differences can hardly be air-brushed away.

In democracies, communities with varying beliefs about ultimate questions can live together in a spirit of respect, if not always in amity—even when different beliefs imply different individual choices. If you see life as a gift from God, you will probably not make the same choices about the reproduction of life, and its termination, as you would if you saw existence on earth as your own to regulate as far as possible. Even here, the possibility of mutual respect exists.

In practice, though, belief also has intractable implications for public policy, and the high salience of religious faith—in the uncompromising form which John Paul professed—has lent a new rancour to the politics of many democracies. States have to decide whether to allow euthanasia; whether to accord same-sex unions the same rights as traditional ones; and whether to allow and fund the termination of pregnancy. Though stable democracies have transparent ways of resolving such disputes, arguments about them are often held in a spirit of mutual demonisation. The church, an undemocratic institution with uncompromising views, has not helped their peaceful resolution, especially in the United States. (Economist editorial)

#### HABEMUS BENEDICT XVI

[Benedict XVI] stands for the same take-it-or-leave-it form of Catholicism that he so skillfully helped his predecessor to define. In Africa and Asia, people may take it, often as a bold, clear alternative to Islam. But in Europe, North America and most significantly, in Latin America, Catholics are increasingly leaving it. A Chilean archbishop reminded the cardinals gathered in Rome that the Latin American church was losing followers at the rate of 1% a year. The Vatican's hostility to Latin America's "liberation theology" is partly to blame.

The views of the new pope, and his uncompromising way of expressing them, could make him a divisive force in rich countries as well. It is not just issues like birth control, married priests and women's ordination that divide Catholics. Aspects of Benedict XVI's thinking, such as his opposition to Turkey's accession to the European Union, have ramifications that go far beyond the church.

Europe matters to the new pope, as the name Benedict suggests—Paul VI designated Benedict as the patron saint of Europe.

Letting the Turks into the EU, the then Cardinal Ratzinger said last year, would be “a huge mistake” and run “counter to history”. This shocked those eager to embrace the reality of multicultural Europe. But it was music to the ears of those who identify Europe with Christendom. What worries some Turks about it is not that the new pope may be anti-Turkish or anti-Muslim, but that he may, in a political sense, be anti-secular. If the pope’s agenda is to re-impose religious authority over historically Christian countries, that could give heart to Muslims, in Turkey and elsewhere, who support “political Islam”.

A more optimistic view is that the new pope is a Christian Democrat in the modern, European sense: part of the political movement that draws inspiration from Catholicism but accepts the rules of the democratic game. Benedict XVI is certainly close to European Christian Democracy in one respect: his views on social and economic questions are well to the left of the Anglo-Saxon free-market consensus. He may surprise many by the vehement way he denounces global inequality, and seeks to prick the conscience of the rich. Nor will he be shy about denouncing bad government in the developing world. (Economist)

#### U.S. CATHOLICS APPROVE OF POPE BENEDICT XVI

An overwhelming majority of American Catholics approves of the selection of Pope Benedict XVI and predicts that he will defend the traditional policies and beliefs of the Church, even though many members say that the Church is out of touch with their views, according to a WP/ABC poll. The survey found that more than eight in ten Catholics broadly support the selection of Ratzinger to replace John Paul II. Nearly as many, 73 percent, said they were “enthusiastic” about the new pontiff, although only one in four was strongly enthusiastic about the choice. Half say they want the Church to adhere to traditional values and policies, while almost exactly the same proportion believe the Church must change its policies to reflect modern lifestyles and beliefs. (WP)

### **TOP OF THE NEWS**

#### U.S. INMATE POPULATION INCREASES BY 2.3 PERCENT IN 2004

While the crime rate has fallen over the past decade, the number of persons entering prison continues to outpace the numbers released. The nation’s prisons and jails held 2.1 million people in mid-2004, 2.3 percent more than the year before. The total inmate population has hovered around two million for the last few years. It was 2.1 million on June 30, 2002, and just below that mark a year later. The increase is largely attributable to “get-tough” policies enacted in the

1980s and 1990s. Among them are mandatory sentences for drug crimes, “three strike and you’re out” laws and “truth in sentencing” laws that restrict early release. (AP)

#### A PRECARIOUS SAFETY NET

While America is focused on the debate about the future funding of Social Security, a less publicized discussion is taking place on the future funding of Medicaid. President Bush’s proposed budget includes a \$60 billion less for medical care for America’s poor—both children and the elderly. The already thin medical safety net will become even more threadbare for this vulnerable population.

