

# 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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First Coast

# FreeThinker



The Newsletter of the First Coast Freethought Society

November 2009

Volume 7, Issue 11

Inside this issue:

## November 2009 President's Message

Special Section: More Observations on Poverty and Capitalism	4
Little Green Men Vacationing on Earth?	8
The God Question	9
Bylaws Amendment Has Passed	14
Election of 2010 FCFS Officers	14

*"You're basically killing each other to see who has the better imaginary friend."*

— Richard Jeni

### Earl Coggins

**F**reethinkers don't all think—alike. If they did, there would be no need for the countless variations defined in the labels I wrote about last month, i.e. atheist, agnostic, humanist, etc., etc., ad infinitum. Most of us agree that freethinkers come to conclusions independent of authority. After that, predicting the behavior

or thought processes of freethinkers becomes synonymous with herding cats.

But what happens next?

Say you conclude that all religions are the

pothesis that asserts religion to be the opiate of the masses.

Does that mean the masses lose something?

Should we—the freethinkers who have the wherewithal, time, resources, and/or courage, to research the origins of theology and challenge the theistic status quo to

put their proverbial money where their religion is? (Continued on page 3)

***"In order to generate a hypothesis, one must first speculate and/or observe. The First Coast FreeThinker encourages such speculation, which leads to healthy debate and reflection on a great number of..."***

## November 2009 Meeting

### Jeff Brumley

Staff Writer with the *Florida Times-Union*

## "An Overview of Church/State Separation Issues on Florida's First Coast"

Monday, November 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

**What:** Books/magazines planned for discussion.

- December 6, 2009 - *Coal Country*, a film by Mari-Lynn Evans & Phylis Geller (see below)
- January 3, 2010 - *Night*, by Ellie Wiesel; and view the PBS presentation, *God on Trial*

Books may be found in the library, may be purchased from local book stores, or purchased online. The First Coast Freethought Society will receive a small remuneration from your purchase (at no additional cost to you) if you first go to <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/> and then click the link to Amazon.com for your purchase.

**T**he Humanist Book Discussion, Sunday December 6, 2009, will meet at Jane Flesher's home. Instead of a book, this month's meeting will highlight a new documentary on mountaintop removal, "Coal Country." Mountaintop removal is the destructive mining practice where mountaintops are blasted away to expose the coal. The waste is then dumped in the waterways of nearby communities, filling valleys and covering fresh water streams, devastating some of the poorest Americans and their way of life. We will see a 40-minute version of the movie and will have available, via phone, a mountaintop removal activist to answer any questions we may have about the movie.

Lunch will be provided. Come early for lunch and socializing at 1:00; the movie will begin at 2:00; and stay for discussion following the film.

Any questions, phone Jane at 287-6434. Seating is limited, so please RSVP to Jane before December 4<sup>th</sup>.

For more info, contact Jewell Kross at [JKross@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org](mailto:JKross@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org) or call 904-996-1553.

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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 that stimulate thought and promote 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.

(November 2009 President's Message  
Continued from page 1)

gious mouths seem to reside—conclude that the masses are somehow less than normal simply because they lack our worldview?

Granted, people similar to or aspiring to emulate the likes of Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, James Dobson, Tim LaHaye, Phyllis Schlafly, or Anita Bryant, may indeed deserve their fate—to be perceived as neurotic religious fundamentalists synonymous with the Afghan Taliban and Iranian Mullahs—something typical atheists hardly resemble. But what about the freethinkers outside of the proverbial bell curve—the atypical freethinkers? (For example, fundamentalist atheists.) What do we do with them? If a freethinker does not fall within your freethought bell curve, what happens?

After reading about the beginnings of the known universe, (i.e. The Big Bang Theory), I understand why people have many different ideas on why we are here, why the universe is here, why anything is here, why anything matters.

As far as I am concerned, it's okay to have a difficult time grasping that the universe originated as a combination of a massive amount of hydrogen atoms combined with a smaller amount of helium atoms, then transformed into the elements of the periodic table, then developed the ability to become self-

replicating life and eventually became sentient beings able to discover the cosmic microwave radiation background in the universe we live in. It's okay. Having difficulty grasping anything is okay.

