

First Coast

# FreeThinker



The newsletter of the First Coast Freethought Society

June 2007

Volume 5, Issue 6

## Inside this issue: **NPR CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP FUND DRIVE and June 2007 President's Message**

A Fundamentalist 5  
Haunts the Nation

Can Ethics Be 7  
Reason Based? --  
Part II

### Other Mark Twain Quotes...

*"It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand."*

*"It is better to keep your mouth closed and let people think you are a fool than to open it and remove all doubt."*

*"Always do right--this will gratify some and astonish the rest."*

**Carrie Renwick**

**C**AN YOU IMAGINE driving home from work, listening to NPR's "All Things Considered" (perhaps stuck in traffic) and hearing, "The First Coast Freethought Society supports nonreligious persons in the Northeast Florida area, promoting a nontheistic approach to everyday life. For information..." Can you imagine a more positive, respectable, and credible way to spread our name throughout the Northeast Florida area, or a

more appropriate listening audience to target?

**YES!** In keeping with our goal of continued positive community exposure, the board has selected as our 2007 project, FCFS Corporate Sponsorship of NPR

membership dues covers the general operating expenses of the FCFS, but special projects require special fundraising. I



hope you will embrace the opportunity to make this wonderful project a reality.

***"The First Coast Freethought Society supports nonreligious persons in the Northeast Florida area. . ."***

member-station WJCT. We are planning a six-month contract running from July through December 2007, targeting the heaviest listening times on weekday mornings and afternoons. Revenue from annual

As hard as it is to believe, we're halfway through my second and final year as your president, and 2007 has reached its halfway mark. It's time for an update! I'm thrilled to report that FCFS mem-

*(Continued on page 3)*

### June 2007 Meeting

**Frank P. Besag, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus, University of Wisconsin**  
**Top-down vs. Bottom-up Societal Structures: A Historical Perspective**

*"It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so." --Twain)*

**Monday, June 18, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.**

**(Upstairs in the Sanctuary - Doors open at 6:00)**

**Unitarian Universalist Church • 7405 Arlington Expressway • Jacksonville, FL**

## HUMANIST BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

- When:** 2:00 p.m., the third Sunday of each month.
- Where:** Borders Books, 8801 Southside Blvd., 519-6500, books are usually in stock.
- What:** Books/magazines planned for discussion:
- June 17, 2007 - *Breaking The Spell*, by Daniel Dennett
  - July 15, 2007 - book of your choice



**F**or July, come prepared to tell us about your latest read. Haven't read anything? Bring along a magazine or newspaper article to share. For more information, contact moderator Jewell Kross at [JKross@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org](mailto:JKross@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org) or call 904-996-1553.



## A BRIEF HISTORY OF DISBELIEF

**T**his illuminating program is coming to a public television station near you! In the series, author Jonathon Miller talks about the evolution of his lack of belief in God and uncovers the fascinating story of atheism. It bills itself as the first television exploration of the idea that God doesn't exist. WJCT (Channel 7) will air the series of three one-hour programs on Fridays, June 15, 22 and 29 at 11:00 PM.



For more information, see <http://www.abriefhistoryofdisbelief.org/>.

### First Coast **FreeThinker**

The *First Coast FreeThinker* is published for members of the First Coast Freethought Society, other freethinkers, and potential freethinkers. We exchange newsletters with other freethought groups and obtain information from many diverse sources.

Readers are invited and encouraged to reprint our original materials provided they give credit to this publication.

The officials of the FCFS are not responsible for opinions or other statements expressed in this newsletter. It is intended to convey ideas to stimulate discussion on a variety of subjects.

### Newsletter Staff

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We welcome submissions. The deadline is the **FOURTH SATURDAY** of each month for the following month's issue. Submit contributions by e-mail to Hugo (see above), or U.S. mail to Hugo Borresen, 8831 Taurus Circle South, Jacksonville, FL 32222. Submit web site contributions to Carrie Renwick at the e-mail address above.

**Presidents Message For June 2007 (1/2 Way Point, Wow!)**

(Continued from page 1)

bership is not only at an all-time high, we have reached our **goal of 100 members!** I'm sure members have noticed the attractive membership packets including welcome letter, membership card, and bylaws that are being sent out this year. Thank you to the membership committee and the treasurer for making this happen.

