

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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February 2010

Volume 8, Issue 2

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Earl Coggins

In case you missed it, the January meeting of the First Coast Freethought Society was a dialogue between a theist (retired Baptist Minister Harry Parrott) and an atheist (yours truly), hosted by the Director of Civilization, Ken Hurley. Our discussion topic was Building Bridges, an attempt to leap across the great divide between these two seemingly incompatible world views and discuss ways in which people of a variety of differing world

views might coexist in harmony with one another.

Building bridges is easier said than done. What a fool I was to think we could discuss this topic in two hours. Where would you begin? A debate? That implies

views being washed away in a tide of unreason and tyranny disguised as democracy.

It was my intent to have an actual conversation. I didn't want the pressures normally associated with debating. I was hoping our discussion would be a catalyst for further conversations between theists and nontheists. Talking to



“We must keep talking in order to build bridges, but someone had better be listening—and on both sides.”

winners and losers—an old world way of resolving differences. Our history is replete with examples of winners-take-all, with the minority

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February 2010 Meeting

**Gordon F. M. Rakita, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Anthropology
Dept. of Sociology and Anthropology, University of North Florida**

“Of Metaphysics and Missing Links: *Ardipithecus ramidus* and Modeling Human Evolution”

Monday, February 15, 2010, 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. • 904-519-6500
- What:** Books/magazines planned for discussion:
- March 7, 2010 - *The True Believer* by Eric Hoffer
 - April 4, 2010 - To Be Announced



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.

A highly provocative, bestselling analysis of the fanatic—the individual compelled to join a cause, any cause—and a penetrating study of mass movements from early Christianity to modern nationalism and Communism. Reporting on the true believer, Hoffer examines with Machiavellian detachment mass movements, from Christianity in its infancy to the national uprisings of our own day. His analysis of the psychology of mass movements is a brilliant and frightening study of the mind of the fanatic, the individual whose personal failings lead him to join a cause, any cause, even at peril to his own life—or yours. (Description from Amazon.com)

For more info, contact Jewell Kross at JKross@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org or call 904-996-1553.

First Coast FreeThinker

The *First Coast FreeThinker* is published for all freethinkers and potential freethinkers. Nonmembers may receive the e-mail version indefinitely. Nonmembers may receive three hard-copy 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 following month's issue. Submit contributions by e-mail or by U.S. mail to Hugo Borresen, 8831 Taurus Circle

South, Jacksonville, FL 32222.

ADVERTISING RATES: *Eighth-page (business card size) \$25.00, quarter-page \$50.00, half-page \$75.00, and whole page \$100.*

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each other is fundamental to fully understanding each other.

During the conversation, I was hoping that the theist and the atheist would realize the importance of focusing on similarities instead of differences, and most of all, root causes for especially sensitive disputes—root causes such as presuppositions and fear, ambiguity and confusion, dialogue and monologues, state and church separation.

Root cause analysis is an excellent tool for resolving problems, so I wanted to get below the surface—go excavating. My subterranean observations found two core components to disputes and problems associated with differing world viewpoints: Presuppositions and fear. Fear, I feel, is driving the main conflicts. Both sides have presuppositions about each other—primarily false—which are leading to nothing but fear and hysteria. Things like “all Muslims work for Al-Qaeda” or “atheists want to take away my religion” do nothing but spread fear. It’s inevitable that these fears will cause distrust, discontent, even hatred and bigotry. If we can eliminate the fear we have of each other, the foundation for the bridges has been laid.

Where are the presuppositions causing the fear coming from? Ambiguity and confusion is my answer. Both sides are using ambiguous language, which leads to nothing but confusion. The theist says you’re going to hell. The atheist responds, saying religion is stupid. Neither side gains from vague and insen-

sitive remarks.