Contemplating the universe has to have an effect on a person. Quite frankly, it blows my mind. Are we to believe that passive hydrogen and helium atoms never knew how to develop a human eye, a binary computer language, quantum mechanics, or the ability to practice reciprocal altruism—or were such abilities innate in the pri-

***It is my hope that the First Coast FreeThinker will continue to push that well-known envelope.***

mordial soup immediately following the explosion that many scientists say produced our universe? And if intelligence was innate, when did the hydrogen and helium or its descendents (the periodic table) acquire such skills? For that matter, why hydrogen and helium? Why anything? More profound to ponder is where these skills and traits came from. A universe seething at a thousand million degrees has lurking within its core the ability to produce Andy Warhol, raccoons, iPhones, and Hula Hoops? What!?! The answers to such questions are worthy of contemplation, but back to my current message.

My position here is to drive home a point—and that point is

simple: Humans don't have all the answers. A lot of people are merely speculating about cosmology, biology, astronomy, physiology, psychology, physics, and even the economics and philosophy of poverty, to name a few.

In order to generate a hypothesis, one must first speculate and/or observe. The *First Coast FreeThinker* encourages such speculation which leads to healthy debate and reflection on a great number of interesting and stimulating subjects. The First Coast Freethought Society also encourages skepticism which leads to dissent—an important component of any democracy.

Recent articles in this newsletter have been the catalyst for much debate and reflection. I look at the authors of these articles, as well as their critics—as dissenters—an important component of any democracy.

So, what is the point now?

Democracy works yet again! The authors had their say—the readers were able to voice their opinions—and no one was arrested or burned at the stake.

It is my hope that the *First Coast FreeThinker* will continue to push that well-known envelope. We do it by publishing a variety of opinions—including those that may be unpopular. It is my sincere belief that hearing both sides of an argument can be a healthy endeavor. I look forward to your side.



## Special Section: More Observations on Poverty and Capitalism

Fred W. Hill

Freethinking begins with questions—not just about the supernatural, but also regarding how we live and how we should treat one another, other living beings, and the environment that sustains our very lives as well as our economic well-being. Freethinkers do not adhere to any alleged holy text, aware that none provides any coherent directions on how best to live our lives and that those cultures that have attempted to govern by such texts have been dismal dystopias.

We may not all think of ourselves as atheists, hard or soft, but freethinkers share, as Susan Jacoby wrote, “a rationalist approach to fundamental questions of earthly existence—a conviction that the affairs of human beings should be governed not by faith in the supernatural but by a reliance on reason and evidence aduced from the natural world.” (*Freethinkers*, 2004, pp. 4-5)

Such reliance does not provide easy answers to many questions, including those dealing with our obligations to one another. Different outlooks on such questions were topics of articles in the last two issues of the *FreeThinker*, “Poverty is a Capital Crime in the U.S.” by Michael Ray Fitzgerald (Volume 7, Issue 9); and a critical response, “My Observations Concerning Poverty and Capitalism” by Curtis Wolf (Volume 7, Issue 10). Curtis’ article has, in turn, generated more responses, published in this special section. The opinions expressed by the contributors to this periodical are entirely their own and are not meant to reflect an endorsement by this newsletter or the First Coast Freethought Society.

Longtime readers of the *FreeThinker* are likely aware that both Curtis and Michael are former assistant editors of this newsletter and continue to contribute articles. Despite apparently very different opinions on economics and politics, both are

very much freethinkers, illustrating the diversity of our members who may regard themselves as liberals, progressives, moderates, libertarians or even conservatives, among other labels.

Salman Rushdie, who knows something about extreme responses to the written word, has reflected, “freedom is the space in which contradiction can reign, it is a never-ending debate. It is not in itself the answer to the question of morals but the conversation about that question.” (“Imagine There’s No Heaven,” *Step Across This Line*, 2002, p. 144).

Whatever profound disagreements we may have, no fatwa will be forthcoming as we strive to retain a civil conversation while promoting a rational outlook on life, the universe and everything.



