

First Coast

FreeThinker



The Newsletter of the First Coast Freethought Society

October 2008

Volume 6, Issue 10

Inside this issue:

The FCFS Is Moving Up! 3

We Are The World... 4

The Dark Side of the Dalai Lama 5

"In sum, human embryonic twinning occurs via separation. But if twinning occurs via separation, an embryo susceptible to twinning cannot be transtemporally identical to a future human being. Hence, if blastocysts are worth protecting, it is not because of their prospective identity to entities that we already know are worth protecting."

—“The Moral Status of the Human Embryo: The Twinning Argument” Berit Brogaard, *Free Inquiry*, Winter 2002/03, page 48.

October 2008 President’s Message

Earl Coggins

I had originally intended to devote this space to amendments 7 & 9, two proposed amendments to the Florida Constitution on the upcoming November ballot. They would have unequivocally compromised Florida’s ability to maintain a clear separation between church and state.

In a unanimous decision, the Florida Supreme Court ordered they be removed from the ballot, ruling that these amendments are misleading, deceptive, and a clear misuse of the limited powers be-

stowed upon the members of the Budget, Taxation, and Reform Committee, the agency responsible for placing these amendments on the upcoming November ballot.

I overheard a stranger lamenting over

I think of liberals as analytical, yet loving, interested in reform, but keen on standards.

the removal of the amendments, stating it was the work of “liberal” organizations. I want to thank those liberals for the Ford vs. Browning lawsuit that ultimately led to the Florida Supreme Court’s ruling.

The groups involved in the lawsuit included Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Florida ACLU, the Florida Education Association, the Florida School Boards Association, the Florida Association of District School Superintendents, the Florida Association of School Administrators, the Anti-Defamation League, and People for the American Way.

I’ve called myself a liberal.

(Continued on page 3)



October 2008 Meeting

Richard T. Hull, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus, Dept. of Philosophy, SUNY Buffalo; Founder and President, Tallahassee CFI; Bioethics Scholar; Humanist

“It’s a BA-by!”

Monday, October 20, 2008, 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:



- October 19, 2008 - *The Age of Unreason*, by Susan Jacoby
- November 2, 2008 - Book of your Choice *

Come and tell us about a good Humanist book you have read recently. Haven't read a book? Then bring us a magazine article, poem, or what ever has caught your attention . We will divide the time among the people who want to present.

For more information, contact moderator Jewell Kross at JKross@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org or call 904-996-1553. (NOTE: If you purchase books from Amazon, please go to our website FIRST, <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/index.html> and THEN click the link to Amazon.com. Thank you!)

* Note: **Starting in November**, we will meet on the **first Sunday of the month** instead of the third Sunday. We will continue to meet at Borders, **except in December**. Borders stocks extra books for the holidays, expects more shoppers, and so they have asked us to meet elsewhere for that month. Any ideas for a **location for the December 7th** meeting? Will someone offer their house? We usually have 10 to 12 attendees, but have had as many as 17. Let me hear from you! —Jewell

First Coast FreeThinker

The *First Coast FreeThinker* is published for FCFS members, other freethinkers, and potential freethinkers. Nonmembers may receive three issues for free, after which they must join the FCFS to continue to receive hard copy.

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. The *FreeThinker* is intended to convey ideas to stimulate thought and discussion on a variety of subjects.

We welcome submissions. The deadline is the **FOURTH SATURDAY** of each month for the

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following month's issue. Submit contributions to the newsletter by e-mail to Hugo (see above), or by U.S. mail to Hugo Borresen, 8831 Taurus Circle South, Jacksonville, FL 32222.

September 2008 President's Message

(Continued from page 1)

So what exactly does it mean to be a liberal? The word liberal comes from the Latin word *liber*, which means free. A quick look at some of the words, all related, that use the Latin *liber* reveals: liberal, liberate, libertarian, libertine, and liberty.

