

scientia, artes HUMANITAS

September 2019 · Issue 6

Humanitas is a Latin noun meaning civility and kindness – getting along with each other and helping each other along. Stanislaus Humanists are people, without superstitious or supernatural beliefs, who come together to better the quality of life in our homes, our community, and around the world. Our compassion extends to all nations and to all living things. We hope this newsletter creates a supportive environment where people can cultivate and share insightful analysis, passion for human expression, and promotion of humane science-informed policies.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

This issue of Humanitas is sure to both challenge and inspire you.

We open with the story of how one person sparked a movement against hate in our own back yard, and then we experience the Straight Pride counter protest through the eyes one of our members.

Next we explore the impact that a secretive organization known simply as “The Family” has had on American politics through dark money and the National Prayer Breakfast.

On page five, we are encouraged to move past our prejudices in order to be our best selves for the greater good, and finally we are challenged to rethink US ties with Israel from a humanistic perspective.

This is definitely a thought-provoking issue, and I hope it stirs you to action! ■

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HUMANISM IN ACTION

FREEDOM BAERHEIM

On any typical day we can open the newspaper, look online, or turn on the television and see something that upsets us. Most of the time this will result in some sort of emotional reaction, possibly followed by some discussion on the matter, and then we usually continue to go on about our daily routines. However, what if on a such day, the reaction could lead to something else? Something that at first might seem like a small thing, but could turn out to be something more? Maybe even life changing? This is exactly what happened to Chris Holland.

Chris, a long time humanist, and a blue collar worker, happened upon an article that was upsetting to him. An organization claiming to promote love and Christianity were going to host a Straight Pride Parade in his hometown in Modesto, California. Puzzled by this, he decided to check out the organization’s website and discovered they were masquerading as a Christian group, but really they promoted white supremacy and disdain for the LGBTQ community.

Growing up in a very conservative town in Kentucky before he settled down in California, Chris knew first hand how people of different color and sexual orientations can be treated by those who claimed to have good Christian intentions. He knew this is often an excuse to persecute and exclude. Now as an adult, he knew he couldn’t just stand by and watch this parade mock all that the LGBTQ community had worked hard for toward equality. He went online and decided to announce his intentions to protest.

It was a seemingly small thing to do in his eyes. He was sure others, who were also aware of the parade, would have the same reaction as him. He posted a protest event page on Facebook, calling it PRISM (Pride, Solidarity, and Multi-Culturalism), expecting his to be one of other similar protests and waited. Waited for people to respond, and respond they did.

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We’re always looking for new content – articles, reviews, commentary, pictures, poems, events. Send submissions to StanislausHumanists@gmail.com, or send a hard copy to: 1905 Kienitz Ave, Modesto, CA 95355

HUMANISM IN ACTION (CONT.)

PRISM was joined and shared by many. In 24 hours it was shared over 300 times. By mid month over two thousand supporters joined his protest. People were paying attention; and they wanted something to be done. This was not just going to be a protest of a handful of people, and they were all looking for solutions on how to effectively run this. Chris knew he had to step up and take action.

The six weeks following the time he posted his protest were non stop for Chris and all those who were directly involved. Comments were being flooded on Facebook wanting to debate, almost daily meetings were scheduled, and he even had to work with the police liaison to go over details on how to properly plan for the thousand-plus protesters who were wanting to show up. Other organizations and even politicians were coming out and showing their support and asking him what they could do to help. This thing was growing bigger than Chris ever expected, and he was ecstatic!

Then the phone calls and emails started. The news companies caught wind of his protest and wanted interviews. Local news as well as the LA Times and San Francisco Chronicle were all asking to speak to the man behind the protest. Only a few weeks before he was just an average guy, now Chris was being followed by news reporters and even a documentary crew.

PRISM's first big break came a week before the parade was scheduled. Modesto City Council needed to approve the permit to allow the parade. Though the straight pride group was allowed to hold an event protected under the constitution, many wanted to publicly state their grievances. City Hall was packed. Modesto would be one of the first cities to hold

a straight pride parade if approved, and everyone was watching to see what would happen next. Chris pointed out that the Straight Pride organizer, Grundmann, had publicly invited the Proud Boys in hopes to incite violence. He stated that proper measures needed to be set in place to provide safety for all and that insurance is



required by law. The insurance company had dropped them when learning of the threat of violence. A couple of days later, Modesto City Council denied the parade due to lack of insurance. Modesto would not have a Straight Pride Parade after all. The battle was won, but the war was not over yet.