## LET THEM EAT CAKE: My Rebuttal to Curtis Wolf’s Observations

Corina Vacco

I find Curtis Wolf’s articles to be incredibly offensive. I am an educated liberal, well-read and well-traveled, and I can cite dozens of brilliant books containing profound intellectual arguments in defense of Liberalism and socially responsible economic philosophies. When Wolf points out all the obvious “truths” Liberals like me “can’t seem to grasp,” I take it personally.

At best, Wolf’s praise of capitalism amounts to gross oversim-

plification. At worst, Wolf’s writing is smug and brimming with unsupported facts and unexamined assumptions. He talks as though he’s enlightened, as though Liberals are lost, and when I read his work, I am reminded of how Born Again Christians often speak to atheists, with baffled pity at how we just don’t “get it.” Wolf worships “The Invisible Hand of the Market,” a force for which there is no evidence. He is frustrated by naïve Liberals who believe government regulations are sometimes

needed. If we would just have a little faith, he argues, the Invisible Hand of the Market would keep Monsanto from creating DDT, would keep Bethlehem Steel from burying Uranium in uncapped landfills near elementary schools, would prevent slavery and child labor, would keep toxins out of our children’s toys, and would ensure that chefs always wash





their hands. Yes, Mr. Wolf, we all want to have faith, but history has shown us The Invisible Hand of the Market is impotent.

Capitalist cheerleaders argue that companies choosing to produce safe, quality products are always rewarded by the consumer, *ergo*, incentive. But what happens when low standards become the norm? When companies are forced to cut corners just to keep up with the dirtiest of the dirty? Slavery happened. Enron happened. Exxon Valdez happened. Regulations are a skeptic's answer to the reassurances of the greedy. Common sense and an elementary knowledge of human nature tell us that the risks of total deregulation, capitalism in its purest form, are too great; likewise, faith and hopeful inaction leave us too vulnerable.

What Wolf is missing is an imagination. We already know companies cut corners even when regulations are in place, albeit, they are often caught. But let's pretend government regulations have been wiped out suddenly and definitively. Would Wolf honestly fly on uninspected airplanes? Would he ingest untested pharmaceuticals? Would he feel confident no cow tumors would be found in his hamburger? Is he certain that lead wouldn't creep back into paint, that not a single chemical company would dump poisonous sludge in his neighborhood, that banned pesticides would stay off the market? No anhydrous ammonia explosions at our ports? No toxic discharges into our oceans? Wolf's optimism is sweet, but the truth is that regulations came about

because business owners, time and time again, have made decisions based on profit, with a total disregard for public safety. People were dying. The honor system wasn't working. Remember when car companies were in unanimous revolt against intuitive safety features like seatbelts? It's not as easy as asking consumers to boycott companies who misbehave—because we have no recourse if collusion occurs and *all* companies begin misbehaving, as was the case when relentless toxic dumping was the standard beginning in the '40s and persisting

***“Common sense and an elementary knowledge of human nature tell us that the risks of total deregulation, capitalism in its purest form, are too great; likewise, faith and hopeful inaction leave us too vulnerable.”***

through the '70s until the Love Canal disaster *finally* convinced the government to intervene.

I'd also like to challenge Wolf's brazen claim that the poor have somehow earned their place. He says this with no sense of context, as if it has not been proven that student loans are unbearable for the very poor, and that a full-time minimum wage salary (so often without benefits) cannot possibly cover rent, medical insurance, transportation, healthful food, daycare, clothing, vehicle maintenance, and school tuition, while still having enough left over for even modest savings and perhaps a small investment portfolio, not to mention recreation. Wolf must be joking. But I sort of hope he's serious—so serious, in fact, that he'd budget this out for us in writ-

ing. I want him to take a minimum wage, full-time salary, deduct income taxes, and please enlighten us on how poor people can simply do as he suggested and “Improve their skill set!” (Exclamation point is Curtis Wolf's, not mine.)

Furthermore, *how dare he* brazenly imply that the rich and successful have all somehow earned their place! We need look no further than George W. Bush to see that being born into a rich, influential family will secure you an unearned spot at an ivy league school, will allow you to stay in

school despite unworthy grades, and will facilitate your ducking out of military service without a dishonorable discharge. Perhaps you can even slide into the presidency despite having been arrested three times and regardless of voting irregularities that went virtually un-

challenged in a state that was conveniently governed by your rich and influential brother. Did George W. Bush really earn his lifestyle? *Really?* He got poor grades! He was a failed businessman who couldn't strike oil in Texas of all places!

