

# FIRST COAST FREETHOUGHT SOCIETY, INC.

*An organization of freethinkers and secular humanists supporting free inquiry, education, and community in the Northeast Florida area*

**Our Motto: “To Question is the Answer.”**

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March 2009

Volume 7, Issue 3

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*"In Christianity neither morality nor religion come into contact with reality at any point."*

—Friedrich Nietzsche  
German philosopher

**Beth Perry**

**W**hy is it the media never write about our own "Christian" hate groups? According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (<http://www.splcenter.org/index.jsp>), we have many here in this country and their numbers are growing. Their numbers have doubled in the past few years to approximately 925, with 49 in Florida. The Ku Klux Klan has 155 branches nationally.

For instance, there is Joel's Army, a movement that preaches theocratic ideology of military takeover. One of their leaders, Cana-

dian Todd Bentley, a general in Joel's Army, has preached his hatred and militarism for months on end, right here in Florida. "The Call," a 12-hour revival of up to 20,000 young people, is held in a different city each year.

***These so-called religious hate groups mean harm to this country and we should pay attention.***

One "pastor" is Lou Engle. This army is hard-core Christian "dominionists," believing the entire nation, as well as the world,

should be governed by conservative Christians, with their interpretation of biblical law. They especially are attempting to influence our young people. Their doctrine is that the enforcers of the five-fold ministry will be members of the final generation, for whom the landmark Supreme Court decision Roe vs. Wade constituted a new Passover or, in other words, everyone born after this Bill was passed can "consider their birth a personal invitation to

*(Continued on page 5)*



### March 2009 Meeting

**Richard T. Hull, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at SUNY Buffalo**

## **"Without God, Whence Cometh Morality?"**

**Monday, March 16, 2009, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.**

**(In the Sanctuary, upper parking lot level • Doors open at 6:00)**

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

## HUMANIST BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

**When:** 2:00 p.m., the first Sunday of each month.  
**Where:** Borders Books, 8801 Southside Blvd., 519-6500, books are usually in stock.  
**What:** Books/magazines planned for discussion:



- March 1, 2009 - *Doubt: A History* - The Great Doubters and Their Legacy of Innovation from Socrates and Jesus to Thomas Jefferson and Emily Dickinson, by Jennifer Michael Hecht
- April 5, 2009 - There are a growing number of high quality magazines, newspapers and newsletters devoted to humanism, skepticism, and state/church separation in the U.S.A. To become familiar with them for the April discussion, buy a couple of samples. You will be helping to support some great organizations while keeping abreast of the latest religious foolishness. Here are some magazines to consider:

<i>The Skeptical Review</i>	<i>Freethought Today</i>	<i>The Freethinker</i>
<i>Free Inquiry</i>	<i>Church and State</i>	<i>American Atheist</i>
<i>The Humanist</i>	<i>Reason</i>	<i>The Skeptical Inquirer</i>

For more information, contact moderator Jewell Kross at [JKross@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org](mailto: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!)

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### First Coast FreeThinker

The *First Coast FreeThinker* is published for FCFS members, other freethinkers, and potential freethinkers. Nonmembers may receive three issues free of charge, 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 intended 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.

## Dumbest Movie of the Decade!

Michael Ray Fitzgerald

**S**lumdogg Millionaire cleaned up at Hollywood's 2008 Academy awards, winning Best Picture with Danny Boyle getting the nod as Best Director.

This does not come as a surprise since the movie has been racking up awards for months. It won Best Motion Picture Drama at the Golden Globes, Best Screenplay at the Writers Guild of America awards, and seven awards including Best Picture at the British Academy of Film and Television Arts. In addition, the Director's Guild of America named Boyle Best Director.

Yet, despite its massive success, *Slumdogg Millionaire* may be the most overrated movie of the year if not the decade.

Its premise is based on two crucial lapses in logic—logical problems it asks the viewer to overcome through great leaps of faith. But faith is the opposite of logic, and we all know that movies operate on emotion. Movies are the realm of myth.

