

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



March 2011

Volume 10, Issue 3

Inside this issue:

Einstein's Famous Equation	4
Secular Self-Support Group of St. Augustine	5
The Evolution of Religion	6
The Scott Adams Project, Part 1	8
The Florida Legislature is Coming to Town	9

President's Message - March 2011

Earl Coggins

I am going to speak about the Building Bridges Campaign this month. Before doing that, I'd like to bring up something from my past.

Mothers often have wise axioms and aphorisms to pass along to their children. My mother was no different. Although it wasn't an original thought (how many are?), her truism concerned the discus-

sion of politics and religion. She was against such discussions. (On a side note, when I told her in 1998 I was considering creating a society in Jacksonville dedi-



our members are very cool, enlightened, educated, informed, fun, life-loving, respectful, and exuberant people.

My mother's position that one should refrain from discussions

(Continued on page 3)

"I have trouble with the assertion that dialogue with a member of a world view contrary to my own worldview is an unproductive conversation, with no hope of resolving conflicts and reaching consensus on sensitive issues."

"Men think epilepsy divine, merely because they do not understand it. But if they called everything divine which they do not understand, why, there would be no end of divine things."

—Hippocrates

cated to freethinkers and the freethought movement, she advised

March 2011 Meeting

Scott Shine, former City of Jacksonville Ethics Commissioner and local Political Consultant

"Ethics, Truth, and Politics: Three Things Rarely Found in the Same Place"

Monday, March 21, 2011, 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: Private Residence - see details below

What: Books planned for discussion:

- April 3, 2011 - *No Impact Man*, by Colin Beavan
- May 1, 2011 - *The Cheating Culture*, by David Callahan

This month, after initiating and coordinating the Humanist Book Discussion Group for nearly 7 years, Jewell Kross is stepping down, and Herb Gerson has graciously volunteered to take over. Also, as our regular meeting place, Borders, is closing, in April we will be meeting at a private residence pending determination of a new public meeting place.

For more info, contact Herb Gerson at herbge@bellsouth.net

Books may be found in the library, 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.

April's book is *No Impact Man: The Adventures of a Guilty Liberal Who Attempts to Save the Planet, and the Discoveries He Makes About Himself and Our Way of Life in the Process*. A guilty liberal finally snaps, swears off plastic, goes organic, becomes a bicycle nut, turns off his power, and generally becomes a tree-hugging lunatic who tries to save the polar bears and the rest of the planet from environmental catastrophe, while dragging his baby daughter and Prada-wearing, Four Seasons-loving wife along for the ride. And that's just the beginning. Bill McKibben meets Bill Bryson in this seriously engaging look at one man's decision to put his money where his mouth is and go off the grid for one year—while still living in New York City—to see if it's possible to make no net impact on the environment. In other words, no trash, no toxins in the water, no elevators, no subway, no products in packaging, no air-conditioning, no television...

Ongoing FCFS Activities

Dinners for Doubters: Sign up to attend or to host a dinner yourself. If a dinner is scheduled, sign-up sheets will be found at the back table at the monthly meetings. For details on how this works, **see page 7 of the July 2008 *FreeThinker***, available on the website, or ask a greeter at the back table.

Secular Sunday Morning in the Park: Freethinkers... let's get acquainted and enjoy intelligent conversation **every 4th Sunday of the month** (unless inclement weather prevails) at 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 or two**. Note, if it's too hot under the pavilion, we take our chairs to some trees with a nice breeze. Mark your calendar. We hope to see you there!

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 info@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org, or leave a notation on a meeting sign-in sheet.

*(President's Message - March 2011
Continued from page 1)*

regarding religion wasn't centered on any worldview possessing contempt for freethinkers—quite to the contrary. She was a live-and-let-live person. Her views regarding the discussion of politics and religion, specifically religion, would be more accurately described as fear. She believed that views concerning religion, religious beliefs and the differing world view of atheism and nonbelief, have had (for millennia) a less-than congenial life together. She felt that we rarely see examples where representatives of two differing world views complete difficult discussions by agreeing to disagree, so why bother engaging in them in the first place? Those types of discussions can lead, she said, to nasty arguments and violence.

I have trouble with the assertion that dialogue with a member of a world view contrary to my own worldview is an unproductive conversation, with no hope of resolving conflicts and reaching consensus on sensitive issues. That is my perception of what my mother was trying to convey to me during my childhood. I don't think she was com-

pletely inaccurate.

Now, back to the present. The Building Bridges Campaign is about dialogue at its core, but it has two goals: to dispel myths and to foster a positive image of the nonreligious world view.



“Listen, I know we may never agree on some things, but can't we at least stop throwing these rocks and perhaps build a bridge instead?”

The first goal is to motivate people to rethink their stereotypes regarding worldviews that differ from their own, with the hope that the end result will be people living in peace with one another.

The second goal is to dispel the perception out there in mainstream America that people with no religious beliefs are an-

gry people who want to do away with religion. The goal is to expose freethinkers and humanists to the public for what they truly represent. I could give a thousand-word essay on the essence of freethought and humanism, but I like Kurt Vonnegut's definition from his book, *A Man Without A Country*: “We humanists try to behave as decently, as fairly, and as honorably as we can without any expectation of rewards or punishments in an afterlife.”

The Building Bridges idea is simple: get people to talk to each other and realize that although their worldviews are different, they have enough in common with each other that building a friendship would be beneficial.