Wolf insists Liberals want income equality. He's wrong. Income equality is unfair and unrealistic. No Liberal would *ever* suggest that a doctor should be paid what a Wal-Mart cashier is paid; that would be absurd. But Liberals do want the working poor to be paid living wages. Liberals do believe starving, poorly educated children; people living paycheck to paycheck on wages that leave nothing leftover for savings;

*(Continued on page 6)*

(Continued from page 5)

and uninsured tax payers crowding emergency rooms with ailments like sore throats and headaches, is unacceptable. This *is* the wealthiest nation in the world. On one hand we have billionaires who are hiding money in other countries to avoid paying taxes, and on the other hand we have children going to run-down schools and trying to learn from outdated books without having had breakfast. On one hand we have AIG executives getting outrageously large bonuses, even when productivity was poor, and on the other hand we have middle class families who have a lifetime of savings wiped out because one member is diagnosed with breast cancer. Migrant farm workers are some of the hardest workers in the world, while plenty of people “climbing the corporate ladder” succeed because of connections, cut-throat business practices, and luck rather than hard work. It’s not as simple as trying harder and earning your place. It’s not as simple as telling a person who’s working three jobs that he ought to go to school and improve his skill set. Bottom line: there are ways to address these disparities while still allowing the wealthy to stay wealthy.

Oh, and please, don’t even get me started on Wolf’s claim that the poor have made no cultural contributions. Slaves built the pyramids. Gold for jewelry and towers was stolen from indigenous people throughout Central and South America. Starving artists and poets become famous centuries after their deaths. Blues musicians played second-hand instruments in rickety barns. Are these things not cultural contributions? The wealthy have made their for-

tunes on the backs of the poor.

Finally, I’d like to address Wolf’s proposal that poverty comes as a result of “natural selection,” that poor people are poor because they’ve inherited zero skills and no real capacity for learning; therefore there’s conveniently nothing we can do about it as nature has made its choice. He’s wrong. Natural selection is observed in nature. When a lion catches the slowest antelope, that slow antelope cannot go on to breed. But what happens if we pluck a lion from the Serengeti and give him veterinary care, steroids, and intravenous nutrients? He’ll have an unnatural advantage. He’ll be able to catch the very fastest antelope. That isn’t “natural.” Terrorists with nuclear bombs are the most formidable predators of all—does that mean they deserve their advantage and that society as a whole should tolerate their violence? Are those who die at the detonation of a nuclear bomb being weeded out by “natural” selection? When a predator is given an unnatural advantage, it works against natural selection; it throws off the entire food chain.

Now translate that into the struggle between rich and poor. When poor people live in a terrible school district and are required by law to send their children to the crumbling public schools within that district, and when wealthier people live in better school districts and have a choice between sending their children to shiny, new public schools or expensive private schools, could we say that certain children are born with an unnatural advantage? Can you think of any other scenarios in which the wealthy in this country have been given unnatural advantages? How about tax breaks and

write-offs? White-collar prisons? Personal accountants that help them hide and manage their money? Lawyers that help them find loopholes? What about access to the best medical care, identity protection, personal trainers, gym memberships, home security, and expensive, health foods? The only way to scientifically discern whether or not natural selection is at play in the class war, is to arm every child with the same skills and basic care. Otherwise there are too many variables present to allow for a controlled experiment, and it would be a real leap to link societal income disparities to natural selection.

And so I ask you, should unnatural forces be allowed to persist in society and in the free market, and if so, for how long? Natural selection in its purest form does not allow for choice. You cannot choose not to inherit a cancer gene. Birds cannot choose to live in a county free of cats. But in cases when we do have a choice, should we not feel compelled to regulate abusers? Should we not feel compelled to help those less fortunate than us? What is civilization if not a rebellion against savage kill or be killed mentality? Why do we teach young children to share and not yell “Mine?” Who cleans up the chemical pollution left behind by defunct companies?