Grundmann announced that if they couldn't do a parade they would hold an event anyway. This was going to happen with or without proper permits. They stated that the location of the event was to remain a secret until the day of. Chris knew that his protest was also going to happen, and he needed to be ready. He wanted to show Grundmann and his followers that love would outshine their hate.

Chris created a side group for those who were committed to attend the protest. People with medical backgrounds were stepping forward to say they would volunteer their services for first aid if needed. Others donated money to help get supplies for signage, water, etc. Colored vests and walkie-talkies were donated so those helping to run the protest could communicate and be easily spotted by one another.

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DONATE TO THE STANISLAUS HUMANISTS

Did you know that it's easy to set up a recurring donation with PayPal?

Visit our homepage at stanislaushumanists.org and click the yellow "donate" button at the bottom of the page.

This link will take you to our PayPal donation page. Just enter an amount

and click the "Make this a monthly donation" box!

Twenty percent of all undesignated donations goes into our Humanist Hall fund. Your regular support will help us get our own meeting space. Thanks for your generosity! ■



HUMANISM IN ACTION (CONT.)

Poets, a politician from San Francisco, and those directly affected in the LGBTQ community were wanting to come speak.

On August 24, 2019, at 11:30 AM the protesters and speakers all met at Enslin Park in Modesto. They were all dressed in their most colorful garb, smiles on, and signs in hand ready for the day. The people who came numbered in the hundreds. The announcement had been made. The straight pride event was being held in front of Planned Parenthood. Chris and the other protesters made their way to them.

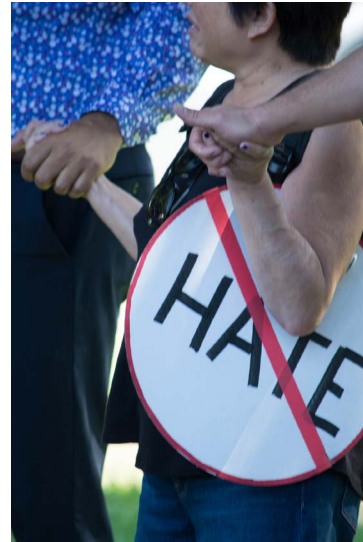
It was almost laughable to see that Grundmann had managed to scrounge up around 50 people for his event compared to the 200 plus protesters who stood with Chris in solidarity and love. The protest lasted for many hours. All peaceful, all organized, and no one backing down. Nothing like this had ever happened before to Chris. Most of these people were strangers to him, and yet in six weeks he had helped create a community of people, gay and straight alike, to come and peacefully protest the hypocrisy and bigotry of Grundmann's Straight Pride event. The day ended as it had started—with smiles. The event was over, the war was won. Love had out-numbered hate.

This was just the beginning for Chris though. What he thought was just a small thing, a posting of a protest online, turned into something bigger than he could have ever imagined. PRISM is now more than just a name for planning a protest. This is a new community of people from different types of minority backgrounds, that can stand together as one voice. A fellow humanist had made a difference.

Sometime in the upcoming months, PRISM will have its own event with speakers from many other organizations coming together in support. For more information about the protest and any future events go to straightprideishatepride.com ■

MY PERSPECTIVE ON THE “STRAIGHT PRIDE” COUNTER PROTEST.

LORRAINE NILSON



It was wonderful to see such a large turnout against hate. Well over 200 people came to Enslin Park to listen to speakers talk against hate and join together for unity. It had a festive vibe with little tension.

Then word came out that the Straight Pride people were protesting in front of planned Parenthood. So, many of the counter protesters went to confront them. I got to Planned Parenthood around 1:00 PM to see 150 to 200 counter protesters overwhelming about 20 Straight Pride demonstrators. The Straight Pride people had signs that varied

from bible verses to “Build the Wall.” They also had a few pro-Trump signs. Tension was high with a lot of crowding for space. PRISM did a good job of keeping the peace. The police were also there in large numbers.

The only problem I had with the day was from the counter protesters. They started chanting “F#@k Trump!” I thought that could and would put off the people driving by with their children in the cars.

