

## On the Dignity of Humankind

Editor's Note: The following article is based on remarks made by Duane Christian in a recent debate on "secular humanism," held at the University Center, Texas Tech University.



Ethical or rational humanism is an educational and philosophical perspective which exalts the full worth of individuals. What are the origins of humanism? Briefly--before the Renaissance, learning was

in the hands of the clergy. Art and literature had a mainly religious purpose, and revolved around religious subject matter. But, as early as the fourteenth century, the Italian Petrarch, and later, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Dutchman Erasmus, attacked the ignorance, greed and vulgarity of the

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### April Calendar

- |    |        |                                                                              |
|----|--------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 11 | Sat.   | NOW Annual Art Auction. Time and place to be announced in separate circular. |
| 14 | Tues.  | Action/Business Meeting<br>9312 Elgin. 7:30 P.M.                             |
| 23 | Thurs. | Happy Hour/Dinner.<br>6 P.M. Stubb's<br>108 E. Broadway.                     |

## May Day, May Day

Support the cause of labor and celebrate the rites of spring. The Texas Farmworkers Support Committee and the Lubbock NOW Times will sponsor a gala May Day, May Day Celebration on Saturday, May 2. A donation of only \$4, which will go to the benefit of Texas farmworkers, will admit you to a costume extravaganza.

The Yellowhouse String Band (tentatively) will supply the music. Refreshments will flow freely. Food will abound.

There will be prizes for costumes in three categories: (1) worker or union organizer (2) enemy of the people (3) nymph, satyr, faun, pixie.

The time is 8:30; the place 2405 27th Street. Early reservations will be appreciated. Mail your check, payable to the Texas Farmworkers Support Committee to: Business Manager, Lubbock NOW Times at the same address.

## Thank Ya'll

Not that we don't need new advertisers and both new subscribers and renewals from old ones, but the Susan B. Anthony-Pam Herd Brink Birthday, etc. Fundraiser was a great success. Net proceeds to the Lubbock NOW Times were nearly \$500.

Special thanks are due Crossed Keys, and the merchants who donated prizes: The Continental Room, J. Patrick O'Malley's, The Town Draw, and The Sting.



# Art Auction

The annual Lubbock NOW Art Auction will be held on Saturday, April 11. The auction will feature a large variety of prints, drawings, and watercolors, as well as a large selection of ceramic and glass objects. For time and location of the auction, watch for a circular which shortly will be mailed to all NOW Times subscribers.

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## LUBBOCK NOW TIMES

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Articles, poetry, etc., should be submitted to the editor, 2405 27th, Lubbock 79411, typed, double-spaced on a 35 character line. Articles are subject to rewrite.

## On Human Dignity

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religious orders and lower clergy, and the lack of piety and humility of the higher clergy. Martin Luther then secularized and democratized religion, and therefore brought it within the reach of lay worshippers.

In addition, Renaissance scholars, such as the Greek, Manuel Chrysoloras and his pupil, the Italian, Leonardo Bruni, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries rediscovered the ancient Greek and Roman scholars and philosophers, and revived their beliefs in the dignity of humans and the perfectibility of human nature. The general philosophical approaches of the Renaissance scholars still form the basis of modern humanism.

Modern humanism focuses on, among other issues, political rights and the development of morals by individuals. Humanists believe that all citizens of civilized states must share in basic human and civil rights. Included are the rights of free speech, free assembly, open trial and protection against political persecution. Humanists uphold the right to communicate with one's countrymen, as well as with foreigners, and the right to cross national borders. The political ramifications of humanism are obvious.

On the question of moral development, humanists disagree with extremist adherents of the theistic tradition. Such extremists demand

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# SCREENINGS



Perhaps it has something to do with the nineteenth century British novel, but Roman Polanski's Tess (based, of course, on Hardy's novel Tess of the D'Urbervilles) is visually the most

beautiful film I've seen since Stanley Kubrick's version of Thackeray's Barry Lyndon. Indeed, in many ways the two seem alike. Each, in a richly photographed, quietly paced film, presents a picture of a world in need of help.