Curtis Wolf ought to hope that the poor people in this country never decide to behead the “Let them eat cake” subscribers in some sort of French Revolution-style revolt, as he would then have to rely on either The Invisible Hand of the Market or, to his great chagrin, government interference to ensure his very survival.



## My Observations Concerning Curtis' Observations

Joque H. Soskis

Whenever a piece of writing begins with lots of references to what “the Left” and “liberals” think, want or say, all the lights on my board go to yellow. So it was with Curtis Wolf’s disquisition on poverty and capitalism. The flashing caution indicators turned out to be thoroughly warranted.

In the interest of conserving space, I am going to slide right over the discussion of whether people die at a higher rate in this country if they lack health insurance than if they are covered. It is really rather a pointless discussion, since we are the only industrialized country left that even has any people without health coverage. Does Curtis really think that we, still by far the largest economy on earth, cannot manage to afford to cover everyone, while sleepy little Denmark can?

My main issue with this bit of writing, though, is the glib assertion, unsupported (and entirely unsupportable) by any facts, that “poverty in America has been dramatically reduced in this country (*sic*) not due to social programs but due to economic growth.” This is followed by an unsophisticated paean to capitalism free from the intrusions of government regulation which, we are invited to assume, is synonymous with eco-

nomie growth. Ahh, where to begin?

First, capitalism free from the intrusions of government regulation has given us the horrors of the worst of the industrial revolution (mercifully dim in our memories as a result of many years of worker safety regulation, child labor laws, wage and hour laws, and other “interference” of government in the working of the free enterprise system).

More recently, of course, lack of effective regulation has brought us the delicate pleasures of the savings and loan debacle, Enron, and the present near-collapse of the financial markets with attendant eviction of hundreds of thousands of families from their homes, and the loss of staggering numbers of jobs. And let’s bear in mind that, almost on a one-to-one basis, everyone who loses a job also loses health insurance, frequently not only for the newly unemployed person but also for his or her entire family.

As for what accounts for the reduction of poverty in the past 200 years, I would like to mention (in no particular order) a few of the social programs of which Curtis thinks so little, but which have had a great deal to do with increasing the general standard of living: Social Security (responsible for reducing poverty among the elderly from about 50% to about 5%), Medicare,

Medicaid, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, Food Stamps, the Interstate Highway construction program (initiated by that well-known liberal, Dwight Eisenhower), the G.I. bills (I and II), the WPA, the FDIC and related creatures, and the federal Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation. There are, of course, others.

And most glaringly of all, Curtis appears to overlook the greatest single contributor to American prosperity in history, namely that at the end of WWII, everyone on earth stood in desperate need of absolutely everything: shoelaces, pots and pans, wire, pipe, glass—it had all been either used up or blown up. And there was one nation on earth, without a war scratch on it, whose industrial apparatus was wound up to redline: Us. How could anyone not get rich under those circumstances?

Finally, it is interesting to wonder how several countries of the European Union, with all that dreaded intrusion of government regulation into their free enterprise systems, can have managed to emerge into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with standards of living higher than ours.



## Michael Ray Fitzgerald’s Response

I feel I should respond to Curtis Wolf’s recent critique of an editorial I wrote that appeared in the September issue.

Mr. Wolf uses the term “fallacies.” I would like to point out some fallacies of his own, pri-

marily his use of the “straw-man” argument. A straw-man argument is when one rebuts a proposition that was never presented. For example, I never used the word “capitalism” nor presented a critique of it. I am in

fact an avid capitalist, having money invested in stocks and other financial devices. Moreover, I never



(Continued on page 11)



## Little Green Men Vacationing On Earth?: CSI Says No!

Curtis Wolf

Are little green men flying our friendly skies and abducting people as they drive on lonely roads in the middle of the night? If you saw the recent advertisement for the movie *The Fourth Kind*, you may think so. But if you attended a recent conference sponsored by the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry (CSI) over the Columbus Day weekend, you would conclude that there are good reasons to be more skeptical of alien visitations to Earth.

