



Humanists of Sarasota Bay, Inc.
Sarasota, Florida

HUSBAY NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2022

CHURCH & STATE | Confusion in the Classroom: Public Schools Brace for a New Round of Prayer Battles



As public schools go back into session this fall, school administrators, teachers, parents, and students are forced to grapple anew with an issue that should have

been settled decades ago: coercive prayer.

Thanks to the Supreme Court's June ruling in *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*, confusion could reign in many schools.

Some background: The case was brought by Joe Kennedy, a high school football coach in Bremerton, Wash., who insisted that he had the right to engage in a "private" prayer after games. (His case was bankrolled by First Liberty Institute, a Christian Nationalist legal group.) Had his prayers been truly private, there wouldn't have been a problem. But Kennedy's "private" prayers took place on the fifty-yard-line immediately after the games. He was often surrounded by players and students.

The Supreme Court, now stacked with far-right zealots thanks to former President Donald Trump, ignored the plain facts of the case, embraced what a lower court called a "deceitful narrative" and held that Kennedy's prayers must be allowed because they were private.

What does this mean for public schools going forward? Well, that's the problem. No one is quite sure. Can a classroom teacher begin the

day with a "private" prayer that just happens to take place in front of the students and tell them they're welcome to join in? Can administrators begin school assemblies with a "private" prayer as every student, who is required to be there, looks on? Can a coach announce, "I'm going to have a private prayer now, and you don't have to join in—but feel free if you'd like to"?

Two other factors are bound to add to the confusion. One, in many parts of the country, teachers and school officials have been pushing the envelope on religion for years and will be more than happy to see that old-time religion get back into the classroom; and two, aggressive Christian Nationalist legal groups, aware that they have a friendly court, will keep bringing cases.

In 1992, the Supreme Court ruled that public schools could not sponsor official prayer as part of their graduation ceremonies. That ruling still stands—for now. But given this court's proclivity to blithely toss precedent aside, as the majority did to *Roe v. Wade* in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, it's only a matter of time before these old cases start to wobble.

As dangerously misguided as this court is, a return to the 1950s when public schools in some parts of the country sponsored daily prayer and Bible reading and forced students to take part, seems unlikely. At least for now, the court is giving lip service to the idea that coercion still matters. But what we could end up with isn't much better: "Private" prayers every day that, in theory, young people have the right to opt out of.

I say "in theory" because we know that, in practice, it can be hard for students to choose not to participate.

Continued on page 5

Haiku Quintets: dandana.us/fivepalms

Happy Holidays

'tis the Solstice, friends,
Mother winter holiday
—longer days coming!

her festive offspring:
Christmas, Hanukkah, Lohri,
Kwanzaa, Festivus

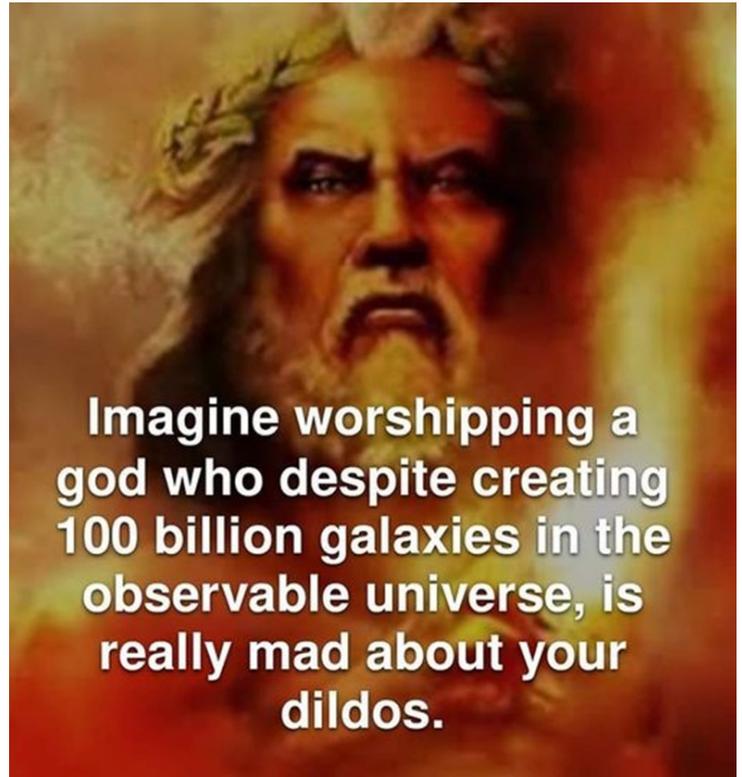
magical thinking:
ancients' attempts to make sense
before real science

holy books' authors,
faiths' inventors' home turf:
northern hemisphere

Earth's axial tilt
from solar orbital plane
is magic enough!