Based on the novel *Q&A* by Vikas Swarup, *Slumdogg Millionaire's* story is so predictable that we know in the first scene how it will end; the viewer is told right up front, in a very obvious manner. The movie makes a promise

and then delivers it—all tied up in a nice, neat bow.

This is all-too-familiar, sentimental, formulaic stuff: The incredible adventures of a pair of star-crossed soul-mates who fight their way through hell and high water to be together. Well, the boy (Dev Patel as Jamal Malik) does most of the fighting; the girl (Freida Pinto as Latika) gives up early on. But faith and the power of true love win out in the end and, of course, they live happily ever after.

This time-tested formula nearly always makes for a feel-good date flick. But the idea of a

***Its religious agenda is subtle: Fate—the writers are clever enough never to use the terms “God” or “Allah,” allowing viewers to fill in the blanks as they see fit—has chosen to favor this young couple***

one-and-only true love, promulgated in gazillions of novels and Hollywood movies, is sadly misleading and perhaps more than a bit damaging for the people who fall for it. Where is it written that we can only truly love one person for the rest of our lives? If that is the case, then it's a terrible thing if that person doesn't love us, or if he or she dumps us or dies—life without that person presumably would not be worth living.

But let's not even go there. This is merely one of the bogus presumptions upon which *Slumdogg Millionaire's* argument operates. The movie's theme is, “It is written.” The obvious question here is: written in what and by whom?

*Slumdogg Millionaire's* religious theme is obscured under—or, rather, behind—Jamal's relentless struggle to be with and eventually to rescue Latika, his one and only love. Never-ending devotion for one's soul mate and to God are conflated—these are presented as different aspects of the same concept. Combine the Old Testament Book of Job with a soapy love story and you get the picture.

Visually, the film is grossly overdone: too many gimmicks, too many jump cuts, too many effects, too much like a music video. It even ends with a celebratory street-dance scene straight out of Michael Jackson's 1983 video for *Thriller*.

The movie plays mainly to ordinary people's empathy for the underdog. We are invited to identify with the ever-struggling protagonist who finally “makes it.” *Slumdogg Millionaire's* storyline cleverly adheres to mainstream (Western) narrative conventions: everyone loves a loser



who hangs in there against all odds and finally succeeds. In the U.S., this is perhaps our very definition of a hero—a classic Horatio Alger story.

The almost entirely WASPish audience I sat with actually applauded at the end.

Maybe that's a good thing. In this era of often fatal jealousies among Abrahamic sects, maybe a little religious tolerance is a positive step—at least compared to the prospect of fighting another series of Holy Crusades, which is where the Bush administration seemed to be taking us after 9/11. Maybe it's a good thing that Westerners can see Muslims portrayed as human beings instead of demons for a change. Maybe this is the right movie for the right time: We now have a president who is a Christian with an Arabic name. Maybe it's time for a little healing between Christians and Muslims.

*Slumdog Millionaire* is not going to do much for Muslim-Hindu relations, however. It depicts a great deal of Hindu violence against Muslims but never the other way around. Moreover, there is no historical context or explanation for the Hindus' anger—they are simply portrayed as sadistic, irrational, and implacably hostile. It depicts Indian Muslims mostly as helpless victims of poverty and Hindu prejudice. This film, by omission, paints Muslims as the

only poverty-stricken, oppressed minority in India.

This, then, is a film designed to appeal to oppressed Muslims—a huge, worldwide audience. At the same time it is astute enough to appeal to Western sensibilities and story styles. Its religious agenda is subtle: Fate—the writers are clever enough never to use the terms “God” or “Allah,” allowing viewers to fill in the blanks as they see fit—has chosen to favor this young couple.

But why?



Actually, there is an underlying religious theme in most movies. Screenwriter and college instructor Howard Suber alludes to this in his book *The Power of Film*: Justice must always be done; audiences everywhere demand it. It is written.

This idea suggests that we are living in a giant Panopticon with a cosmic judge looking down on all of us. Apparently this is one of those ideas most people accept as children and rarely give much thought to. However, if viewers were to apply a little logic instead of think-

ing with their emotions, they might add up the two propositions *Slumdog's* story relies upon: A) that some supernatural intercessor is looking out for these two glorious lovers, and B) that millions of Muslims are being abused and oppressed in India (and elsewhere).