If ambiguous language were not enough, add to that the fact that a lot is being said, but no one is listening. A dialogue consists of two or more people having a discussion. All too often, many discussions regarding the problems associated with differing world views are not dialogues, but instead two monologues disguised as such—where each person has as his or her motive the desire to pontificate and thus



“Hey, what if instead of throwing these things at each other we used them to build a bridge?”

never really truly listens to the person standing or sitting across the way. We must keep talking in order to build bridges, but someone had better be listening—and on both sides.

I especially wanted to avoid a discussion regarding any theological truth claims. This has already been done...ad infinitum. One definition of “insanity” is to keep doing the same thing over and over, expecting different results with each new iteration. Both sides need fresh ideas. We have to have a paradigm shift. I

no longer think it matters whether or not I prove to a theist that his or her religious belief is misguided or irrational. That argument has very little if any benefit to the real problem at hand, which is not the elimination of theism, but a juxtaposition where theism and atheism can share the planet. The only way I see to accomplish it is with religiously-neutral governments. The separation of states and churches must become global.

If I tell a person their god does not exist, their belief in that god is irrational, and their faith is nothing more than fantasy, I might be correct, but it doesn’t negate the fact that I have insulted that person and almost certainly damaged any likelihood of bridge construction.

I don’t feel that Harry and I had enough time for our discussion. I’d like to do it again in the future if the people attending liked the program. Please email or write a quick note to me, a board member, or the newsletter editor with your comments about January’s program and if you’d like to see it attempted again.

Building bridges is a root cause solution. In 1969, Neil Armstrong stepped onto the surface of the moon and described it as a giant leap for mankind. When theists and atheists step onstage together to engage in civil discourse on how to live together in peace, they may not eclipse Armstrong’s moon leap, but they have definitely taken the first steps of a journey into the center of mankind’s soul—a term I, of course, use loosely.



Is Christianity Really Such A Great Deal?

Curtis Wolf

Ann Coulter recently wrote a column defending Brit Hume's assertion that Christianity offers the best way for golfer Tiger Woods to recover from his adulterous affairs. <http://townhall.com/columnists/AnnCoulter/2010/01/06/if-you-can-find-a-better-deal-take-it/?page=full>; also see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8LJKmWdJQc4>. Coulter's column is basically a religious tract on behalf of Christianity, describing it as the "best deal in the universe." After reading it in the *Florida Times-Union*, I was wondering if I had stumbled onto the religion section of the paper. But no, I was definitely reading the page reserved for news commentary and op-eds.

So does Coulter make a good case for Christianity as the "best deal in the universe?" I think not. Coulter argues that Christianity is about redemption and forgiveness. Clearly, Woods betrayed his wife by having multiple affairs with other women. However, if ever he needs forgiveness and redemption, he must get them from his wife. It is difficult to see how Jesus dying on

Woods' behalf so that his sins are wiped clean leads to his taking personal responsibility for his mistakes. If anything, it reduces the incentives for people like Woods to accept responsibility for their actions and reconcile with those people that they have wronged. It is like saying that God wiped my sins clean, so why shouldn't you forgive me even when I have done nothing to deserve a change of heart from you? Forgiveness must be earned, not given away freely.

"It is difficult to see how Jesus dying on Woods' behalf so that his sins are wiped clean leads to his taking personal responsibility for his mistakes."

Coulter argues that once you accept Jesus into your heart, you will have no choice but to give your life up to God and stop doing sinful things like adultery. According to a 2005 *Christianity Today* article, that is not necessarily so. (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/bc/2005/janfeb/3.8.html>) Most of the "moral failings" mentioned in the article are not of much concern to typical freethinkers. I personally don't care if born-again Christians are just as likely as non-Christians to divorce. To me,

if you are in a bad marriage, get out of it. Nor am I concerned that cohabitation before marriage is practiced by 25% of born-again Christians according to a 2001 poll. I say good for them. The article does point to behavior like racism that does have serious consequences. In this case, 20% of Southern Baptists object to black neighbors according to a 1989 poll. Overall, it is apparent



from the article that the moral behavior of Christians often mirrors the society in which they live.