Kubrick's vision is of a corrupted society, of people constantly chasing meaningless rewards and choosing appearance over reality. His Barry Lyndon is a rogue so preposterously endearing that we cheer his successes and mourn his failures. Kubrick's style neatly reflects this devil-may-care world.

By contrast, Polanski's Tess moves in a society corrupted not by greed and laziness but by self-righteousness, inhuman morality. Tess is vilified neither for what

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## By Two Women

On January 25, 1981, the New York Times reported the following: remarks made by two women, at grand occasions. The first had this to say: "All of the women here have husbands who have worked hard for what they have," said a woman at an Inaugural Ball. "If a little girl from Alabama. . . can appear in public wearing beautiful jewels and gowns, it should be a symbol to everyone that they can do it, too."

The other woman, also couturier dressed, was speaking at the induction of the first female ever admitted to the Academie Francaise. She said: "This uncertain floating me, whose existence I myself dispute, here it is, surrounded, accompanied by an invisible troupe of women who perhaps should have received this honor long before, so that I am tempted to stand aside to let their shadows pass . . . ."

"One cannot say," Marguerite Yourcenar added, "that in French society, so impregnated with feminine influences, the Academy has been a notable misogynist: it simply conformed to the custom that willingly placed a woman on a pedestal but did not permit itself to officially offer her a chair."

The Times ruefully remarked: "We wonder which one was heard at the White House."

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## Oration on the Dignity of Humankind

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that there be strict adherence to a moral code that is preached and indoctrinated.

But some problems arise here. Those indoctrinated see examples of believers who don't follow avowed moralistic principles. Yet, behavior speaks more loudly, especially to the youngster, than do mere words. Just as importantly, rules or laws frequently are followed more because of fear, or some other extrinsic pressure, than because of the internalizing and understanding of a principle which has universal applicability.

To illustrate this latter point, let me relate an incident which was reported to me. A father, after correcting his son's behavior, and meting out punishment, said to the boy, "Now son, isn't it wonderful to do the right thing?" The boy pondered, and then replied, "Well, Pop, it's not exactly wonderful. I just know you're gonna' whomp the fire out of me if I do that again."

A person conditioned, as this boy evidently was being conditioned, may not necessarily do the "right" thing of his or her own accord. In parti-

cular, when the authority figure is not present, behavior may revert to the "incorrect" or "immoral."

A more viable approach to behavior includes appropriate explanation of why a rule or law exists, and modeling behavior which is in accord with stated beliefs. Rational discussion, which leads to forming principles of humane interaction, together with examination both of instances of selfishness, cruelty and injustice, and instances of unselfishness, kindness and enlightened justice, provide more sound bases for developing moral principles.

The model I'm suggesting is one of moral development which includes the slow accretion of internal principles as the learner grows, matures, and becomes increasingly sophisticated in his or her philosophy. The aim is to internalize universal abstract precepts of thought and practice which hold human life in reverence. Such a goal is not easily attainable through education and reflection, but it is highly unlikely to be attained through preaching and moralizing which omits concomi-

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## Human Dignity

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tant reflection and soul searching.

Behavior is vitally important to humanists. Humanists are for just, humane behavior. As noted modern humanist Paul Kurtz has theorized: "Humanism represents the scientific-naturalist world view that is skeptical of the classical theological vision and wishes to develop an empirically warranted view of the universe. This involves a commitment to an ethical humanism: an image of the human person that centers on both responsible service to our fellow human beings and the achievement of happiness for the individual. Ethical humanism wishes to enhance the freedom and dignity of the individual. It seeks to liberate modern society from blind custom and dogmatic morality. It believes in democratic values and the democratic method as the best way to develop a just society."

### No Humanist Plot

This ethical or rational humanism is secular in that it is centered in the world, and not aimed at other-worldly rewards. Despite the attacks of the stern absolutists of the new moral right, there is no deliberate and organized movement seeking to impose a religion of humanism. In the Sept./Oct. 1980 issue of The Humanist, Kurtz replied to such a charge: "the majority of the more than two million school teachers identify with the Judeo-Christian tradition, nominally or otherwise, whereas the official membership of the humanist religious bodies are numerically only a small portion of the total. Moreover, the organizational activities of secular humanists have no role in the schools hence they are in no way leading to the establishment of a religion."