At this point a logical person would arrive at an inescapable impasse: How can both of these propositions be true at the same time? God has the power to rescue Jamal, who in turn rescues Latika, yet he lets millions if not billions of his believers suffer abuse, starvation, degradation? What makes Jamal—who doesn't even seem fervently religious—so much more worthy than everyone else?

Is he purer? Stronger? Just lucky?

Perhaps we will find out in the inevitable sequel, which could have Jamal and Latika pen a self-improvement book that will enlighten and assist their fellow believers: *How We Won Allah's Lottery*. They can even appear on Oprah—she has already lauded *Slumdog I* on her TV talk show. Winfrey could play herself in the sequel.

Better still, Jamal and Latika could start their own TV talk show and sell their ideas to millions—no, billions—of less-fortunate Muslims (and Americans): Jamal and Latika become the Jim and Tammy of Islam.



## American Hate Groups

(Continued from page 1)

take part in this great army.” (*Intelligence Report*, Fall 2008 issue.) Its leaders are extremely popular on Elijah’s List, an online site for a broad spectrum of Joel’s Army enlistees. Doesn’t this sound like the Taliban?

Another organization, becoming more militant and rapidly growing, is the black supremacist wing of the Hebrew Israelite movement. To my knowledge, the nearest branch to us is in Baltimore at the Israelite Church of God in Jesus Christ. The movement is headquartered in New York City. They are obsessed with hatred for whites and Jews and have managed to build up 29 church branches in recent years. This is not the only one. Around the country, thousands have joined black supremacist groups of this movement.

There is a black nationalist theology dating back to the 19th century. Their doctrine asserts that African Americans are God’s chosen people because they are the real descendants of the Hebrews in the Bible, not the Jews. Their beliefs are the reverse of the Christian Identity theology that is embraced by



white supremacists. They believe that when Christ returns, the white people who are not killed by Christ will go into slavery. They also preach “The Holocaust is a joke! Heil Hitler!” They congregate at busy inter-

sections in Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore, and Washington D.C., verbally assaulting white pedestrians.

So why don’t the media ever write about these groups? Isn’t it bad enough that we’ve had a mostly secretive government 28 out of the past 40 years? These so-called religious hate groups mean harm to this country and we should pay attention. The Southern Poverty Law Center, headquartered in Montgomery, AL, and founded by Morris Dees and Joseph Levin, Jr. has been monitoring these hate groups for at least twenty plus years, and managed to sue and win a judgment against the Ku Klux Klan which put them out of business for a number of years. However, even it is making a comeback.

Dees is an attorney who keeps track of the hate groups and bankrupts them through lawsuits after they commit crimes. Half of his staff of about twenty includes armed guards to protect him. Of the hate groups in Florida, four are Ku Klux Klans; eight are Neo-Nazis; five are White Nationalists (one in Jacksonville); two are Racist Skinheads (one in Jacksonville); one is Christian Identify; fourteen are Neo-Confederate; three are Black Separatists (one in Jacksonville); two are General Hate; one is Patriot; and one is National Association for the Advancement of White People (in Jacksonville).

### Wanted: *FreeThinker* Assistant Editor

- Responsible for design of intellectually stimulating and visually pleasing monthly newsletter using submitted articles and appropriate visual material.
- The position requires approximately eight to ten hours over a one week period every month.
- Applicant should be comfortable with computers and familiar with desktop publishing programs such as MS Publisher.
- Applicant should be self motivated, disciplined, and should take great pride in his or her work.
- Contact Hugo Borresen: [hborresen@bellsouth.net](mailto:hborresen@bellsouth.net) or call 779-6883



## Bills Before the 2009 Florida Legislature About Which Freethinkers Should Know

Curtis Wolf

It is time for the fourth annual review of bills coming before the 2009 Florida Legislature that may interest or even terrify freethinkers who believe in separation of church and state and in using reason when judging government policy. The Florida Legislature will convene its regular session on March 3rd.