There is one way in which

Christianity may benefit Woods. Christians are less tolerant of extramarital sex than the non-religious. Also, there is a lower incidence of extramarital affairs among those who regularly attend religious services. (http://www.allacademic.com//meta/p_mla_ap_a_research_citation/0/1/9/8/9/pages19894/p19894-1.php)

Interestingly, religious affiliation by itself is not correlated with less cheating by spouses. So this suggests that one's commitment to the religion is more important

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than the religion itself.

Here are a couple of points to keep in mind. First, the research paper tying religious service attendance to frequency of extramarital affairs does not claim that the former is the cause of the latter, since the authors make it clear that the data does not support this conclusion.

Second, to say that zeal for religion leads to less cheating does not explain why this should be the case. It could be that the fear of being ostracized from a religious com-

munity into which they have put a lot of time and effort is what keeps these married couples

in line rather than the religion itself.

What works against a newly-Christianized Woods is that get-out-of-jail free card you receive when you become a Christian. In the real world, if you cheat on your wife and she forgives you, being caught cheating on her a second time is likely to diminish considerably your chances of being forgiven again. But that is not the case with Christianity. That get-out-of-jail free card never expires, and therefore there is little incentive not to repeat the sin of adultery. As noted above, there may be



Tiger Woods

other incentives like peer pressure that keep you out of trouble, but not the free forgiveness offered to Christians by just signing up.

What Tiger Woods needs to do, in my opinion, is to acknowledge that his callous behavior has hurt his family and stop that behavior. I do not see how receiving forgiveness without doing anything to deserve it gets him to that point. Betrayal can be forgiven, but it should be a long arduous process that makes the betrayer think twice about doing it again.



Ann Coulter

“We must question the story logic of having an all-knowing, all-powerful God, who creates faulty Humans, and then blames them for his own mistakes.”

—Gene Roddenberry, screenwriter, producer and creator of Star Trek



Devil-Dealing in Haiti, A Brief History

Fred W. Hill

Haiti's recurring troubles may truly have begun not with a supposed deal with the devil, as imagined by televangelist Pat Robertson, but with the arrival of an agent for the Catholic monarchs of Spain, Christopher Columbus, on December 5, 1492, in the northwestern region of the island he named *La Española* (the Spanish Island). Initially, Columbus was very impressed with the natives he encountered, known as the Taino, writing in a report to King Ferdinand, "*They traded with us and gave us everything they had, with good will, they took great delight in pleasing us. They are very gentle and without knowledge of what is evil; nor do they murder or steal. Your highness may believe that in all the world there can be no better people. They love their neighbors as themselves, and they have the sweetest talk in the world, and are gentle and always laughing.*" (Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise*, p. 100).

Their laughter died, along with approximately 90% of the Taino themselves, over the next 30 years as successive Spanish overlords introduced them to Christianity, weapons they had no adequate defense against, diseases they had no immunity

to, slavery, rampant greed, and wanton cruelty. Pirates in turn terrorized the Spanish colonists into abandoning the western third of the island, which the French then claimed for themselves in 1664. Under the direction of yet another Christian monarch, Louis XIV, glorified as the Sun King, the darkness of plantation slavery dominated the colony, then known as Saint-Domingue, which would become one of the French Empire's greatest sources of wealth, far more valuable than their territories on the North American con-

"No deal with any devil was necessary to cause Haiti's troubles. All it took was all-too-human greed and bigotry by people who professed fervid belief in and fear of God, and believed it was their divine right to exterminate one people, enslave another and ravage the environment to enrich themselves."

continent ever were. With too few Tainos left to work the land, African slaves were imported in ever increasing numbers, over 40,000 per year by the 1780s. Such heavy importation of human chattel was necessary because their average life expectancy was only about 21 years due to the harsh conditions on the plantations. Pompée Valentin Vastey, born into slavery and later to become an author, educator and politician in Haiti, wrote scathingly of his Christian masters, "*Have they not hung up*

men with heads downward, drowned them in sacks, crucified them on planks, buried them alive, crushed them in mortars?