Again in keeping with our goal of continually placing the name of the FCFS in public view, we participated in the **WagePeace** "Presidents' Day Gathering for Local Progressives" which was held on February 18, 2007, at the San Marco Theatre. WagePeace held a concert in the theatre and did not have display tables available, but we were able to provide a slide show depicting salient facts about the FCFS and sent hand-

outs. Also, on April 21, 2007, the FCFS participated in the annual **Earth Day Fair** at the Jacksonville Landing. Wilhelmina Walton did a great job of coordinating the display table staff which included Alice Ricker, Beth Perry, Anita Myrick, John Ruskuski, and Tom Bowen. (See Wilhelmina's cover story in the May 2007 *FreeThinker* for details.) Great job, everyone!

We placed our **first paid ad** of 2007 in *Folio Weekly*, in April, for Ellen Wagner's program on the Divine Command Theory, resulting not only in new faces at the meeting but also several new members. Additionally in the way of publicity, the FCFS was represented beautifully by **Wilhelmina Walton** in a *Times-Union* article written by Jeff Brumley titled, "Should you pray or reason in times of tragedy?" published on April 19, 2007. The very next day, the FCFS had a letter published titled, "Mayor 'broke the law'" in which we ex-

plain the reason the American Atheists brought suit against the city for using public funds on the "Day of Prayer" rally. (See page 4 of the May 2007 *FreeThinker*.)

A major accomplishment of the first half of the year: the **Action Plan** portion of Curtis Wolf's excellent five-year Long-Range Plan was approved at the March board meeting and was presented in its entirety in the April *FreeThinker*. We still need you to review the Action Plan and come forward if you see anything that appeals to you.

Finally, as some of you already know, the jungle drums are beating, and the grapevine is humming as we search for some **new leadership for the FCFS**. If you feel you might be interested in a board position in 2008, please let a board member or me know. The Nominating Committee will start serious head-hunting when appointed in September.



**NPR Corporate Sponsorship Fund Progress as of June 9, 2007**

We are **TWO-THIRDS** of the way to our goal!! We have received \$2070--we still need **\$930!**

Many thanks to those who have donated already. With their permission, here are their names:

- Hugo Borresen \*
- Tom Bowen \*
- Michael Corbett \*\*\*\*
- Mike Cross \*
- Jan Eisler \*\*\*\*\*
- Fred Hill \*

- Kristine Hoppenworth \*
- Val Jones and Rod Montgomery\*
- Bobbie Nord \*\*
- Anne Odell and Patrick Odell \*
- Stephen Peek \*\*
- Beth Perry \*
- Mark Renwick and Carrie Renwick \*\*
- David Royer \*
- Wilhelmina Walton \*
- Curtis Wolf \*

The key to the stars is as follows:  
Up to \$100 = 1 star  
up to 200 = 2 stars  
up to 300 = 3 stars  
up to 400 = 4 stars  
up to 500 = 5 stars

To donate, mail a check to FCFS, P.O. Box 550591, Jax, 32255-0591, or donate on the website, [firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org](http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org).

NPR-o-Meter



Watch  
**civil discourse**

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Hosted by  
**Ken Hurley**

Every Thursday at 6:30 p.m.  
Comcast Cable Channel 29

**Watch Ken and his special guest**

**HEATHER WELLMAN**

**Executive Director**  
**Humanists of Florida Association**

THE REMAINING THURSDAYS IN JUNE

Contact: [ACLUjax@Yahoo.com](mailto:ACLUjax@Yahoo.com)

## UPCOMING EVENT

**H**erb Silverman, President and Founder of Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry, Charleston, SC, will be speaking at the Buckman Bridge Unitarian Universalist Society, 12447 Mandarin Rd. (they meet at the Mandarin Community Club, corner of Brady Road), in Jacksonville. Do not miss this excellent speaker!!

Date: Sun., June 17, 2007.

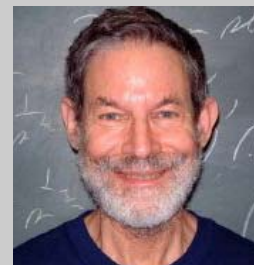
Time: 10:30 a.m.

Topic: "Positive Atheism."

For directions and more info:

<http://www.bbuus.org/>

or call 904-276-3739.



## Ongoing FCFS Activities

### Dinners For Atheists (and Freethinkers, Humanists, Agnostics, etc.)

Sign up to attend or host a dinner yourself. Sign-up sheets will be at the back table at the monthly meetings. For further details on how this works, see page 9 of the February 2006 *FreeThinker*, or ask the hospitality ladies at the back table.