I am using the same criteria for selecting the bills in this article that I have used in previous years:

Does the bill advance religion or religious ideas?

Does the bill cover an issue in which religious arguments are presented on one side of the issue?

Does the bill advance or discourage pseudoscience?

Please note that the First Coast Freethought Society neither endorses nor opposes any of these bills. This is for informational purposes only.

Gay rights are popular with legislators this year. HB 397 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. HB 413 removes the statutory prohibition against adoption by gays or lesbians. SB 460 does the same when certain conditions are met such as the death of both parents and the designation of the guardianship of the child

to the gay or lesbian adoption applicant. Why the state has a compelling interest in prohibiting gays and lesbians from giving children a much needed home in the first place is beyond me.

SB 1642 could also help gays and lesbians enjoy something akin to wedded bliss by allowing them to become domestic partners with many of the rights enjoyed by married persons. As I have noted in an earlier article, I believe that marriage should be a private contract not subject to state regulation beyond the ap-

***If Wise's anti-evolution bill passes, which is quite possible, it will surely lead to a lawsuit and waste taxpayer money on a costly court case.***

plication of contract law. But this bill is a move in the right direction in that at least we are given an alternative to marriage.

Faith-based prisons are given a thumbs up by HB 71. While the bill includes the usual prohibition against religious proselytization, we know that many Christians will not pass up the opportunity to save someone's soul if this opportunity becomes available. While I do not disagree with allowing people of faith to establish mentoring relationships with inmates through a secular based volunteer pro-

gram that assists the inmates in reintegrating into society, such a program does need to have the faith-based label and be administered by a chaplain as it is in this bill.

Abortion rights are the concern of two bills. HB 129 requires that emergency contraception be provided to rape victims by health care practitioners and pharmacists. While an individual pharmacist can refuse to fill the prescription for religious reasons, the pharmacy must find someone to comply with the woman's request for emergency contraception without delay.

Also, HB 983 requires a woman seeking an abortion to view an ultrasound image of the fetus unless she specifically declines to do so. SB 590 prohibits minors from other states from using Florida courts to apply for a waiver of parental notification of an abortion by the minor.

Two bills will continue the culture wars raging in our public schools. HB 265 requires comprehensive and medically accurate sex education in the public schools. HB 533 allows for "inspirational messages" that include prayer if the majority of students request the message and a fellow student delivers the



message. That's right. As long as we have a majority, it is OK to suspend the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution!

Finally, Senator Stephen Wise has introduced a bill on the teaching of evolution as promised. SB 2396 calls for a "thorough presentation and critical analysis of the scientific theory of evolution." I suppose that we could give him the benefit of the doubt that he wants our teachers to do a "thorough" job of teaching our science standards and promoting critical thinking, but I think that we know better. This bill is clearly intended to

give teachers some wiggle room to introduce at the very least popular "weaknesses" of Darwinian evolution into the classroom.

Fortunately, it does not specifically mention Intelligent Design, as suggested by his quote in the *Florida Times-Union* that if "you're going to teach evolution, then you have to teach the other side so you can have critical thinking."

([http://www.jacksonville.com/news/metro/2009-02-08-story/wise\\_to\\_introduce\\_intelligent\\_design\\_bill](http://www.jacksonville.com/news/metro/2009-02-08-story/wise_to_introduce_intelligent_design_bill)). But it does allow religious opponents of evolution to get a foot in the door and

pick away at the scientifically-validated theory of evolution within the constraints imposed by federal court rulings against the teaching of creationism, until they are able to overturn these rulings.

If Wise's anti-evolution bill passes, which is quite possible, it will surely lead to a lawsuit and waste taxpayer money on a costly court case. With all the talk of state budget deficits this year, this is nothing more than an irresponsible abdication of his responsibilities to the citizens of Florida to spend their money wisely.



## 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 a 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](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). If you prefer, leave a notation on the sign-in sheet at the back table at one of our monthly meetings.