Have they not forced them to eat excrement? And, having flayed them with the lash, have they not cast them alive to be devoured by worms, or onto anthills, or lashed them to stakes in the swamp to be devoured by mosquitoes? Have they not thrown them into boiling cauldrons of

cane syrup? Have they not put men and women inside barrels studded with spikes and rolled them down mountainsides into the abyss? Have they not consigned these miserable blacks to man-eating dogs

until the latter, sated by human flesh, left the mangled victims to be finished off with bayonet and poniard?" (*The Uses of Haiti*, Paul Farmer, p. 64).

Still, by late 1789, with the American Revolution already history and the French Revolution underway, there were approximately 32,000 white masters, 500,000 black slaves, and 25,000 mulattoes who were free but did not have equal rights with their paler kin. Revolts erupted as the latter demanded civic rights under the *Declara-*



tion of the *Rights of Man and of the Citizen* adopted by the French National Assembly, which agreed to their demands. This resulted in opposition from the white overseers and finally the outbreak of a slave uprising that began the Haitian Revolution in 1791. Toussaint Louverture, a freed slave, emerged as the leader of the revolution and became de facto ruler of the colony, pledging loyalty to the French Republic, which abolished slavery throughout the empire in 1794. Napoleon, however, overthrew the Republic and invaded Saint-Domingue, seeking to restore slavery and make the colony a profitable prize again. Louverture was captured in a ruse to settle differences and died in a French prison, but ultimately after a war during which the French troops used such brutal tactics that they turned the entire non-white population against them. Napoleon cut his losses and, on January 1, 1804, the Republic of Haiti was proclaimed, using a variation of the name the long-vanquished Taino natives had used for the land, Ayiti.

Thus, Haiti became the first successful slave uprising anywhere as well as the second republic declared in the New World, but of course its troubles were far from over. For one thing, the first republic, the United States, was still largely dominated by slave-owners who weren't too keen on the example set by the Haitians, and so refused to trade with or even rec-

ognize the new nation (at least not until the Lincoln administration established diplomatic ties in 1862), and assisted the British and French in an embargo which was lifted only after Haiti paid 90 million francs in reparations for "lost property" (primarily the slaves!) the French demanded, necessitating taking out high-interest loans.



**Toussaint Louverture
"Father of Haiti"**

"By 1900," writes historian Alex von Tunzelmann, "[Haiti] was spending 80% of its national budget on repayments. In order to manage the original reparations, further loans were taken out—mostly from the United States, Germany, and France. Instead of developing its potential, this deformed state produced a parade of nefarious leaders, most of whom gave up the insurmountable task of try-

ing to fix the country and looted it instead. In 1947, Haiti finally paid off the original reparations, plus interest. Doing so left it destitute, corrupt, disastrously lacking in investment, and politically volatile." (http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us_and_americas/article6281614.ece)

The economic calamity combined with overpopulation has led to environmental devastation to such a degree that the denuded landscape of Haiti contrasts sharply with the lush forests of the Dominican Republic along their common border. The barren land makes natural disasters, such as the earthquake that struck this past January, and the hurricanes of the past several years, that much more devastating. Man-made and natural calamities follow each other in seemingly endless cycles.

No deal with any devil was necessary to cause Haiti's troubles. All it took was all-too-human greed and bigotry by people who professed fervid belief in and fear of God, and who believed it was their divine right to exterminate one people, enslave another, and ravage the environment to enrich themselves. As a distinct people, the Taino were extinguished, but the modern Haitians will survive this latest catastrophe as they have endured so much before. Yet much more time is likely to pass before innocent laughter fills the land again as Columbus reported over 500 years ago.