### Atheist Sunday Morning (or Sunday Morning in the Park)

Freethinkers...let's get acquainted and enjoy intelligent conversation **every 4th Sunday of the month** (unless inclement weather prevails) at 9 a.m.'til ? at the pavilion at Losco Park, 10851 Hood Rd., S., Jacksonville 32257 (between Shad Road and Losco). Need directions? Call Beth Perry at 733-5489, or Google the address to get a map and directions. Bring your own cup and breakfast snack. Most of the time coffee is furnished. Mark your calendar. We hope to see you there.

### No Atheist Left Behind (or Are You Going My Way?)

If you are seeking a **ride** to an FCFS event, contact **Hugo Borresen** at [HBorresen@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org](mailto:HBorresen@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org) or call 904-779-6883.

### Caring Tree

If a telephone call to a member is in order, or if a sympathy card, flowers, or some form of support is needed, please contact **Nita Pitts** at 904-996-0879 or e-mail her at [pitrymnd@comcast.net](mailto:pitrymnd@comcast.net). Otherwise, leave a notation on the sign-in sheet at the front table during one of our meetings.

## A Fundamentalist Haunts the Nation

Fred W. Hill

**J**erry Falwell is dead. His ghost, however, will haunt our national landscape for many years to come. For most of the last 30 years he was the chief agitator for and face of the angry American fundamentalists. He led a movement dedicated to dismantling the wall between church and state and to realizing its vision of God's will by attempting to reinstate the unquestioned political dominance of white, male, heterosexual, fundamentalist Christians. Mr. Falwell's movement did not quite succeed in achieving its aims and has even fragmented, yet it did change American politics and remains a force to be reckoned with.

Initially, the wicked dragon Falwell charged against was Negro civil rights. During the late 1950s, early in his career as a pastor at Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia, Falwell railed against the *Brown vs. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision against segregation in public schools. During the 1960s, he regularly denounced Martin Luther King, referring to him as a communist and advocate for "civil wrongs."

Moreover, as noted by Max Blumenthal in *The Nation* ("Agent of Intolerance," May 28, 2007), Falwell's political action group, the Moral Majority, was largely founded in response to the revoking of the tax-exempt status of private schools that practiced racial discrimination. This government action posed

serious economic consequences to Falwell's own Liberty University, which he founded with the desire that it remain a whites-only institution for religious-based higher education. Of course, by the time he got his supposed majority up and running in 1979, continuing to rant against integration of the races was no longer a sure bet to win broad appeal, even among southern conservatives. Some other enemy had to be found.

Naturally there were plenty of other targets for a disgruntled religious extremist to cry out against, primarily the *Roe vs.*

***Ultimately, Falwell was a leader of bullies, a gang frightened over losing their sense of control of their environment...***

*Wade* decision legalizing abortion. Moreover, there were liberal legislators and judges decriminalizing consensual sexual activity between unmarried adults, even between consenting adults of the same sex (gasp!), as well as the sale and possession of pornography depicting such activity. And there was the teaching of evolution and banning of formal prayers in public schools. And there were women demanding equal rights and an end to legal sexual discrimination and harassment at work and school. And there were environmentalists agitating for laws to protect wildlife and natural habitat from destruction and urban sprawl.

All these challenges to long-entrenched cultural mores were too much for many Americans, particularly those in the Bible Belt of the Southern States, but hardly limited to that region.

By taking a prominent stance against these evil or deluded liberals, as he saw them, and thus stoking discontent against progressive changes, Falwell garnered a mass national following. In essence, Falwell, the founder of Liberty University, became an arch-opponent of individual liberties except in matters of pushing his particular brand of theology on others.

Indeed, one of the touted goals of Liberty University as well as of Regent University, a religious law school founded by the Reverend Pat Robertson, is to indoctrinate students in conservative religious dogma and then place many of them in key positions within local, state and federal governments in order to take control of the bureaucracies from within, and thereby work to weed out liberal social policies. The results of such efforts within the U.S. Justice Department and the firing of federal prosecutors for purely ideological reasons are shedding some public light on such tactics.

The specific goal of the Moral Majority was to politically mobilize fundamentalist Christians to take control of government from without. As Democrats had become largely associated with lib-



eralism and Republicans with conservatism, Falwell focused on widening the gap between the major parties, demonizing all suspected liberal candidates, and drumming up support for Republican candidates who at least pretended to share his religious outlook, at all levels.