## What on Earth Was I Doing?

David Schwam-Baird

*A very popular error: having the courage of one's convictions; rather it is a matter of having the courage for an attack on one's convictions!!!*

—Friedrich Nietzsche

*If human beings can indeed be described as rational animals, it is precisely by virtue of the fact that humans, of all the animals, are the only ones capable of irrational thoughts and actions.*

—Ronald de Sousa

Many years ago, when I was living in Israel, I took part in a demonstration in the Occupied Territories. This demonstration was organized by the Israeli Peace Movement, known as "Peace Now." The idea was to have a demonstration that would block the roadway that had been plowed through Palestinian fields by right-wing Israeli settlers who were planning to create a small settler village on land taken from local Palestinian farmers. There was a plea before the Israeli Supreme Court to issue an injunction to prevent this settlement from going up, but the settlers were trying to get the settlement in place before the Court had a chance to decide the case. So we were going to block the road to prevent the settlers from bringing their

trucks and cars to the site.

During the day of that protest, there were perhaps a thousand Israeli Peace Now activists, including some dovish members of parliament, and the road was effectively blocked. But most of the demonstrators were going to leave before sundown. About a hundred of us decided to stay on the road the whole night. We had made a blockade on the road with rocks, and we were going to sleep around the blockade to prevent the settlers from moving in.

Later that evening, we heard some noise, and we got up to see

roughly with us, but we didn't know that at the time.) This was way back when the Israeli Defense Minister was a relatively decent man, Ezer Weizman.



The soldiers were sent back up, in formation, shouting and yelling at us to get out of the way. So we fell back again, and they cleared the roadblock. They fell back, and we put the roadblock back in place, a few dozen

meters further up the road. This happened a few times that night.

Early the next morning, Israeli Peace Now protesters started coming back, swelling our numbers.

***We must act morally. But in doing so, we are almost always confronting others who think, with no less conviction, that it is their moral duty to oppose us!***

what was going on. A group of about 20 or 30 Israeli soldiers had come to clear the road. They pushed us back and then dismantled our roadblock. Then they fell back. At first, we peaceniks just milled around, trying to see what would happen next. But some of our folks began throwing rocks back onto the road, and before long, we were all rebuilding our roadblock.

Apparently the soldiers were now confused. We guessed that their commander thought that their "push" would scare us away. (We found out later that they had orders not to deal

Some of the dovish parliamentarians had finally persuaded Weizman himself to come out. He arrived later in the day by military helicopter. Our leaders managed to drag the discussions out until we found out that the Israeli Supreme Court had issued the injunction against the settlers. That particular settlement, at least, was stopped.

I often think about that experience. Staying out all night in the middle of the West Bank, not being sure if the soldiers would arrest us or rough us up, not knowing if the settlers might do something fishy, or even if

some radical Palestinians might get involved (they didn't), all made this a rather frightening experience. But it was also an exhilarating experience. I had been active in the Peace Now movement in Israeli for many years, but that usually involved participating in large (legal) demonstrations in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem, or handing out leaflets on a street-corner. This demonstration was entirely different. There was uncertainty. There was risk. It was actually illegal. I felt that I was really putting my convictions to the test.

I am still very proud that I participated in that all-night demonstration-cum-confrontation. But in my more

reflective moments I can't help but wonder what made my commitment to this issue different from the commitment of those on the other side. They, too, took risks, made sacrifices. But—of course—they were wrong. I could go on all day and all night about why these fanatical settlers were wrong and unethical and dangerous. But undoubtedly, they could hold forth about

why what they were doing was the Lord's Work, fulfilling prophecy, etc. What was it that made my actions laudable, but made their actions reprehensible? (Because the actions of the Israeli right-wing fanatics ARE reprehensible!!)

I believe (oh no—must I fall back on that most dubious of words?!) that at the very least,



### *Israeli Settlements*

my story here touches on one of the important quandaries of human existence. We must do what is ethically right. We must act morally. But in doing so, we are almost always confronting others who think, with no less conviction, that it is their moral duty to oppose us! It would be ethically wrong to back down, to turn away from doing what we know to be right. But it is also

imperative that we not fall into the trap of arrogance, of assuming that there can be no doubts, that we, and we alone, have got it right. We need to take a stand to be willing to take risks for principles like equality and democracy and justice.