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What the Pharaohs Shared

We're talking about Coke
No, Not the kind that you drink
But the one that you sniff
To make your whole head shrink

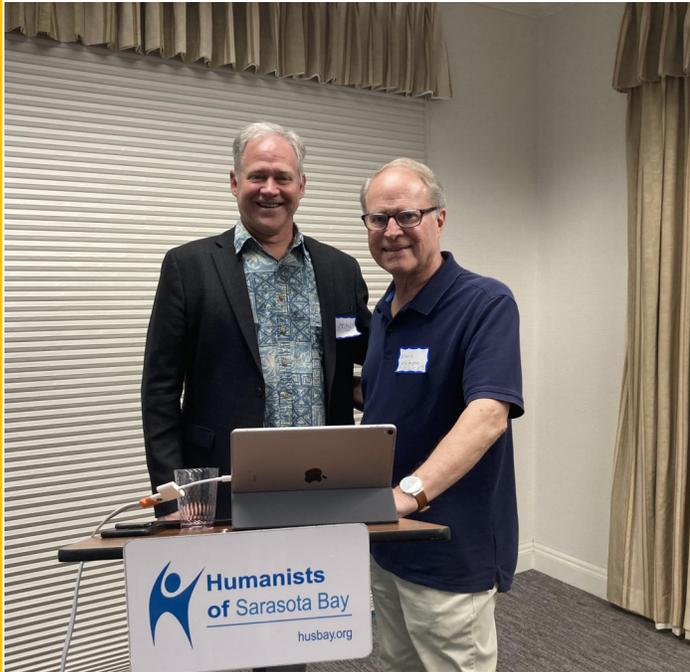
Egypt's higher ups
Never did complain
As long as they could get
The very best cocaine

Not only did they share their ramen
They also had their toot in common

Thank you Barry Zack

Humanism is a progressive philosophy of life that, *without theism or other supernatural beliefs*, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good. To learn more go [here](#).

Brian Dunning Lecture a Huge Success



Science writer Brian Dunning is the host and producer of the podcast *Skeptoid: Critical Analysis of Pop Phenomena* (skeptoid.com), applying critical thinking to urban legends and popular pseudoscientific subjects promoted by the mass media. *Skeptoid* has a weekly audience of 161,000 listeners.

His talk was an insider's look at five religious miracles that are far more interesting when we discover what actually took place. Simple debunking is just as useless as uncritical belief; the real excitement comes from learning the history and the context. All those in attendance remarked on how interesting and informative he was.

So, don't miss the next lecture with Zac Anderson coming on December 5th.



CC31928



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Allstar: \$200 to \$500

"Don't get secular with me, pal."

Special Interest Groups

Here is a list of Special Interest Groups (If you have an idea for one, please let us know).

SIG Names

Current Affairs (CAF):

Life's Experiences (LEX):

Non-Fiction Review (NFR):

Creativity (CRE):

Roundtable (RT):

Science Technology & Medicine (STM): What have you learned, and would like to share

Open Forum (OF):

Focus of the Group

Events discussed during the current news cycle

Your memorable experiences to share with the group

Reviews of non-fiction books, magazine articles, films and TV

Includes short stories, poetry, blogs; in other words fiction writing (including reviews) as opposed to non-fiction review.

A discussion of a topic selected by the SIG hosts

What have you learned, and would like to share

This SIG will happen on dates when no one has stepped up to do a presentation on any of our previously existing categories.

Check our website for specific information by clicking [HERE](#).

Monthly Meetings

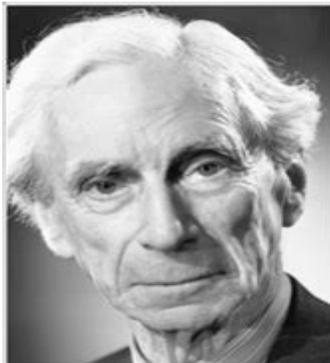
All lectures begin at 2pm with a social gathering and lecture at 2:30. Time for non-lecture events are noted. Lectures are held at the Center for Arts and Humanity, 1226 N. Tamiami Trail, 34236.