...State demographers estimate that the number of people qualifying for Medicaid will rise dramatically during the next 10 years. With reduced federal funding, the burden of those costs will be borne more heavily by the states. The states will have little choice but to reduce costs by limiting eligibility, reducing benefits and cutting reimbursements to doctors and hospitals that care for this population. Does this remind you of what happened two years ago when the Children’s Health Insurance Program came under the state budget ax?

...In Texas, Medicaid reimbursement for physicians runs roughly one-fourth to one-half the rate of reimbursement for private insurance. Further cuts will only erode access to care in medical home-clinics and providers’ offices. So more sick poor will be forced to seek care in hospital emergency departments, which are already bursting at the seams. ...Hospitals will not be able to sustain their operations providing more care for less reimbursement to the poor. The result is that local counties and hospital districts will levy more taxes to pay for care that is inherently inferior to what might be provided in a medical home. Economists have written that such a disruption to our medical system will threaten our future economic vitality.

...In Texas and across the nation, children make up approximately 70 percent of the enrollees but consume only 30 percent of resources. Cuts to Medicaid will disproportionately harm the most vulnerable Americans; poor children. Our future and our legacy should not be commodities or a line item to cut in a budget process. Our federal government must find another solution to the rising costs of medical care for the poor and not abandon the values behind caring for those who are most at risk. (Dr. Jason Terk, Cook Children’s Physician Network, Fort Worth in letter to FWST)

#### MORE THAN BUSH CAN CHEW

Bush can count some early successes. He has signed legislation restricting class-action lawsuits (the first and easiest step in his multi-part assault on trial lawyers), and he has approved a bill tightening rules on personal bankruptcies—a boon to part of his business constituency.

His far more important goal of changing Social Security ...has sunk like a rock. The latest *Post* poll shows a 2-to-1 disapproval score for Bush's handling of the Social Security issue, by far the worst score of his presidency. For the first time in *Post* polls, more opposed private accounts than supported giving people that option.

...Bush also appears to have overreached in his dealing with the judiciary. His stated goal of bringing more "strict constructionist" judges onto the bench has been perceived as a narrow political objective by increasing numbers of Americans. Other polls have shown that Bush's participation in the effort to overturn the state court decisions allowing Terri Schiavo to die was criticized by large majorities. And current efforts by Senate Republicans with the explicit backing of the White House, to eliminate Democratic filibusters against some Bush judicial nominees were surprisingly rejected in the latest *Post* poll. By a margin of 66 percent to 26 percent, the voters opposed changing Senate rules to make it easier for the Republicans to confirm Bush's judicial nominees.

The public clearly seems to be telling Bush to back off his most ambitious plans. (WP columnist David Broder)

#### BUSH ADMINISTRATION PRESSURING PBS AND NPR

The Republican chairman of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting is aggressively pressing public television to correct what he and other conservatives consider liberal bias, prompting some public broadcasting leaders—including the chief executive of PBS—to object that their actions pose a threat to editorial independence. Without the knowledge of his board, the chairman, Kenneth Y. Tomlinson, contracted last year with an outside consultant to keep track of the guests' political leanings on one program, "Now with Bill Moyers." He also hired the director of the White House Office of Global Communications, while she continued to serve in that post, as a senior staff member, corporation officials said. She helped draft guidelines governing the work of two ombudsmen whom the corporation recently appointed to review the content of public radio and television broadcasts. Mr. Tomlinson is also supporting Patricia Harrison, a former co-chairperson of the Republican National Committee, who is now an assistant secretary of state, to be the corporation's new chairperson and CEO. "My goal here is to see programming that satisfies a broad constituency," Tomlinson said, adding "I'm not after removing shows or tampering internally with shows." But he has repeatedly criticized public television programming as

too liberal overall, and said in the interview, "I frankly feel at PBS headquarters there is a tone deafness to issues of tone and balance."