Liberal is defined as: 1) Not limited to or by established, traditional, orthodox, or authoritative attitudes, views, or dogmas; free from bigotry. 2) Favoring proposals for reform, open to new ideas for progress, and tolerant of the ideas and behavior of others; broad-minded.

Upon reading the dictionary, I was immediately reminded of why I have always felt good about the "liberal" label. I like

being associated with people who favor proposals for reform, who are open to new ideas for progress, and tolerant of the ideas and behavior of others. A proposal for reform could be alternatively worded as a course correction, something we have all had to do from time to time. The U. S. government made a historic course correction with Amendment 13 to the U. S. Constitution, eliminating slavery. And then with amendment 14, they attempted to solidify their move away from bigotry—all part of a liberal frame of reference.

In his book *The History of Western Philosophy*, Bertrand Russell gives the following account of liberalism:

"Early liberalism stood for religious toleration; it regarded the wars of religion as silly. It

valued commerce and industry, and favoured the rising middle class rather than the monarchy and the aristocracy; it had immense respect for the rights of property; the divine right of kings was rejected in favour of the view that every community has a right, at any rate initially, to choose its own form of government. Early liberalism was opposed to everything medieval because medieval theories had been used to sanction the powers of church and king, to justify persecution, and to obstruct the rise of science."

I think of liberals as analytical, yet loving, interested in reform, but keen on standards AND I believe liberals to have a genuine fascination with the universe and their place in it. I'm happy to be a part of that club.



The FCFS Is Moving Up!

Carrie Renwick

In the 10/01/2008 *Florida Times-Union* article (http://www.jacksonville.com/tu-online/stories/100108/lif_338191548.shtml), "Wall Street's woes go beyond financial to spiritual," reporter Jeff Brumley goes on to state, "Four community leaders look at role of biblical ethics in crisis."

First Coast Freethought Society founder and president Earl Coggins takes his rightful place among three other community leaders: an Episcopal bishop, a rabbi, and the business dean of

UNF, as they all share their views on whether the nation's current economic situation is due to a lack of biblical ethics.

Some gems coming out of Earl's mouth include:

"To suggest that religion has all the answers, I have to respectfully disagree with him."

"I think he needs to clarify what he means by 'biblical ethics.' The Bible has been interpreted a million ways... We have some denominations that think gays shouldn't be allowed to marry, while some denominations say they should be allowed to marry... In order to properly

evaluate what is going on on Wall Street, we should use secular ethics."

The *Times-Union* article has already received rave reviews. One enthusiastic FCFS member wrote, "Earl and First Coast Freethought Society have reached maturity, therefore recognition and status in the community. Congratulations to Earl and FCFS. Keep up the good work, and keep doing what you're doing. It's working great!"



We Are The World...

Curtis Wolf

Sparta was a city state that existed in southern Greece during ancient times. It was the dominant military power in Greece until the fourth century BCE. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sparta>).

It was a militaristic society. Young boys left their parents at age seven and received military training. They stayed in the military until age 30 and in inactive reserves until age 60. (*The Rise of Christianity* by Rodney Stark, page 103)

It was also a closed society. Spartans believed in their traditions so strongly that they expelled foreigners on various occasions and put restrictions on international trade in order to keep new ideas from influencing Spartan society. (*Ancient Greek Civilization*, The Teaching Company)

This last point brings me to the focus of my article. If the Spartans feared that contact with the outside world was dangerous to their ability to keep their traditions unchanged, it would appear that international trade, tourism, academic conferences, and other forms of contact among people of different cultures are beneficial if we want humanistic ideas to propagate throughout the world.

As the song goes, we are a small world after all. With the advent of air travel and televi-

sion, there are not many places in the world that we cannot experience in some way. According to the World Trade Organization, "In 2006, the volume of world merchandise trade grew by 8 percent while world gross domestic product recorded a 3.5 per cent increase. This confirms the trend of world merchandise trade growing by twice the annual growth rate of output since 2000."

(<http://tinyurl.com/6k4ozz>).