December 5	Zac Anderson, Political Columnist, Sarasota Herald Tribune
January 9	New Year Party, (7pm)
January 23	Annual Meeting
February 11	Noel W. Smith Darwin Day Luncheon
March 6	Sarah Wertheimer, Embracing our Differences Project
April 2	Annual Carl Sagan Picnic (4pm), Turtle Beach Pavilion
May 1	TBD

Chat & Chew

Meets every 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month at Perkins restaurant at Fruitville and Cattlemen at 12noon.

It's now time to renew your dues for 2023. Please make your check out to HUSBAY for \$40 per person and send it to HUSBAY, PO Box 52989, Sarasota 34232. Note: If you joined HUSBAY on or after September 1, you are automatically renewed for 2023.



Democracy is the process by which people choose the man who'll get the blame.

— Bertrand Russell —

AZ QUOTES

President's Message

DUES RENEWAL: Based on a recent survey of members, those responding listed their number one reason for joining HUSBAY as being able to associate with like-minded people. Renewing your dues in December will help you keep that commitment.

As 2022 nears the end, we can reflect back on the luncheons and special interest group discussions, our lectures, the annual picnic, Darwin Day, and the HUSBAY newsletter, along with the camaraderie we experience with our like-minded friends. Truly a place to "hang your hat".

Your dues help fund our lectures, the picnic, Darwin Day and various administrative costs. So open up your like-minded hearts and write that check for \$40 per person and help keep HUSBAY moving. Thank you for your support!

SPONSORSHIP LEVELS: This year the Board implemented sponsorship levels to help support our lectures and other events. Here's an opportunity to show your support of our programs and get your name in print. You have received info on all the levels. Sponsoring an event also helps keep our dues low. To sponsor an event contact me at dbhelgager@comcast.net.

As we enter 2023, we can feel good about getting our events and programs back on track with the help of science during this time of COVID. Hopefully, more of our members will venture out and join us at our lectures, special interest groups and other events in the new year.

Stay safe and healthy in the new year!

Continued from page 1

Consider the Pledge of Allegiance. Prior to 1943, public schools had the right to force students to say it, and many did. At the time, it was mainly Jehovah's Witnesses who protested. Although the Pledge back then didn't contain the words "under God," the Witnesses still declined to recite it. The ritual, they argued, put the state above God.

After "under God" was added to the Pledge in 1954, atheists, agnostics, humanists, and others began seeking opt-outs to reciting it in public schools. A 1943 high court ruling, *West Virginia v. Barnette*, gave them that right, which still exists today. But students who demand their right to opt out are often singled out for abuse or retaliation by fellow students, teachers, or administrators. It takes courage to sit out the Pledge. (And does anyone think first graders are going to understand that they even have the right not to participate?)

Thanks to the ruling in *Kennedy v. Bremerton*, we may be headed down the same path with school prayer, where the best a dissenter can hope for is a right to opt out that, while it technically exists, can be difficult or impossible to put into practice.

The infuriating thing is, none of this was necessary. The ruling in the *Kennedy* case is yet another example of a partisan court running amok. For sixty years, the law governing religion in public schools has been guided by a simple maxim: no coercion. If an activity pressures students to take part in prayer or worship against their will, it can't stand.

At the same time, truly private religious expression has always been permitted in public schools. A student could pray before taking a test, over lunch, or any other time, if the prayer was private and non-disruptive. Teachers and staff had the same right as long as their actions didn't have the effect of pressuring young people to engage in religious activity. Public schools also had the right to offer objective instruction about religion as they would any other aca-

demic subject.

That system protected everyone's rights and worked well. The Supreme Court trashed it. The result will be mass confusion. It may take years—and a host of new cases—to figure out the new parameters.

One final thought on this: In light of the *Kennedy* ruling, some folks are, sensibly, calling on church-state and humanist groups to dial back their litigation in this area. We will, but that doesn't mean we won't be in court. Remember, Coach *Kennedy* sued the *Bremerton* district. He was aided and abetted by an aggressive Christian Nationalist legal group that for years has sought to undermine church-state separation. They were spoiling for a fight.