Christy Carpenter, A Democratic appointee to the board from 1998 to 2002, said partisanship was "essentially nonexistent" in her five years. But once Mr. Tomlinson, a former editor-in-chief of Reader's Digest, joined in September 2000 and President Bush's election changed the board's political composition, the tenor changed. There was an increasingly and disturbingly aggressive desire to be more involved and to push programs in a more conservative direction," said Ms Carpenter. One of the more disturbing developments, she added, was a "very vehement dislike for Bill Moyers.

Recently PBS refused for months to sign its latest contract with the corporation governing federal financing of national programming, holding up the release of \$26.5 million. For the first time, the corporation argued that PBS's agreeing to abide by its own journalistic standards was not sufficient, but that it must adhere to the "objective and balance" language in the charter. In a January letter to the leaders of the three biggest producing stations, in New York, Boston and Washington, the deputy general counsel of PBS warned that this could give the corporation editorial control, infringing on its First Amendment rights and possibly leading to a demand for balance in each and every show.

Last November, members of the Association of Public Television Stations met in Baltimore along with officials from the corporation and PBS. Mr. Tomlinson told them they should make sure their programming better reflected the Republican mandate. Tomlinson said later the comment was made in jest. [Well, maybe.] (NYT)

#### A TESTIER CLIMATE EVOLVING IN HIGH SCHOOL BIOLOGY CLASSES

Critics of Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection are equipping families with books, DVDs and a list of "ten questions to ask your biology teacher" developed by the Discovery Institute. The intent is to plant seeds of doubt in the minds of students as to the veracity of Darwin's theory of evolution. The result is a climate that makes biology harder to teach. Some teachers say class time is now wasted on questions that are not science-based. Others say the increasingly charged atmosphere has simply forced them to work harder to find ways to skirt controversy.

On May 5 the Science Hearings Committee of the Kansas Board of Education was to reopen questions on the teaching of evolution in state schools. Conservatives, now in the majority again, have raised the question whether school classrooms in Kansas need to include more information about alternatives to Darwin's theory.

An informal survey taken in April by the National Science Teachers Association found that 31 percent of the 1,050 respondents said they feel pressure to include "creationism, intelligent design or other nonscientific alternatives to evolution" in their science classes. While 20 percent of the teachers say the pressure comes from the parents, 22 percent say it comes primarily from students. One biology teacher complained that some students put their heads on their desks and pretend they don't hear a word you say. (Christian Science Monitor)

#### U.S. STUDENTS SHUN SCIENCE

Intel sponsors a Science and Engineering Fair, which is the world's largest pre-college science competition, open to high-school students from around the world. Last year was a good one for Americans: 65,000 participated in the local fairs that are used to select finalists. In China the number was six million. [It would be interesting to know how many of the 65,000 were ethnic Asians.] (Newsweek)

#### BOOK CORNER

*Voltaire in Exile*, Ian Davidson. 308 p. 2004.

Ian Davidson is the *Financial Times*' former Paris and Brussels correspondent. With a degree in the classics from Oxford he is superbly fitted to write a very literate account of Voltaire's life.

Principally, he focuses on the last quarter century of that highly eventful and productive life. Voltaire made a name for himself as playwright and *enfant terrible* at a tender age. At the age of 24 he had become *Comedie Francaise's* most popular draw. His wit was soon to land him into trouble with the royal family and he was exiled at the age of 32. He chose to spend the next two years in England where he came to have a deep appreciation of the English political system and of English religious liberties—a marked contrast with French absolutism in both governance and religion. Shortly after his return to Paris in 1728, he made a fortune in a somewhat shady venture that he was to add to right up to the end of his life.