...we should recognize that the transmission of new ideas (or memes as they are popularly referred to) throughout the world, will lead to the betterment of mankind.

With e-mail, a scientist studying a supernova can collaborate with other scientists all around the world on what he or she has discovered. We are truly a global society.

So we should not be surprised when governments try to shield the citizens of a country from "foreign influences." As an example, China is known to censor access to web sites not deemed conducive to the absolute control of the population by the state. This includes websites on taboo subjects like democracy and the 1989 Tiananmen massacre. (<http://tinyurl.com/5m64lx>)

Also, the roots of Islamic terrorism are often found in the re-

action of Islamic societies to the intrusion of Western ideas into Muslim countries. As Congressman Ron Paul noted in the Republican debates, "They (the Al Queda terrorists) don't come here to attack us because we're rich and we're free. They come and attack us because we're over there (in Muslim countries)." (<http://tinyurl.com/yp4g95>).



Despite the inevitable backlash to any new ideas introduced into a society that threatens the current political and social order, we should recognize that the transmission of new ideas (or memes as they are popularly referred to) throughout the world will lead to the betterment of mankind. Because when people stubbornly rely on tradition or religion as their source of truth and refuse to accept new ideas, their societies often become stagnant at the same time that new ideas improve the quality of life in societies where these new ideas are welcome. This is why I am suspicious of international boycotts. They may make us feel good since we are not allying ourselves with evil, but they also impede the exchange of ideas between societies that may lead to the overthrow of dictatorships.

What can we do to support the propagation of humanistic ideas throughout the world? We

(Continued on page 7)

The Dark Side of the Dalai Lama

Fred W. Hill

Tenzin Gyatso, better known by his title, the Dalai Lama, the 14th such “holy man,” is a living anachronism, a man out of time and place. He has a favorable persona as a wise, affable advocate of universal peace and spiritual harmony—oh, and more particularly, of freedom for his people, the Tibetans, ruled since the 1950s by China. It’s easy enough to fall for the popular myth: the peaceable Buddhist paradise of Tibet invaded by the Chinese communist fiends who forced the Dalai Lama, their benign religious and political ruler, to flee, and have been ruthlessly oppressing the Tibetans ever since. Reality, as usual, paints a different picture.

For starters, Tibet was hardly a humanist utopia prior to the Chinese invasion. Rather, it was a harsh, feudalistic theocracy, primarily ruled by priests since 1642, when the Mongol conqueror Gushi Khan selected Lozang Gyatso, the 5th Dalai Lama, to rule the then nearly thousand-year-old kingdom of Tibet. The title Dalai Lama literally translates, in a Mongolian-Tibetan mix, as “ocean teacher of righteous duty” and is bestowed upon the supposed successive reincarnations of Chenresig, the Bodhisattva, a supernatural being bound for enlightenment, who embodied the compassion of all Buddhas. The new Dalai Lama is usually a young boy picked out after arcane divi-

nations by the elder subordinate lamas after the death of the previous Dalai Lama.

Compassionate enlightenment, as practiced in old Tibet, consisted of ruling over a slave society consisting primarily of serfs who toiled away their lives on the estates of lamas, or the few secular lords who might

And even if the Dalai Lama is a genuinely nice guy, ...he would have ruled a theocracy that exhibited the worst excesses of the union of church and state and may have made a monster even out of the Dalai Lama.

maim, torture, or kill them with impunity. As described by political analyst and author Michael Parenti, *“The theocracy’s religious teachings buttressed its class order. The poor and afflicted were taught that they had brought their troubles upon themselves because of their foolish and wicked ways in previous lives. Hence they had to accept the misery of their present existence as an atonement and in anticipation that their lot would improve upon being reborn. The rich and powerful of course treated their good fortune as a reward for—and tangible evidence of—virtue in past and present lives.”*

(<http://www.swans.com/library/art9/mparen01.html>)