Taking place in Tucson, Arizona, the conference, aptly named UFOs: The Space-Age Mythology, covered subjects from the Betty Hill story, to the possibility of life on other worlds, to the end of our world in 2012. And of course you cannot have a skeptical UFO

conference without talking about the alleged crash of an alien space craft at Roswell, New Mexico which, likely, was a large balloon train with listening devices trained on Russian nuclear bomb tests, otherwise known as Project Mogul. The speakers at the conference have long, impressive resumes in physics, mathematics, and astronomy. They also have affiliations with the Com-

mittee for Skeptical Inquiry which would explain their skepticism concerning UFOs!

There were three main themes that permeated the various presentations. The first is that space travel from the nearest star to our planet is not as easy as we think. It is not like getting into your car and heading to the local grocery store for a gallon of milk. The nearest star to our planet is in the Alpha Centauri star system and it is about four light years away.

finity as its velocity approaches the speed of light. This is no problem for massless photons, but it makes it next to impossible to get massive space craft moving anywhere close to the speed of light.

The second theme is that the evidence for alien visitations to Earth does not hold up very well under careful analysis. Observations of UFOs, whether or not they involve photographs, are problematic due to scintillation, atmospheric phenomena such as

sun dogs and ball lightning, hoaxes, etc. The physical evidence such as trace evidence at alleged alien space craft landings, alien implants, etc., is found wanting when properly examined. Alien abductions are not corroborated by evidence independent of the alleged abductee's story.

It is telling that even though aliens can easily clear up everything by just landing on the White House lawn, we continue to argue over whether a bent twig at an alleged alien space craft landing site is evidence of extra terrestrial visitation.

The third theme is that popular imagination drives the UFO



***“Dang it, Big G, I’m tired of hiding! Let’s come out and prove to all of them that we exist, unambiguously!”***

***“Oh, tush, Bug-Eyes, you’re just mad because you’re losing again. Besides, it’s so much more fun to listen to them argue and bicker about us, don’t you agree, Big Foot?”***

***“Urrghhh!”***

That means that if a space craft could fly at the speed of light, it would take four years to get here from Alpha Centauri. And hurtling through space at the speed of light is no easy task in itself, according to Albert Einstein, due to the apparent mass increase that comes into play when an object accelerates to the speed of light. Basically, the apparent mass of an object approaches in-

*(Continued on page 9)*

craze. Not only have the descriptions of aliens changed over time based on cultural influences, but belief in extra-terrestrial visitors was not widespread prior to 1947, when Ray Palmer used the *Amazing Stories* and *Fate* magazines to promote UFO stories to the general public. After that, it took off to the point that 56% of the American public believe that UFOs are aliens visiting the earth in 2002.

The bottom line is that the idea that aliens are visiting our planet is an extraordinary claim due to the considerable obstacles that special relativity has placed in the way of interstellar travel. As any skeptic will tell you, extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. We are not even close to having that kind of evidence for alien visitations. I feel the same way about aliens that I feel about Bigfoot and

God. If any of these exist, it would be very easy to establish their existence beyond any reasonable doubt by having the aliens, Bigfoot, and God just show themselves in such an unmistakable manner that only the people who do not want to believe in them would doubt the evidence. The fact that this has not happened is very enlightening to skeptics like me.



## The God Question

Shane Christian

In the September issue of our newsletter, the *First Coast FreeThinker*, Earl Coggins briefly analyzed the difference between strong atheism, “There is no God!” and weak atheism, “I see no evidence supporting the existence of God.” Earl makes what looks like a contradictory statement when he said, “I don’t believe there is no God, but at the same time, I have no belief in a god.” The line between these two statements is very thin. Earl goes on to say that, “From a scientific perspective, I cannot say I believe in anything unless I have proof of it; therefore, I cannot say I believe there is no god unless I have proof that there is in fact no god, or gods existing today or yesterday.”