Humanists Can Hold Their Heads High

Beth Perry

Recently I had a conversation with my “in-the-closet atheist” son-in-law who at 64 reached his second childhood in that he is attempting to emulate a member of the Hells Angels or the Outlaws. In other words, he has become a “Harleyman,” complete with costume, shaved head, and skulls on his attire. He is rather adamant in his opinions, and when I asked him to come to one of our freethought meetings, he replied he could see no point to it. Atheists, freethinkers, etc., he insisted, never do good for anyone.

Needless to say, this took me aback. I had to agree (slightly) that as a group, freethinkers aren’t known for their charitable or community work. Suggestions to remedy this perception and provide positive recognition for our group have included keeping a mile or so of some street picked free of litter and having our name on a sign stating FCFS was responsible, as well as holding a food drive after our solstice party.

I relayed my son-in-law’s observations to Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-president of the Freedom from Religion Foundation, and asked her if any of this country’s nonreligious organizations had done any charity/nonprofit work

that she knew of. Here is her reply.

“My mother, who was the principal founder of FFRF, is still directing the Women’s Medical Fund charity, of which she was also the principal founder back in the 1970s, and which has probably raised the funds to help pay for abortions for nearly 20,000 indigent women in the state of Wisconsin, after the state cut off Medicaid abortion coverage so cruelly.

“Most social and moral progress in the world was brought about because of nonbelievers, from opposing slavery which was sanctified in the Bible, to promoting women’s rights, opposing the death penalty, etc.” —Annie Laurie Gaylor, Co-President, Freedom from Religion Foundation

“Usually religion gets the credit and taxpayers get the bill when it comes to real charity. Only a tiny percentage of church coffers goes to charity, and often when he (taxpayer) sees a line-up of men at a religious shelter, he doesn’t realize tax dollars are paying for most of it (and that includes the Salvation Army).

“If people really want to do good, why must they parade their religion to do it? They have an ulterior motive. Red Cross was founded by Clara Barton, at most a Unitarian, which is creedless, and most hospitals and universities are secular, not religious. Hope that helps! Maybe it’s just as well this fellow

doesn’t own up to being an atheist because he’s not a very informed one. Most social and moral progress in the world was brought about because of nonbelievers, from opposing slavery which was sanctified in the Bible, to promoting women’s rights, opposing the death penalty, etc. Some churches are now liberal, but that’s because their believers became more liberal than their Bible, and is a result of infidel reformers.”

—Annie Laurie Gaylor

Being apostate, I always felt really good when the church I belonged to

did “good” for less fortunate people. I cannot prove either way that the taxes paid for what was done, but I feel that helping our fellow human beings even a little during these trying times of lost jobs, lost homes, etc., is something that humanists can and should do.

After all, humanism is believing in and looking out for our fellow humans. Plus, it might give people a better idea of what we freethinkers support and do, as well as advertising to anyone who shares our lack of belief in divine beings that they are not alone and would be welcome as members of our freethought community.



A Dialogue About Building Bridges

Carrie Renwick

The January 18, 2010 monthly meeting of the First Coast Freethought Society brought us an entirely different format than we've ever had before. In a presentation titled, "Theism and Atheism: A Dialogue about Building Bridges," FCFS president and founder Earl Coggins engaged retired Baptist minister Harry Parrott in a dialogue (NOT a debate!) in which a religious and a nonreligious person could examine their differences and similarities via civil discourse.

The stage was set with armchairs and coffee tables giving it a "fireside chat" atmosphere. The event was hosted by Ken Hurley who asked Harry and Earl questions and took questions from the audience, providing a little pizzazz as well as keeping everybody on track. Ken started by asking questions intended to elicit their differences, evolving toward areas of agreement. Right from the start, a rich tapestry of differences and similarities was woven.