Overall it was a good day and sent the message HATE is not welcome in our community. ■

THE FAMILY: MORE GILEAD THAN GODLY

BECKY GARRISON • THIS ARTICLE APPEARED ON THEHUMANIST.COM AUGUST 6, 2019

When tuning in to Netflix's five part documentary series *The Family*—which provides an inside look into the high-powered Christian ministry known as *The Fellowship* (aka *The Family*)—viewers can be forgiven for thinking they clicked on Hulu by accident. *The Family's* stately mansions in Virginia—bestowed with such grand names as Ivanwald, Potomac Point, and *The Cedars*—bear an eerie resemblance to the sets from *The Handmaid's Tale*. Colonial-style architecture and dark wood furnishings lend an upper crust English veneer to both settings, where only those deemed worthy may enter the hallowed halls.

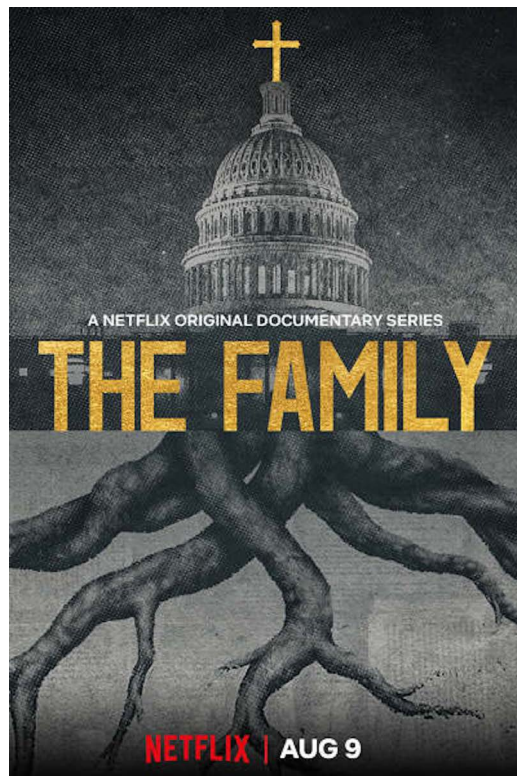
For those unfamiliar with *The Handmaid's Tale*, this series tells the story of the rise of a totalitarian Christian regime, the Republic of Gilead, where freethinkers are executed and women are relegated to property of the state. In both Gilead and Virginia, men in inner circles have been anointed by God to lead. Conversely, those women chosen to be of service remain in the background where they respond to these godly guys' commands with a heavenly "blessed be."

Scenes from best-selling author Jeff Sharlet's *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power* may lull one into thinking the new docuseries is a work of fiction like the Hulu adaptation of Margaret Atwood's novel. However, in *The Family*, filmmaker Jesse Moss weaves together historical re-enactments with actual video and still photographs to serve up a potent and chilling reminder that the viewer is, in fact, watching a real-life dystopia.

I've been reporting on *The Family* and the National Prayer Breakfast it hosts since Sharlet's book debuted in 2008 (most recent coverage focuses on *The Family's* role within the Trump administration). So I was well acquainted on paper with the story of how, in the 1930s, Abraham Vereide founded their prayer breakfasts in Seattle designed to bring together men of industry.

But I wasn't prepared for my visceral reaction to audio and news clips chronicling how these seemingly informal prayer groups protected their wealth by eradicating the labor movement in Washington State. Or to watching the long-time head of *The Family*, Doug Coe, proclaim the motto "Jesus plus nothing" juxtaposed against visual depictions of Hitler and other like-minded dictators utilizing analogous slogans of blind allegiance to justify their atrocities.

Lest we think these actions are all in the past, Moss documents with the slow chilling clarity of a psychological thriller how *The Family's* stealth evangelistic endeavors continue to prop up dictators, murderers, and thieves on a global scale. After seeing the vast array of photos and videos of US presidents and members of Congress connecting with such despots on behalf of *The Family*, one can't help but feel they're witnessing the unfolding of a sinister global empire that not even George Lucas or Tom Clancy could envision.



This military mindset became most evident in the second segment of the five-part series. In the episode aptly titled "The Chosen," Moss intersperses clips from the 1951 popular film *David and Bathsheba* with re-enactments of Bible studies to illuminate how those whom God (or *The Family*) anoints as their chosen vessel can be forgiven for their egregious sexual sins. The same illogic, used to justify the affairs of former Senator John Ensign (R-NV) and former South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford (aka "The C Street scandals"), was later employed to justify white evangelicals' tacit endorsement of the current predator-in-chief.