The Religious Right's legal forces won't stop here. They will threaten public educators. They will sue other schools. Those schools will likely ask us for help, and we're morally obligated to provide it. Whether we want to or not, we're going to find ourselves in court from time to time. And there we'll have to make the best arguments we can and seek to mitigate the damage as much as possible.

At the same time, we need to give as much support and comfort as possible to all those public school students out there who are willing to resist having prayer foisted on them by teachers, coaches, and administrators. And we have to offer the same level of support to the many great men and women working in public education who are appalled by the *Kennedy* decision and who value inclusive education.

Our dedication to church-state separation and a public school system that welcomes all young people demands no less.

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How Do We Know Ourselves?: Curiosities and Marvels of the Human Mind

a [NY Journal of Books](#) review by Karen R. Koenig

“This is a book whose purpose is to provoke curiosity and enlighten.”

Reading David G. Myers’ book is akin to wandering into a curio shop and delighting in the proprietor’s private tour of fascinating items, familiar and foreign. In the case of *How Do We Know Ourselves?*, Myers’ thumbnail sketches are of our individual and collective thoughts, feelings and behaviors.

While clearly a man of science—the author is a social psychologist, professor of psychology at Hope College, and author of 17 books and dozens of periodicals and magazines—Myers writes with great wit and obvious joy in word play. In another author’s hands, the content of this book would be dry and boring, replete as it is with data from scientific studies on everything from the grandiose self to cell phone compulsivity to contemplating death. Fortunately, Myers’ self-deprecating humor makes him come across as equal parts humanist and scientist.

The book is divided into three parts that offer the author’s take—bolstered by in-depth research and personal anecdotes—of what makes us tick as individuals, in relationship to one another, and as a species. To ensure the book moves along and readers stay engaged, chapters (40 of them)

are three to six pithy pages per topic. Whenever possible, Myers uses examples from the state of the world, including our current polarized political climate and the recent COVID pandemic.

Part 1: “Who Am I?” shares his perspective on topics such as the dual processing of the brain, how intuition and expectations both help and hinder us, why we fear what we fear, making judgments, and the power of simple attention.

Part 2: “Who Are We?” explores the upside of humility, how we process traumatic events, what makes for excellent friendships, understanding the push and pull of relationships, and the question of whether birth order really matters.

Part 3: “What in the World?” examines the nature versus nurture debate, the art of failing well, how politics changes politicians, the role confirmation bias and credibility of belief play in shaping our thinking, dying people’s surprising feelings about death, and how technology affects our connection to others.

This is a book whose purpose is to provoke curiosity and enlighten. Sometimes Myers’ questions have been asked (and answered) before, and he gives us yet another spin on them. Other subjects never may have crossed our minds but make us wonder how we’ve lived so long without examining them. This book is a gentle reminder that there is much we don’t know we don’t know even when we think we know ourselves.

A Second of Time by Bob Magill

If, during your entire lifetime, as little as one second of time had been altered, you would probably not be reading this now. If during my lifetime, for instance, I, while looking straight ahead, had turned and looked off to my left (elapsed time one second) and therefore not seen the golf ball coming which impacted my right temple, I may not have written this essay.

Of course this phenomenon affects all of humanity. The sum total of everyone’s actions and decisions determine where they will be at any point in time. Any deviation, no matter how seemingly trivial, could over time result in a different history for that person. Is life that chancy? Is this chance or destiny? Not destiny in any predetermined sense, but destiny by causation in a time continuance.

I recently passed my 90th birthday. My life has taken me around the world. Like many others I have flown

in airplanes, traveled in ships and boats, in buses and countless other vehicles. I’ve been exposed to numberless viruses and sinister bacteria, accidents and other threats to life and limb. I am now retired and live with my wife of 66 years in Florida. Often I sit on our lanai and think what a stupendous train of singular moments it has taken for me to sit in the sun here, now, in this particular spot. What were the odds of my being in this place at this time?

I cast back over the billions of particles of time that passed in my longish lifetime, and consider that just one minor deviation could have caused a trajectory that permanently altered my history. Look back over your own experiences and ponder the countless opportunities that passed for your life history to have been altered as well. Perhaps we can now, when viewing or contemplating a piece of ‘time traveler’ fantasy, think of the massive chaos this feat would cause to all of reality for all time?