Ronald Reagan's landslide victories in the 1980 and 1984 elections seemed to prove that Falwell really was speaking for a majority of all Americans, even if his minions failed to gain control of either house of Congress before the Moral Majority was dissolved in 1989. By then, however, religious extremists had become a large faction within the Republican Party, and most Republican candidates for the Presidency or top positions within Congress courted Falwell's approval, even after he infamously blamed the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 on "pagans, abortionists, feminists, gays, lesbians, the American Civil Liberty Union, and the People for the American

Way," damning them all for having aroused the wrath of god.

Shortly after Falwell was reportedly called to meet his maker, former Republican



Speaker of the House and current Presidential hopeful, serial adulterer and pious hypocrite Newt Gingrich gave a commencement speech at Liberty University which took the form

of a eulogy of the reverend and an attack on secularism, echoing Falwell's repeated laments that he and his fellow fundamentalists or evangelists are the real victims of persecution because they aren't allowed to force everyone else to be indoctrinated in and live by the doctrines of their religious beliefs--a display of the typical tactic of bullies, claiming victim-hood when not granted carte blanche to abuse others.

Ultimately, Falwell was a leader of bullies, a gang frightened over losing their sense of control of their environment, their feeling of a special, holy entitlement to dominate others. Falwell is gone but his gang remains, perhaps fragmented just now, but still aching to regain control, to force everyone to bow down to their god and let them rule according to their interpretation of their god's will, entirely contrary to the best principles upon which this country was founded.



## The Florida Legislature and Freethinkers... So, How Did We Do?

Now that the end of the regular Florida legislative session has arrived, how did legislation of importance to freethinkers do? Most of the bills and resolutions listed in the March 2007 newsletter article *Bills Before The 2007 Florida Legislature About Which Freethinkers Should Know* did

not pass. There were a few exceptions, however.

Bills and resolutions related to osteopathic medicine (HR 1141 and SR 1306) were adopted by the Florida Legislature. As noted in the March article, osteopathic medicine is considered to be pseudoscience by the QuackWatch website. (See [http://www.quackwatch.](http://www.quackwatch.org/04ConsumerEducation/QA/os)

<http://www.quackwatch.org/04ConsumerEducation/QA/os>[teo.html](http://www.quackwatch.org/04ConsumerEducation/QA/os)).

Also, January 6th has been designated as Three Kings Day (HB 627). As noted in the March article, Three Kings Day has church/state separation implications. The possibility of a legal challenge was even raised in the Government Operations committee staff analysis.



## Can Ethics Be Reason Based? - Part II

Curtis Wolf

Last month, I wrote about the need for a universal ethical system based on empiricism and reason. I started with the following empirically validated statements:

**All men and women are equal to each other in every relevant way.**

**Humans are social animals.**

**My actions have consequences that affect other people's ability to live happy lives.**

This month, I will present three deductive assertions that derive from the preceding empirically validated statements. Then, next month, we will consider the implications of all of this and see if we can come up with some principles that can guide us in making ethical decisions.

**All men and women have equal rights to happy and fulfilling lives.**

Since we all are of equal status, we all should have equal access to the good life. This does not necessarily mean that we should all be guaranteed six figure salaries and BMWs in our garages, but there should be no impediments to our reaching for the stars if we so choose. I have no greater right to a happy life than you do.

**We have to take into account the consequences of**

**our actions that affect others' ability to live happy lives.**

Since none of us lives on a desert island apart from human contact, we cannot just do what we want and be oblivious to how our actions affects others. There are very few things we do that do not have the potential to harm others. Even an individual act such as suicide is devastating for the survivors who have to live without this person.

*Ultimately, negotiations about ethical rules have to be conducted in the spirit of altruism for them to be truly effective.*

**Since no one can dictate ethical rules to any other person, they must be negotiated between people with equal rights to happiness.**

Equality can be very messy. While many of us find it easier to have ethical rules dictated to us by someone, e.g., God or some other authority figure, others want to play a part in defining the ethical rules that govern their relationship with others. The bottom line is, people want to be treated fairly by others.

But, with no one to define the word for us, what constitutes "fair?" There is no easy answer to this question and therefore the meaning of the word must be

defined in negotiations between people with equal stakes in the answer to this question. Ultimately, this question must be answered to everyone's satisfaction, as much as humanly possible, or a significant number of dissenters may not follow the ethical rules agreed upon in the negotiation.



How do we conduct these negotiations? While we could simply assert our respective rights to happiness and threaten dire consequences for anyone who does not treat us in a certain way, I believe that this almost certainly leads to strife and discontent. Instead, negotiations about ethical rules have to be conducted in the spirit of altruism for them to be truly effective. We have to want the other person to be as happy as we are. These negotiations test not only our reason, but they test our compassion as well.