In Donald Trump, *The Family* found their Wolf King, a man who will not lie down like a sheep. Rather, he is a biblical-style bully who represents the epitome of muscular Christianity by devouring the meek. Inserting their long-time soldier Mike Pence into the Trump orbit, *The Family* ensured this wolf would advance their capitalist Christian agenda.

While the majority of leaders connected to this clan claim the Republican label, the series points to Bill and Hillary Clinton and other like-minded neoliberals who are connected to Coe and who praise the work of *The Family*. Included in this mix are progressive thought leaders who build their platforms and publishing deals based on their public veneer as a new kind of Christian, a warrior willing to do battle against those Bible believers who back a Trumpian theology.

But as *The Family* demonstrates, these progressive Christians are equally complicit in supporting the structure that placed Trump into power. Anyone who participates in the National Prayer Breakfast, the Fellowships' congressional prayer breakfasts, or some other *Family*-friendly gatherings cannot claim they are engaging in "bridge building." In practice, they're doing *The Family's* business by

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THE FAMILY (CONT.)

continuing Vereide's legacy, utilizing the name of Jesus to advance the interests of industry titans.

Those looking for specific evidence that a particular pastor, author, or other Christian thought leader is connected to The Family (more formally The Fellowship Foundation) may be disappointed. But this is not a documentary designed to prove an individual's connection to this secretive organization.

Instead, Moss lays out this vast hidden network and lets viewers decide how to respond. Will people unfamiliar with the powerful group be curious enough to watch *The Family* (debuting August 9 on Netflix)? And if they do, will they grasp how important it is to end US governmental support for the National Prayer Breakfast, as well as any involvement by political and religious leaders in The Family's global political ventures? Anyone who cares about religious neutrality and the freedom of and from religion will hope they do.

And if they understand, will they speak out or stay silent? To quote Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel, "Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented." ■

THE "FAKE NEWS" WE TELL OURSELVES

MICHAEL WERNER •

THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE MARCH/APRIL 2019 ISSUE OF THE HUMANIST.

Psychotherapists say that therapy is merely holding a mirror up to ourselves, just as Socrates championed the wisdom of "know thyself," which was carved in the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. We spend a lifetime trying to really understand ourselves, but how effective are we? How much do we really understand who we are? In recent years science has explored this very question, and what we're learning has implications for all humanists.

We know that much of who we are is hidden from our view. We've learned that the subconscious plays a major role in our thinking. The modern theory of the brain is that we are not of a single mind but, as Marvin Minsky, the father of artificial intelligence says, a society of minds. I like to think of it as a committee of minds, all competing and interacting. We don't see any of this battle. There is even a portion of the brain that psychologist Michael Gazzaniga calls "the interpreter" because it makes up stories for what we believe and how we behave.

We are biopsychosocial beings. Our biology plays a huge but subtle role in guiding our behavior. Our instinctual urges are hardwired into us and can only be overcome with difficulty. Our instincts are governed by evolu-

tion's two main drives, survival and reproduction. For example, in addicts the "reward circuit" in their brain is hijacked and their body literally thinks it will die if they don't get their drug of choice. They will give up on their health, career, self-respect, and family because survival is an evolutionary impulse that's hard to overcome.

We are also products of our culture. Postmodernism even posits that everything is a social construction and our social experiences shape everything we believe and do. In Western society we accept the search for freedom, a concept largely unknown in many Eastern societies. So much of who we are is motivated by power and control.

Moreover, it is argued in academia that free will is merely an illusion, that everything we think and do is determined by our history. The argument is that we live in a deterministic, naturalistic world. There are hundreds of experiments that cast consciousness as nothing more than a deterministic result of all our minds' inner workings. In one such experiment, a subject mentally recorded when they chose to push a button while watching a rotating clock. The times the subject said they freely chose to push the button came after the signal to the hand was already traveling down the arm to push the button. It may be that consciousness is intended to give us a "story" as to why we are doing something.

Ultimately, William James was correct when he said, "A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices." This is the core concern. At a time when everyone is concerned about lies, fake news, manipulation, and the strangulation of free thought in the public square, we can never be sure of our own biases and prejudices—the "fake news" we tell ourselves.