However, he was soon in trouble with the political authorities again following the publication of a book (*Lettres Philosophiques*) praising English liberties and tolerance with its implied criticism of the French political and religious systems. He fled Paris this time and spent much of the following decade in the French provinces, presumably beyond the notice of the authorities. In 1750 he accepted the post of Chamberlain and poet-in-residence at Frederick the Great's court. But Voltaire could never very long reconcile himself with despotism and he had to make a hasty departure from Potsdam in March 1753 following a quarrel with

one of Frederick's flunkies. When discreet inquiries at the French court brought the unwelcome news that Louis XV would not have him back in Paris, Voltaire took up residence first in Calvinist Geneva and Lausanne and then, after quarreling with the theocrats in Geneva, just over the French border at Ferney.

Enormously wealthy by this time, he acquired an estate that included a chateau large enough to accommodate a theater holding more than a hundred spectators and to put up guests numbering in the dozens. Some 22 servants were employed at the chateau; at one point he employed four gardeners to take care of the grounds; how many tilled his fields the author does not tell us but presumably several score since they constituted a village. Voltaire was no absentee landlord. He took a very active part in the management of his estate right up to his death at age 84. He was to show remarkable entrepreneurial talents when he welcomed Geneva watchmakers, who had fallen out with the Geneva oligarchy, to set up shop at Ferney. Voltaire soon had a flourishing business on his estate that lasted into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A man of immense energies, he continued a steady output of plays, histories and unnumbered letters to almost everyone of note on the French literary and political scenes.

Had he died before arriving in Ferney, Voltaire's would probably never have been more than a footnote in the history books. His last play to be produced in Paris (and presumably anywhere) was in 1965, a command performance by the French President for the visiting Chinese Premier, himself educated in Paris. His histories are scarcely read any longer. His contribution to philosophy was as interpreter of other men's ideas not as originator of a system of ideas. Fortunately for his own reputation with posterity, he began a lively interest in the French justice system during his residence at Ferney. It is hard to believe now that France, a country that prides itself on its *mission civilatrice* could have had such an appallingly inhumane system for dispensing justice only a little more than two centuries ago. There was virtually no accountability. Persons accused of crimes were routinely tortured in a manner that makes Abu Ghraib seem like child's play. Trial proceedings were as a matter of course kept secret. If mistakes were made, they were unlikely to see the light of day. Minorities were especially at risk since public opinion often egged the authorities on. In the three best-known cases in which Voltaire took a role, the victims were French protestants whom their bigoted Catholic neighbors were pleased to see persecuted.

It was also during his stay at Ferney that he wrote his one work, *Candide*, that continues to enjoy a large contemporary readership. Leonard Bernstein adapted it for opera and, although the opera will perhaps never enter the repertory, the overture has to rate as one of his most charming compositions.

Voltaire was to return to Paris following the death of Louis XIV and to spend the last four months of his life there although he had planned to return to Ferney. Up until a few days before his death he was busy revising his last play for production at the *Comedie Francaise* despite increasing physical frailty. Knowing that he was about to die, he was concerned to receive a burial worthy of his contributions to the French nation and to mankind. That implied a Christian burial. Despite a lifetime spent ridiculing religious intolerance and superstition, he had never been excommunicated by the Church. In fact, Voltaire was a Deist, not an atheist as he was often accused. The last few weeks of his life were spent in a cat and mouse game with the Paris religious authorities. The Church was determined to get a confession that renounced his many harsh judgments on the Catholic religion. He was determined to give as little as possible. Suffice it to say, Voltaire was too wily for the priests and he received the burial honors he merited without yielding on any essential principles.

What stands out most in Voltaire's life for me was an almost unparalleled enthusiasm for life right up to his 85<sup>th</sup> year despite the many physical ailments that afflicted him throughout his years. He was notorious for his affairs up until middle age when, very discreetly, he took his niece as his mistress to whom he apparently remained faithful for the rest of his life, although she, 18 years younger, apparently was rather less so. Voltaire seems to have taken it all in stride.

Davidson has written a book that should appeal to most humanists.

**That's it for this month's *Cowtown Humanist***