Bertrand Russell observed in 1930, only a few years before the current Dalai Lama’s birth (or reincarnation, if you accept the

myth), “the Buddhist priesthood (as it exists, for example, in Tibet) has been obscurantist, tyrannous, and cruel in the highest degree.” (“Has Religion Made Useful Contributions to Society,” republished in *Why I Am Not a Christian*, 1936). Slavery and serfdom were not abolished in Tibet until 1959, after Chinese forces crushed an attempted rebellion that had been egged on and supported by the CIA, and imposed stricter, more direct rule, ending the auton-

omy that Chairman Mao had previously permitted. Mao, possibly the most cunning political strategist of the 20th century, also made sure that Tenzin Gyatso escaped, not wanting to make a martyr of the holy man and thereby “inflare world opinion, particularly in the Buddhist countries and India” (*Mao: The Untold Story*, Jung Chang & Jon Halliday, 2005, p. 447).

From the modern “Chinese perspective,” as described by Peter Hessler in his article for *The Atlantic* (February 1999), “Tibet through Chinese Eyes” (<http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/99feb/tibet.htm>), the Dalai Lama represents a remnant of a corrupt, unspeakably vicious and barbaric, priest-ridden regime which China rightfully overthrew to bring the light of an advanced civilization to its down-trodden common people. More-



over, they have been taught that “Tibet has always been part of China...a simplistic and inaccurate view,” as Hessler notes, born out of the complex muddle of their long intertwined histories. They were initially united as part of the vast Yuan Dynasty established in the 13th century by the Mongolian conqueror Kublai Khan. Left to itself during the nearly three centuries of the Ming Dynasty (the last of the Han, or “true” Chinese dynasties), it was left to the Manchurians of the Qing Dynasty to again assert hegemony over Tibet during the 18th century, but primarily to use its sparsely populated expanses as a buffer against mutual enemies.

Internal affairs were left to the lamas.

Unlike the Manchurians, the Tibetans were never assimilated into the dominant Han culture, maintaining their own language and traditions. In 1913, two years after the Xinhai Revolution that ended nearly 3,000 years of imperial rule and established a republic in

China, Thubten Gyatso, the 13th Dalai Lama, issued a proclamation asserting, “the existing relationship between China and Tibet had been that of patron and priest and had not been based on the subordination of one to ‘we are a small, religious, and independent nation.’”

(<http://www.tibetjustice.org/materials/tibet/tibet1.html>).

Beset by great difficulties

that nearly tore it apart over the next four decades, China made no effort to assert its claim over Tibet until after Mao established his “people’s republic” in 1949. Determined to achieve control over all regions that he considered part of Greater China, Mao found Tibet, with a weak military and no protective allies, an ideal target. Typical, opportunistic imperialism, as repeatedly practiced by states with the capacity to impose their will, including the United States, of



course. And the Chinese are as disinclined to return Tibet to independent rule by Tibetans as our nation would be to restore the Hawaiian Islands to the ethnic Hawaiians who are now a declining minority in their own homeland. That is a fate feared by Tibetans at home and in exile: being overwhelmed by other ethnic groups migrating to their country in ever larger numbers

and eroding their unique culture, a possibility even if reports of attempted ethnicide of Tibetans by the Chinese government are entirely false.

The exiled embodiment of that endangered culture has naturally focused on what the Dalai Lama regards as its positive, spiritualist aspects. Only 24 years old as he decamped to Dharamsala, India, where Prime Minister Nehru graciously invited him to establish a Tibetan government in exile, he can

hardly be blamed for the misrule of his predecessors or his selection, while a mere toddler of two, as titular head of church and state. Now an elder statesman bereft of a state but recipient of a Nobel Peace Prize, he is one of the most revered religious figures in the world, even if his particular Buddhist sect is relatively small.

Whether this particular incarnation of the enlightened teacher would have abolished the inhumane practices of his country’s ruling class and reformed the corrupt priesthood if he had become the actual political and religious leader of an independent Tibet will never be known. The Chinese may yet permit Tibet

more autonomous rule and welcome the return of this or a successor Dalai Lama, but the old Tibet he was born into is gone for good, and even a majority of Tibetans may be thankful for that.