Carl Sagan, eloquently explained this position: “Those who raise questions about the God hypothesis and the soul hypothesis are by no means all atheists. An atheist is someone who is certain that God does not exist, someone who has compelling evidence

against the existence of God. I know of no such compelling evidence. Because God can be relegated to remote times and places and to ultimate causes, we would have to know a great deal more about the universe than we do now to be sure that no such God exists. To be certain of the existence of God and to be certain of the nonexistence of God seem to me to be the confident extremes in a subject so riddled with doubt and uncertainty as to inspire very little confidence indeed. A wide range of intermediate positions seems admissible, and considering the enormous emotional energies with which the subject is invested, a questing, courageous and open mind seems to be the essential tool for narrowing the range of our collective ignorance on the subject of the existence of God.” (quoted from Carl Sagan’s book, *Broca’s Brain: Reflections on the Romance of Science.*)

Earl’s position is the most common among non-believing intellectuals these days. Even Richard Dawkins falls into this same category, though he admits

to leaning towards strong atheism. He dedicated an entire chapter in his book, *The God Delusion* to this, titled, “Why There Almost Certainly Is No God.” In science there are no absolutes. There are physical models and theories that explain the very small quantum world of the atom to the very immense world of black holes and the universe. At some point of data acquisition and analysis, scientists collaborate to form opinions as to what is most likely to be the correct model. These models are subject to change as advances in technologies may provide new and improved data. The average person who has a desire to understand science, human nature, and the evolution of religion, may go through similar transitions as more data are digested and understood. So, at what point or amount of accumulated

(Continued on page 10)



*(The God Question  
Continued from page 9)*

knowledge does one cross the line from being a believer to an agnostic? Or from agnostic to atheist? From a weak atheist to a strong atheist? Each individual is different and the sources of study vary greatly. Among most people who become nonbelievers, there does seem to be a gradual transition from one position to another, as more is learned about the complexity of reality and the evolution of religion. I have met some people who found atheism by way of Buddhism. I have considered myself an atheist since the age of ten. It wasn't until my early forties, that I made the transition from weak atheism to strong atheism.

Often, I am asked to prove there is no God. I usually reply with the statement, "There is no God, therefore one cannot prove a negative!" But there is a vast convergence of evidence from all walks of science that supports the fact that all of the world's major religions, and all things supernatural, are the product of human nature, superstitions, ignorance, mythologies, imagination, and psychopathologies. Religions, like life, have all evolved by the same Darwinian processes. Scientific models explain the formation of matter, black holes, and galaxies with no designer needed. All things are founded on the laws of physics and the nuclear forces within each and every atom. Much like a puzzle, one does not have to have all of the pieces of the puzzle to see what the puzzle reveals. The same is true of a basic understanding of the sciences

and the complexity of nature. Example: One need not have a Ph.D. in evolutionary biology to conclude that evolution is the best model which explains the diversity of life on Earth. Carl Sagan said the more we learn about science and nature, the less there is for God to do. Once we have discarded all of the world's religions as mythological nonsense, at what point does one conclude that there absolutely is no such thing as God? As Richard Dawkins puts it, "Either there is a God or there isn't!" As we have seen from Earl's statement above, it's not a very big step to go from a weak atheist to a strong atheist.

Dawkins makes a good point in the chapter "The Ultimate Boeing 747" from *The God Delusion*: "However statistically improbable the entity you seek to explain by invoking a designer, the designer himself has got to be at least as improbable." There is no free lunch. You can't get something from nothing. In other words, the odds of probability of an uncaused God are impossible. Therefore any supreme being would have had to evolve to complexity by way of gradual accumulation of complexity by natural selection.

Does this mean that a supreme being could have evolved into something that we might be able to perceive as a God? Does this mean there could be a supreme being lurking somewhere in the vast universe? I don't think so. The notion that life could somehow evolve to transcend its physical constraints is only the product of science fiction. Consciousness is the prod-

uct of many specialized regions in the human brain. The human brain must consume energy to accomplish its biochemical processes. Again there is no free lunch. Consciousness cannot survive without energy in to get energy out. The argument from  $E=MC^2$  has no relevance to the possibility of consciousness surviving after death. Matter and energy may be mutually convertible, but energy has a tendency to dissipate very rapidly. Any complex life form, no matter how alien, would have to be confined within a complex physical form of some sort and therefore subject to the laws of physics. The notion of a complex spirit, or ghostly being, having evolved by way of natural selection is just as improbable as the uncaused God. Carl Sagan's God that can be relegated to remote times and places, and Richard Dawkins God that must have evolved to complexity by way of natural selection, become irrelevant. There could be a superior intelligent life form somewhere else in the universe. But knowing there are billions of galaxies separated by vast distances and the time required to travel these distances, means the probability of ever crossing paths with such a being is almost impossible. Even within our own galaxy, the probability of ever finding a complex life form that evolved to consciousness and advanced technology, within our own conscious existence, is highly unlikely. When I say, "There is no God!" it's not a leap of faith, but is founded on sound science, logic, and reason.