But we also have to constantly re-examine and re-evaluate our own convictions, and be ready to admit our mistakes. One of the great challenges of life is to be able to take a stand when we must, but without becoming fanatics. We must be willing to take a stand even as we remain willing to continue to question our own convictions. The one thing that I do

know about the difference between my comrades and me back then on that hill in the West Bank, as opposed to the fanatical true-believer settlers, with the glaze of unreason in their eyes, is that we were willing to keep asking questions. We are willing to realize that we are only human. You know—sometimes we might even be wrong ... (ah, but not THAT time!!)

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## Quoting Epicurus

If God listened to the prayers of men, all men would quickly have perished: for they are forever praying for evil against one another.



## A Humorous Thing Happened on the Way to the Anatomy Lesson

Fred W. Hill

Once among the greatest mysteries to humanity were our own bodies. They were so near yet so far from our understanding that they were like distant suns that could be seen but not closely studied. Partly, this was due to technological deficiencies, such as the means to keep bodies from rotting while they were being studied, or to see microscopic parts of the body. Largely, however, it was due to cultural and legal restrictions on cutting open human bodies in the pursuit of knowledge about them. Another stumbling block during a long period from antiquity to the Victorian Era was excessive deference to the writings of Galen, a second century CE Greek physician who served in the courts of the Roman emperors Marcus Aurelius and Commodus.

Galen's marked lasting influence, as related by Daniel J. Boorstin in *The Discoverers* (Vintage Books, 1985), sprang not so much from his reputation as the best and most knowledgeable physician of his era but to the survival of many of his voluminous writings, predominantly through Arabic translations, which essentially formed a compilation of the medical lore of his admired predecessors and "his own philosophy of medical procedures" (Boorstin, p. 345). One predecessor championed by Galen was Hippocrates, the

famed Greek "father of medicine," born circa 460 BCE, who determined that contrary to the prevailing wisdom of his time, illnesses were not caused by gods or demons determined to punish or torment us, but were instead due to entirely natural causes, including the environment, diet, and living habits. This was a significant step in medical progress, even if religious zealots still abound seeing supernatural causes for everything that ails us and revering the story of the reputed first century healer who transferred devils out of a sick man and into a herd of swine.

*If they could, Galen and Darwin might both insist that the creationists get their faces out of their dusty old super-naturalist tomes and take a closer look at the natural world itself.*

Alas, Hippocrates himself managed the trick of exchanging one ill-founded medical myth for another—the hypothesis that physical illnesses and personality disorders are caused by an imbalance of the four humors believed to fill our bodies: blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile. Although related terminology, such as melancholic, choleric, and humor itself, remains in use, albeit with revised mean-

ings, the idea itself has long since been thoroughly discredited. Galen's writings, however, kept the humorous notion of diseases long in circulation, despite his caution, "If anyone wishes to observe the works of Nature, he should put his trust not in books on anatomy but in his own eyes...." (Boorstin, 346).

Galen's personal observations of internal human anatomy and physiology were limited by Roman laws prohibiting dissections of human bodies, so he relied on what he could discern while treating the wounds of gladiators and soldiers, through dissecting pigs and monkeys, and applying his discoveries to humans, as he admitted while lamenting the restrictions that forced him to do so. In the coming centuries, as the Roman Empire withered away and much ancient wisdom was lost, the surviving texts of Galen's flawed projections would become the authoritative source of knowledge on human anatomy in the Christian and Muslim worlds. Even questioning Galen's writings on human anatomy was staunchly discouraged by most prominent physicians and universities, where reliance on authority, rather than free scientific inquiry, had yet to be downgraded to a fallacy.