Admittedly, when another member of our freethought society suggested I write about the Dalai Lama from a skeptical point of view, I was uncertain

about producing a derogatory article about him. After all, even though I'm as skeptical of the supernatural aspects of Buddhism, including reincarnation, as I am of any other religion, the Dalai Lama at least seems a relatively reasonable and decent person, even for a "holy man." Moreover, while I knew little about old Tibet, I was aware of

the atrocious human rights record of the People's Republic of China, particularly during the reign of Chairman Mao. Upon further investigation, I discovered that neither side is, unsurprisingly, all white or black. For all his other crimes, Mao may actually have improved the lot of most Tibetans when he knocked down the power of the lamas.

And even if the Dalai Lama is a genuinely nice guy, who just happens to believe he's the reincarnation of a mythic embodiment of a human feeling, had he not been deposed, he would have ruled a theocracy that exhibited the worst excesses of the union of church and state and may have made a monster out of even the Dalai Lama.



We Are The World...

(Continued from page 4)

should support organizations like the Center for Inquiry that have centers promoting humanism throughout the world. We

also should support government policies that lead to the free exchange of ideas between societies. Humanism, with its emphasis on the here and now, scientific understanding of the universe, and seeking human solu-

tions instead of waiting for a savior, is needed more than ever if we want to continue the amazing human progress that we have experienced in the Twentieth Century.



Ongoing FCFS Activities

Dinners for Doubters

Sign up to attend or to host a dinner yourself. Sign-up sheets will be at the back table at the monthly meetings. For details on how this works, see **page 7 of the August 2008 *FreeThinker*** (available on website) or ask a greeter at the back table.

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

Freethinkers... let's get acquainted and enjoy intelligent conversation **every 4th Sunday of the month** (unless inclement weather prevails) at 10 a.m. until ? at the pavilion at Losco Park, 10851 Hood Rd., S., Jacksonville 32257, between Shad and Losco Roads. Need directions? Call Beth Perry at 733-5489 or Google the address to get a map and directions. We generally provide coffee. Bring breakfast snack and a **chair**. 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 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. If you prefer, leave a notation on the sign-in sheet at the back table at one of our monthly meetings.

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.
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<http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>

Statement of Purpose

The First Coast Freethought Society, Inc. is an educational, nonprofit, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization dedicated to supporting nonreligious persons in the Northeast Florida area and promoting a nontheistic approach to everyday life.

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. Meeting time: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Meetings are free and open to the public. Doors open at 6:00 p.m.

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CWolf@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

October Social

Where: OLIVE GARDEN on Philips Highway, near the Avenues Mall.

When: Tuesday October 28, 2008 at 6:00 p.m. Proceed directly to our room. Drinks at 6:00. Dinner at 7:00. (Order from the menu.)

RSVP: CarrieRen@att.net (or 268-8826) by **Tues. a.m.**, if you plan to go!

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.

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

2009 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? Comments? _____			

Membership level (please select one):

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

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <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) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family (\$45/yr.) | | |

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

- General member Committee member Officer Financial supporter

- Annual dues cover the period of January 1 through December 31.
- The initial dues for new members joining in July through September shall be half the regular rate. Membership shall extend to the end of the current calendar year.
- The initial dues for new members joining in October through December shall be the full, regular rate. Membership shall extend to the end of the following calendar year.

*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 • <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/>
All inquiries are held in the strictest confidence.

FCFS October 2008 Activities

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19 Book group	20 Public Meeting	21	22	23	24	25 Article Deadline
26 Secular Sunday	27	28 Olive Garden	29	30	31	

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

In the Adobe version, the links are **LIVE!** One click takes you there. Two-line links may not work. Best to copy and paste into your browser window.

Start your AMAZON.COM purchases from the link on the FCFS Website and help the FCFS!
[firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org](http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/)

Return service requested



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