Humanism is contingent on our ability to take reasoned actions for the greater good in the face of the disquieting realization of our limitations. As humanists we must utilize humility and self-examination to discover how we may be merely rearranging our own prejudices. We have to subdue our own demons before we try to tackle the world's. ■



HUMANISM & FOREIGN POLICY: THE ISRAEL LOBBY

TROY SPEARS

I don't think the humanist tradition has any fixed beliefs over its six centuries, but it has promoted a consistent set of values. Critical inquiry, free expression, representative government, universal secular education, access to information, compassion towards the vulnerable, and concern for the rights of all humans. Human rights remain as one of humanism's enduring (but fragile) contributions to the modern world. You are accorded a set of rights just because you're a human being, and we protest whenever those rights are violated by others' parochial interests.

Buckle up for a bumpy ride....

For our study group this year, I was going to pick the New York Times Best Seller, *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy*, written by John J Mearsheimer and Stephen M Walt (2007). John Mearsheimer is Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago, and Stephen Walt is Professor of International Relations at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. However, some members thought this might be a little too much reading. Instead, I've opted for the forty-page paper the authors wrote the year before commissioned by *The Atlantic Monthly*. *The Atlantic Monthly* rejected the paper, but it was published later that year in *The London Review of Books*. You can find a copy of the full paper with supporting endnotes at one author's academic page:

<https://mearsheimer.uchicago.edu/pdfs/IsraelLobby.pdf>

Mearsheimer and Walt describe the lobby as a "loose coalition of individuals and organizations who actively work to steer U.S. foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction." The paper "focuses primarily on the lobby's influence on U.S. foreign policy and its negative effect on American interests." The authors also argue that "the lobby's impact has been unintentionally harmful to Israel as well."

The 2007 book argues that although "the boundaries of the Israel lobby cannot be identified precisely," it "has a core consisting of organizations whose declared purpose is to encourage the U.S. government and the American public to provide material aid to Israel and to support its government's policies, as well as influential individuals for whom these goals are also a top priority." They note that "not every American with a favorable attitude to Israel is part of the lobby," and that although "the bulk of the lobby is comprised of Jewish Americans," there are many

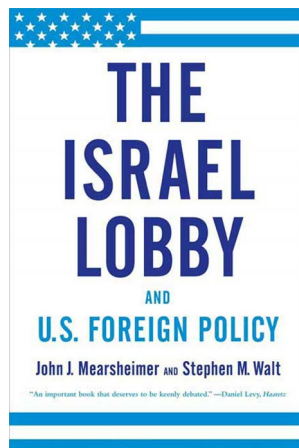
American Jews who are not part of the lobby, and the lobby also includes Christian Zionists. They also claim a drift of important groups in "the lobby" to the right, and overlap with the neoconservatives.

If the paper seems outdated, I still think it is a good refresher on the politics surrounding the Iraq wars and the emergence of ISIS. Also, the Lobby's control over US foreign policy has only increased during the intervening years. A progressive Jewish colleague has proofed this article and suggested that Mearsheimer and Walt are "pretty tame" and suggested that I check out the Jewish Voice for Peace at <https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/>

We will cover the paper at 7pm on September 17, 2019. You can RSVP at our Meetup or Facebook pages. Contact me if you have trouble accessing the paper. Please be considerate of others' time and finish the reading before attending so the discussion is productive. And please be kind and thoughtful to each other at the meeting.

Full disclosure: My maternal grandparents were Palestinian. They had home and lands seized by the Haganah in late 1948. So surely it seems that there is a sour grapes argument to be made for my choice of topic. However, I also participated in and helped organize UC Berkeley's anti-apartheid rallies to divest from South Africa in 1984-1986. After our success with the University Regents, the movement snowballed and led to the capitulation of white South Africa. We were very proud of what we'd begun, and feeling our oats, we didn't know what to do next. Some of us suggested we protest Israeli apartheid. The suggestion was voted down due to the heavy participation of Jewish students, but it seems to have resurfaced in the BDS movement (Boycott Divest Sanction).

I do not consider myself Palestinian-American or Palestinian Humanist. I prefer to identify exclusively as a humanist, fully committed to the rights of Jews and Arabs — even the ones that are vociferously anti-humanist. The UN has passed hundreds of resolutions against Israel, but the US has doggedly defended Israel since the 1960s against the overwhelming disapproval of other nations. US support for Israel has led America to promote Israel's interests at a cost of trillions of our tax dollars and millions of lives. We have created a legacy of broken families, inhuman living conditions, and — with each bomb dropped — growing resentment which we seek to address with heightened security measures, actually resulting in less, not more, freedom and security for Americans and Israelis. ■



EVENTS!