More than fifteen years ago, Mary Raywid affirmed that evidence, decency and democracy should be the watchwords when dealing with political extremism. Courage also will be needed, because the above three

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## Screenings

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she is not for what she does; she is punished for what is done to her, Barry Lyndon chose his destiny. Tess has hers thrust upon her.

Hardy's villains are the church, the British class system, and British law. The beauty of his prose brings out the evils of his world by contrast. I assume that Polanski wanted to do the same thing cinematically. Unfortunately, it doesn't work very well. The lushly romantic filming serves rather to undercut the viciousness of the society. "Even amid this splendor," we can almost hear Polanski say, "Tess is a victim."

There's a charm to that, but the need is for bitterness rather than charm. As Hardy tells us in pronouncing Tess's final doom: "'Justice' was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess."

\*\*\*\*\*

Last month I told you that I refused to watch Kent State: What Really Happened because I don't watch

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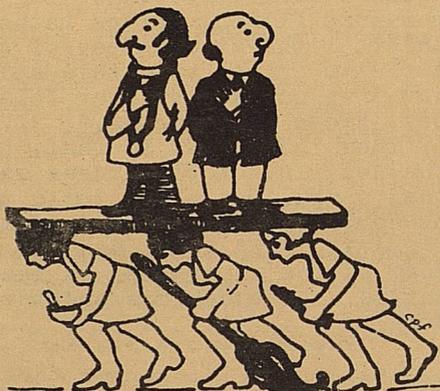
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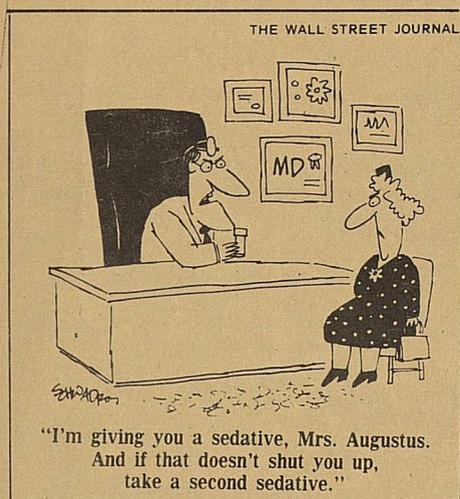
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By BOB MANTANA



From the Avalanche-Journal,  
February 21, 1981. Submitted by  
BLT.



From the Wall Street Journal,  
February 2, 1981. Submitted by  
Dannie Botros.

## On Dignity

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entities are beginning to undergo  
severe tests as dictatorial moralists  
appear and exercise their brand of  
political extremism. Those of us  
who advocate a rational/ethical  
humanism must affirm our values and  
be prepared to defend the efficacy of  
teaching ethical behavior.

-- Duane Christian

This particular made-for-television  
cautionary tale about child porno-  
graphy ("Howard lures innocent girls  
to star in his movies," reads the  
ad in TV Guide) was called Fallen  
Angel. During a commercial break  
about halfway through the movie,  
two products were advertised:  
"Whipsticks," a new lipstick for  
the leather underwear set; and "FDS--  
feminine deodorant spray."

From a night of television viewing.  
Submitted by Jeffrey M. Gamso.

Contributions to Hogwash should be  
sent to The Editor, Lubbock NOW  
Times, 2213 B 36th Street, Lubbock  
Texas 79413.

## Women USA Hotline

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## SCREENINGS

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docu-dramas. Shortly after that  
issue of the Lubbock NOW Times went  
to press, I read an interview with  
the producer of the show. He  
wouldn't call his work a docu-drama,  
he explained, because that indicated  
a fraud. Kent State, he argued, was  
nonfiction -- even though some  
characters were invented for the sake  
of the story.

-- Jeffrey M. Gamso

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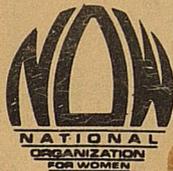
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