We have only to read the newspaper to see how difficult it would be to implement this negotiation strategy. It is easier to demand that others treat us fairly than to seek a negotiated settlement that makes everyone happy. Unfortunately, it is sometimes necessary for ethical rules to be demanded of the offending party before more altruistic negotiations that help everyone to achieve a moment of happiness can proceed.

*(Continued on page 10)*

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.  
P.O. Box 550591  
Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591  
(904) 288-6291  
<http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>

### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the First Coast Freethought Society is to serve the needs of the nonreligious of Northeast Florida, to promote freethought and secular humanism, and to provide an opportunity for agnostics, atheists, skeptics and other free-thinkers to exchange ideas.

### Meetings

The FCFS meets the THIRD Monday of each month at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Jacksonville, upstairs in the sanctuary, 7405 Arlington Expressway, Jacksonville, Florida 32211. (904) 725-8133. Doors open 6:00. Meeting time: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

### Committees and Chairs

**Program** Curtis Wolf 573-3847  
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**Vice President** Curtis Wolf 573-3847  
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[CWolf@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org](mailto:CWolf@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org)

## June Social - All Welcome!

**WHERE:** STEAK & ALE at Baymeadows and I-95 South

**WHEN:** TUES., June 26, 2007. Gather in Lounge at 6:00 p.m., Dinner at 7:00 p.m.

**RSVP:** [CarrieRen@att.net](mailto:CarrieRen@att.net) (or 268-8826) by June 25, if you plan to attend!



First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.

P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591 • (904) 288-6291

2006 Membership Application



Name		Date	
Home address	City	State	Zip Code
E-mail address	Home phone	Business phone	
Occupation	Areas of interest and/or expertise		

How did you hear about us? \_\_\_\_\_

Membership level (please select one):

- |                                                  |                                                      |                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regular (\$30/yr.)      | <input type="checkbox"/> Carl Sagan (\$50/yr.)       | <input type="checkbox"/> Charles Darwin (\$200/yr.)   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student (\$15/yr.)      | <input type="checkbox"/> Bertrand Russell (\$75/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Robert Ingersoll (\$500/yr.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior - 65+ (\$15/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Thomas Paine (\$100/yr.)    | <input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime (\$1,000)           |

I'm interested in getting involved in the FCFS as a(n):

- General member     Committee member     Officer     Financial supporter

Do you object to your name appearing on our membership list, which is only distributed to other members? YES

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

***You can make a lasting impact on the future of  
freethought and secular humanism in this community  
...if you provide for the First Coast Freethought Society in your Will.***

Your bequest will ensure that the FCFS continues to be a beacon for freethinkers on the First Coast and to remain a vital Voice of Reason in the Northeast Florida area. Several options are available for establishing a bequest (specific, percentage, residual, or contingent). We will be happy to provide the appropriate wording to you and your attorney, depending upon your wishes.

For further information, contact  
Carrie Renwick, P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591 or  
904-288-6291 • [CarrieRen@att.net](mailto:CarrieRen@att.net) • <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/>  
All inquiries are held in the strictest confidence.

**Can Ethics Be Reason Based?  
- Part II**

(Continued from page 7)

This is certainly true of the civil rights movement. Before the civil rights movement, the white racists in the South cer-

tainly had no desire to negotiate in the spirit of altruism with black people that they did not consider to be their equals. Now that significant progress has been made in assuring equal rights for all people regardless of color, the foundation for more

altruistic negotiations of ethical behavior by people of different colors has been set.

Negotiations are never easy, but negotiated ethical rules are more likely to be followed than ethical rules imposed "from above."



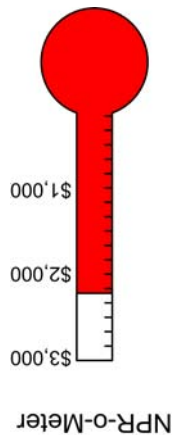
**Next deadline for article submission: June 23, 2007**

First Coast Freethought Society 2007 Events			
June	18 - Monthly meeting	17 - Book discussion group	26- Social at Steak and Ale
July	16 - Monthly meeting	15 - Book discussion group	24- Social at Steak and Ale
August	20 - Monthly meeting	19 - Book discussion group	28- Social at Steak and Ale

Visit our website at <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/>.

(In the Adobe version, the links are **LIVE!** Ctrl & Click will take you there.)

To contribute to the  
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click on green link titled, NPR  
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Return service requested



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