Ken: "Do you believe in God, and can you justify your belief as true?" Harry replies, "Yes, I believe in God" and states he feels that humans are hardwired to believe in and to experience "spirit." He goes on, "What we do with that is that we create religions and we create theology... Both of those are human constructions." And while Harry believes in "transcendence, the divine, or God" because he experiences it, he observes, "It is something that cannot be proven." Earl's reply to both questions is "No, and no." The gentlemen agree that religions and

church are human constructions, and they agree that neither stance is provable.

Ken: "Is the Bible evidence of God?" Harry: "The Bible is the evidence of people and communities searching for God...it is the record of [people] ...trying to understand this transcendence, this divine, this God we're talking about." Harry's ultimate answer to Ken's question is, "Yes." Earl: "The Bible is evidence that there are people who have a belief in God, but it is not evidence that God exists."



When Ken asks about religion, Harry reiterates the human tendency to believe in "spirit" and remarks that "this is why people build systems that are called religion." He notes that religions "keep bringing into our consciousness...great things like joy and hope and love and awe. They motivate us to live by these things."

Interestingly, Earl shares that his own negative view of religion was actually built on "sound bytes" of TV evangelists Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and "people like that." It was not until about five years ago when Earl came to know Barry Lynn, Executive Director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State (SCS)—a minister—that Earl's negative views softened. Both Harry and Earl agree that while evil has been perpetrated

in the name of religion (or a "world view"), for the average, ordinary person (Christian, Buddhist, etc.), living on a day-to-day basis, religion influences them to live by love, compassion, and service. Earl wholeheartedly agrees.

Harry observed of separation of church and state and building bridges, "Even though we have different world views, there are overlapping areas where we can work together." Regarding Barry Lynn and SCS, Harry stated, "...you and I are absolutely, I think, on the same page!" [applause] He goes on, "In America, the SCS means... that people with your point of view are fully respected, and people who have my point of view are fully respected, and neither of us is to dominate the other. One world view is not to dominate in this country. Now that's a bridge!"

Regarding "building bridges," Harry said to Earl, "You took the first step. You invited me into your home, and I as far as I'm concerned, that's great. ...The next step is for us to get up here...and have a civilized dialogue, that you respect me, and I respect you. The NEXT thing to remember about building a bridge is to realize that even though we have different world views, there are overlapping areas...where we can work together."

Ken: "Should we be building this bridge? Why?" Earl: "Yes, we should be building the bridge. ...My bridge has to do with getting people to get along with each other. ...I don't want to change your viewpoint ... I'm not a threat to you ... The theistic side and the atheist side need to realize they're not a threat to each other."



Quotes from Edward Abbey

Fred W. Hill

Edward Abbey (1927-1989), known as Cactus Ed, was a novelist and essayist who earned renown for his prickly opinions on many subjects, particularly government, public land policy and religion. His best known works are *Desert Solitaire* (1968), a collection of vignettes about his work as a park ranger in Arches National Park in south-eastern Utah, and *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975), a novel about a quartet of disgruntled misfits who use acts of sabotage to protest anything they regard as destructive to the natural environment of the American Southwest. Referred to as a “conservative an-

archist” by Bill Croke in *The American Spectator* (March 2009), he could arouse the ire of both the



Edward Abbey

left and right while making unfettered use of his First Amendment right to free speech.

A few of his quotes related to freethought::

“Whatever we cannot easily understand we call God; this saves much wear and tear on the brain tissues.”

“God is a sound people make when they’re too tired to think anymore.”

“What’s the difference between the Lone Ranger and God? There really is a Lone Ranger.”

“Life is hard? True, but let’s love it anyhow, though it breaks every bone in our bodies.

“The Earth is older and bigger than we are. This is a hard truth for some folks to swallow.”



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 904-733-5489 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 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, or leave a notation on a meeting sign-in sheet.