(Michael Ray Fitzgerald's Response,  
Continued from page 7)

said anything about "income equality"—I do not believe in such a thing and never have.

Labeling is another fallacy in which Mr. Wolf indulges, lumping me in with "left-of-center" liberals. This is a huge assumption on his part. Mr. Wolf knows next to nothing about me or my politics.

Mr. Wolf moreover downplays the statistics I presented. Subsequent research reveals that the figures I offered were actually very low: according to a recent Department of the Treasury report, Americans are dying at the rate of 45,000 per year for lack of health insurance, not 18,000 ("The Risk of Losing Health In-

surance Over a Decade: New Findings from Longitudinal Data." U.S. Department of the Treasury. Sept. 2009. <http://www.treas.gov/press/releases/docs/final-hc-report092009.pdf>).

What is the point of his disagreeing with these statistics if they, in principle, don't matter, as he goes on to argue? Mr. Wolf ultimately relies on the specious argument that the poor deserve what they get for being uneducated. Blaming the victim, as I already mentioned, is another common fallacy—a "red herring" argument. It may indeed be true that the poor deserve the blame for their own destruction—but this is a different debate altogether.

Mr. Wolf never actually addresses my question, which was and still is, are the rest of us going to idly stand by while people who cannot afford health insurance die from preventable diseases?

Does it matter who is to blame? Can we get beyond that? Even if uneducated, underemployed people *do* deserve their fate, are we, as citizens, going to stand back and let millions simply die off?

Shall we also add insult to injury by jeering at them? "Get a new skill set!" How will this advice benefit, for example, an infant struggling for its life, whose mother never bothered to seek prenatal care because she knew she couldn't pay for it?



## 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 **Judy Hankins** at 904-724-8188, or e-mail her at [JHankins@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org](mailto:JHankins@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org), or leave a notation on a meeting sign-in sheet.



First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.  
P.O. Box 550591  
Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591  
(904) 288-6291  
<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

**Program** Carrie Renwick 268-8826  
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### FCFS Officers

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### Other FCFS Appointments

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**Long-Range Planning** Curtis Wolf 573-3847  
[CWolf@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org](mailto:CWolf@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org)

## November Social

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

**When:** **Tuesday November 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.

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):

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <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 November 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 Monthly Meeting	17	18	19	20	21
22 Secular Sunday	23	24 Olive Garden	25	26	27	28 Newsletter Deadline
29	30					

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.

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### BYLAWS AMENDMENT INCREASING SIZE OF BOARD HAS PASSED

Be advised, the bylaws amendment proposed last month increasing the number of At-Large Board Members from one (1) appointed position to three (3) elected positions passed. The Board is now composed of seven (7) elected positions and the Immediate Past President. Thank you all for voting. Let's hear it for democracy in action!

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### Election of 2010 FCFS Officers Now Underway

**A**s hard as it is to believe, the time has come once again to select next year's leadership for the First Coast Freethought Society, Inc. The Nominating Committee, chaired by Bobbie Nord, recommends the following slate of officers for 2010:

**President** - Earl Coggins  
**VP** - Carrie Renwick  
**Treasurer** - Mark Renwick  
**Secretary** - Patrice Bennett  
**At-Large #1** - Richard Keene  
**At-Large #2** - Alex Mabee  
**At-Large #3** - Steve Peek

The ballots have been mailed via U.S. Mail, according to the Bylaws, to all FCFS members.

Members, please vote! And please note that the deadline for voting is December 1, 2009.

The election results will be announced and the 2010 leadership will be installed at the **FCFS Sixth Annual Human Light Celebration** to be held downstairs in the Social Hall of the UUC, December 21, 2009.