JOIN US FOR OUR REGULAR EVENTS!

	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1 ST			BOOK GROUP 7:00 PM PRIVATE HOME, HUGHSON				
2 ND							
3 RD	COFFEE KLATCH 11:00 AM QUEEN BEAN MODESTO		HUMANISM 101 7:00-9:00 PM PRIVATE HOME, MODESTO	COLLOQUIUM (BIMONTHLY) 7:15 PM MANTECA LIBRARY, MANTECA			
4 TH	TURLOCK BRUNCH 10:00 AM PANERA TURLOCK						

FOR MORE ACCURATE INFORMATION ON ANY OF THESE EVENTS PLEASE VISIT US AT STANISLAUSHUMANISTS.ORG OR OUR FACEBOOK & MEETUP PAGES.

BOOK CLUB

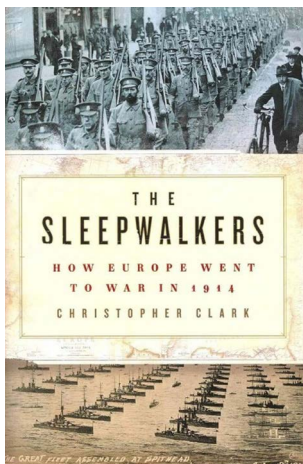
Please come whether you enjoyed the book, hated the book, or... didn't quite finish it. Every month we try to rotate through a variety of viewpoints and subjects. Sometimes that's fiction, history, biology, economics, theology, or philosophy.

RSVP ON OUR WEBSITE, FACEBOOK, OR MEETUP FOR THE ADDRESS.

OCT. 1/NOV 5 *THE SLEEPWALKERS: HOW EUROPE WENT TO WAR IN 1914*

7:00 PM

CHRISTOPHER CLARK



“Drawing on new scholarship, Clark offers a fresh look at World War I, focusing not on the battles and atrocities of the war itself, but on the complex events and relationships that led a group of well-meaning leaders into brutal conflict.

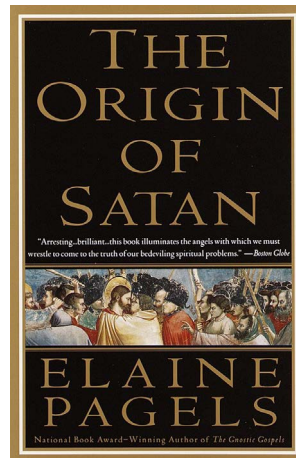
Clark traces the paths to war in a minute-by-minute, action-packed narrative that cuts between the key decision centers in Vienna, Berlin, St. Petersburg, Paris, London, and Belgrade, and examines the decades of history that informed the events of 1914 and details the mutual misunderstandings and unintended signals that drove the crisis forward in a few short weeks.”

DEC. 3

7:00 PM

THE ORIGIN OF SATAN: HOW CHRISTIANS DEMONIZED JEWS, PAGANS, AND HERETICS

ELAINE PAGELS



“From the religious historian whose *The Gnostic Gospels* won both the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award comes a dramatic interpretation of Satan and his role on the Christian tradition. With magisterial learning and the elan of a born storyteller, Pagels turns Satan’s story into an audacious exploration of Christianity’s shadow side, in which the gospel of love gives way to irrational hatreds that continue to haunt Christians and non-Christians alike.”

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PRINCIPLES OF HUMANISM

Humanism is a naturalistic philosophy, informed by science, inspired by art, and motivated by compassion. The document Humanism and Its Aspirations* states six basic principles with which AHA and chapter members should substantially agree:

1. We hold that knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis.
2. We understand that humans are an integral part of nature, the result of unguided evolutionary change.
3. We derive our ethical values from human needs and interests as tested by experience.
4. We find fulfillment in our lives from individual participation in the service of humane ideals.
5. We are social by nature and find meaning in relationships.
6. We have found that working to benefit society maximizes our individual happiness.
7. We respect those with differing yet humane views working for an open, secular, democratic, sustainable society.

*The full text of Humanism and Its Aspirations can be found at www.americanhumanist.org/Humanism/Humanist_Manifesto_III



We're always looking for new content – articles, reviews, commentary, pictures, poems, events.
Send submissions to StanislausHumanists@gmail.com, or send a hard copy to:
1905 Kienitz Ave, Modesto, CA 95355