Charles Darwin and Family Connections

Fred W. Hill

Many admirers (and at least a few detractors) of Charles Darwin are aware that his paternal grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, was a famed physician and author of his time and an early proponent of evolution, although unlike Charles he did not come up with a valid scientific explanation for how it works. What may be less known is that Darwin's other grandfather, Josiah Wedgwood (1730-1795) was also famous, both for industrializing the production of pottery, which made him immensely wealthy, but also for his prominence as an abolitionist, mass producing the seals for the Society for the Abolition of Slave Trade, depicting an African in chains, with the slogan, "Am I Not a Man and a Brother?"

Contrary to the claims of some modern anti-evolutionists, Charles Darwin himself also publicly expressed his vivid disgust with slavery, most predominantly in his journal, *The Voyage of the Beagle*, first published in 1839, wherein he writes, "Those who look tenderly at the slave-owner, and with a cold heart at the slave, never seem to put themselves into the position of the latter;—what a cheerless prospect,



Josiah Wedgwood

with not even a hope for change! Picture to yourself the chance, ever hanging over you, of your wife and your little children—those objects which nature urges even the slave to call his own—being torn from you and sold like beasts to the first bidder!



"And these deeds are done and palliated by men, who profess to love their neighbors as themselves, who believe in God, and pray His will be done on earth! It makes one's blood boil, yet heart tremble, to think that we Englishmen

and our American descendants, with their boastful cry of liberty, have been and are so guilty: but it is a consolation to reflect, that we at least have made a greater sacrifice, than ever made by any other nation to expiate our sin."

Racists misappropriated and misrepresented Darwin's theory of Natural Selection to bolster their claims to racial superiority, neglecting to note that Darwin refuted any such idea, asserting that the various human "races" were no more than subspecies and that, "all the races agree in so many unimportant details of structure and in so many mental peculiarities that these can be accounted for only by inheritance from a common progenitor; and a progenitor thus characterized would probably deserve to rank as man." (*The Descent of Man*, 1871, ch. 21)

Part of Darwin's real legacy is the recognition that we all are kin, all brothers and sisters within the human species. Slavery has long been outlawed in nearly every nation in recognition of its inhumanity. While there will be squabbles amongst us as long as our species survives, we may at least hope that someday the family of humans will become more truly kind to themselves.



First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 550591
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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.

For other activities besides monthly meetings, please see the website, brochure, or newsletter!

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February Social

Where: OLIVE GARDEN on Philips Highway, near the Avenues Mall.
When: **Tuesday February 23, 2010** 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

2010 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

Note, all dues at all levels are fully tax deductible.

I'm interested 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 • <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/>
All inquiries are held in the strictest confidence.

FCFS Activities - February 2010

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

Visit our website at <http://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.

A Little More About Next Week's Meeting

Our February speaker, anthropology professor Dr. Gordon Rakita, was one of the four presenters on the panel discussion that the FCFS co-sponsored with UNF in November 2006. This was a special presentation titled, "Science Under Siege: The Attack on Evolution" and stressed the importance of teaching evolutionary theory in Florida's public schools. Dr. Rakita was outstanding.

Dr. Rakita's areas of expertise include evolutionary theory, bioarcheology, and human skeletal biology. He plans to cover three topics in his talk. (1) Models of human evolution, how new fossils are interpreted in light of those models, and how they alter those models; (2) why *Science* magazine named the *Ardipithecus* finds as the top science breakthrough of 2009; and (3) what are so-called "missing links" and what role do they play in reconstructing human evolution.

He is a splendid teacher, and I guarantee that this is one meeting you will not want to miss.



REMINDER: The *FreeThinker* Now Accepts ADVERTISING!

Note also, the distribution list for the *First Coast FreeThinker* currently numbers close to 1000. See the section pertaining to the newsletter on Page 2 of every issue for our ADVERTISING RATES.

Contact Patrice Bennett, PBennett@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org or call 904-352-0074, to advertise.