Galenists such as Jacobus Sylvius, the leading professor of



anatomy in Paris in 1525, “believed that the most important contribution to a better knowledge of the human body would be a more accurate Latin rendering of the purest Greek text of Galen” (Boorstin, 347). The thought would likely have appalled Galen himself. The treatment of bloodletting was based on acceptance of the notion of humors and was used in an attempt to cure George Washington of laryngitis in 1799 and may have been more responsible for his death than the actual disease.

Galen hadn’t intended to impede further research and knowledge about the human body. Rather, it was the cultural and religious taboos of the pagan Roman, Islamic Arab, and Christian European civilizations that forbade taking apart dead human bodies for medical research that could help the living, even if they saw no problem in directing humans to be slaughtered in nearly every grisly way imaginable during nearly ceaseless wars or for any number of crimes, including questioning religious or royal authority. Galen’s texts were fetishized much the same as bibles have been, if in a much more limited manner.

Gradually, however, over the course of a millennium, physicians dedicated to learning how to better heal their patients, to discovering what worked and discarding what didn’t, found ways to obtain human bodies for

research, usually soldiers slain on battlefields, executed criminals, or suspected victims of epidemics or homicide provided for determination of the cause of death. In 9th century Persia, Abū Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariyā Razi methodically studied the various diseases he came across as a physician and reported that Galen’s descriptions did not agree with his own clinical observations; Razi also con-

Galienism on medical science.

Modern creationists may venture to find an analogy between Galen’s humors and Darwin’s evolution, although they would miss significant distinctions. Among them, unlike Galen’s hypotheses of humors as an explanation of illnesses, tests of Darwin’s hypotheses of natural selection as an explanation of evolution have substantiated it to such a high degree of probability that it became a scientific theory widely accepted within the scientific community. Further, Darwin’s theories were based on his observations of geology, fossils, and living flora and fauna which led him to question and ultimately reject the authority of ancient received wisdom regarding the origin of species.

While Darwin’s own writings are widely admired and respected by those who accept the validity of evolution, they have never been regarded as sacred writ that must never be questioned. Creationists, of course, have an uncritical attitude towards their bibles and continue to believe they can better understand the natural world by more intense study of their holy texts. If they could, Galen and Darwin might both insist that the creationists get their faces out of their dusty old super-naturalist tomes and take a closer look at the natural world itself.



CLAUDE GALIENUS.

## *Galen of Pergamum*

ducted experiments to test the humorous hypothesis and arrived at negative results. Further experiments and anatomical studies by Ibn al-Nafis in 13th century Egypt, Andrea Vesalius in the 16th century France and the Netherlands, and Rudolf Virchow in 19th century Germany, among many others, finally released the hold of



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.

### Committees and Chairs

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## March Social

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

**When:** Tuesday March 24, 2009 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](mailto:CarrieRen@att.net) (or 268-8826) by **Tues. a.m.**, if you plan to go!

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.

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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):

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <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, distributed to other members?  Yes  No

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

- 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** are half the regular rates. Membership extends to the end of the current calendar year.
- The initial dues for new members joining in **October through December** are the full, regular rates. Membership extends 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](mailto:CarrieRen@att.net) • <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/>  
All inquiries are held in the strictest confidence.

# FCFS March 2009 Activities

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

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

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

## SOME 2009 MEMBERSHIP DUES STILL DUE!

Carrie Renwick

**R**emember, everyone, the FCFS membership year runs from January 1 through December 31. If you have not joined, we welcome your membership. If you plan to renew for 2009 but have not yet done so, we encourage your renewal.

To make sure we reach everyone, we will send e-mail reminders to those who still have not yet renewed. In late March, we will send out

“snail-mail” reminders.

Needless to say, if you could renew before we send the U. S. Mail reminders, the FCFS will save postage as well as trees.

Remember also, nonprofit organizations depend on the support of their members to exist. Note the higher levels of membership we offer, but we need and value your membership at whatever level you choose!

Why not join or renew

right now, while you're thinking about it. You can either pop a check in the mail to the FCFS, at P. O. Box 550591, Jax, FL 32255, or visit the website to join on line using a credit card or PayPal. Here is the link for your convenience.



<http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/support.htm>

Thank you!!