So, how do we get from the present to a future where religious conflicts over dogmatic differences have been minimized? Dialogue is one way. Discussion and negotiation, followed by more discussion and negotiation, chipping away at contrarities until things improve. It's a form of therapy, and therapy is repetitive and frequently takes time to bring about improvements.

No one said it would be easy, especially my mom.



March Social

- Where:** OLIVE GARDEN on Philips Highway, near the Avenues Mall.
When: Tuesday March 22, 2011 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!

Einstein's Famous Equation: A Book Review

Roger Curry

Recently, I read David Bodanis' *E=MC²: A Biography of the World's Most Famous Equation*, an excellent book that does not require a strong background in math or physics. I highly recommend this book and it is available in print or unabridged audio at the Jacksonville Public Library or through distributors such as Amazon.com.

The first few chapters take on one aspect of each of the equation's components: Energy, Equals, Mass, Speed-of-light, and Squared. Within these chapters are stories of Faraday (energy), Lavoisier (mass), Ole Rømer, who was the first to prove that the speed of light is not instantaneous and computed its value, and "squared," the story of Émilie du Châtelet, lover of Voltaire, who searched out the answer to the debate of whether kinetic energy should have velocity times 1 or velocity squared.

The book segues into a more modern time as Maxwell develops his field equations and Einstein ponders out his Special Theory of Relativity (of which the famous equation is a part), the discovery of the fission of Uranium, and the story of Lise Meitner who first realized that the enormous force needed to split the nucleus came from the transformation of mass to energy. This is followed by the race for the atomic bomb. There is an excellent description of

what was happening within the bomb as it was dropped over Hiroshima. The final part of the book deals with the history of the equation since Hiroshima: the life cycle of stars, black holes, and modern devices that exploit the mass-to-energy relationship.

Although the author does not explain how to use the equation, I was able to learn enough from Wikipedia to satisfy my curiosity. For those who have had enough algebra to understand scientific notation, here is how you figure out how mass crosses the equals sign to become energy:

“Unfortunately, the conversion of fossil fuels to energy is very inefficient. Even atomic power generated in civilian power plants does not come anywhere near 100% efficiency.”

“e” is for energy and the amount of energy is given in joules (more about joules later).

“m” is for mass and it is measured in kilograms (about 2.2 pounds).

“c” is for celeritas, the speed of light in meters per second.

Therefore,

$$E_{\text{joules}} = m_{\text{kg}} \cdot \left(\frac{\text{METERS}}{\text{SECOND}} \right)^2$$

Let us convert 1 kg mass into energy (this simplifies the equation).

$$E = c^2 / \text{joules}$$

Almost there!

The speed of light in meters per second is 300,000,000 or 3×10^8 .



$$c^2 = (3 \times 10^8)^2 = 9 \times 10^{16}$$

Therefore, 1 kg of mass converted to energy is 90,000,000,000,000,000 joules (that is 90 quadrillion). A joule is about the amount of energy of a small apple dropped from a height of one meter. This is also exactly equal to 1 Watt per second (which is easier for us to visualize since we have to pay electric bills).

Since there are 1000 watts in a kilowatt and 3600 seconds in an hour, there are 3,600,000J (J is the symbol for joule) in a kilowatt hour (kwh). It takes ten hours for a 100 watt light bulb to use 1 kwh of energy, so one kilogram converted

to energy is enough to keep a 100 watt bulb burning for 9×10^{17} hours which is about equal to 100 trillion years.

This is a little big for most people to grasp, so let's cut down the amount of mass to something more reasonable. From Wikipedia, I learned that 1 ton of TNT is the equivalent of 4,184,000,000J or 4.184×10^9 J. Furthermore, the Hiroshima bomb had a yield of about 15 kilotons of TNT which equates to an energy of 15,000 times 4.184×10^9 J or about 63×10^{12} J. How much mass had to cross the

equals sign to produce that energy?

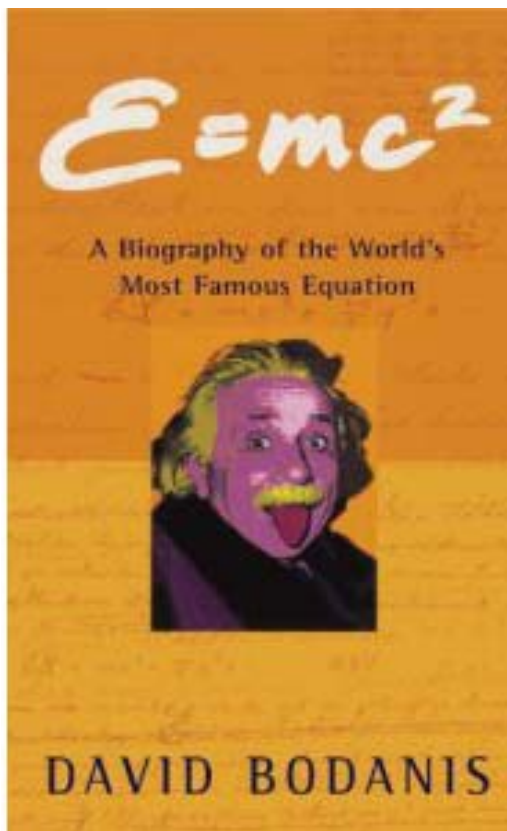
If $e=mc^2$ then $m=e/c^2$ or

$m = \frac{68 \times 10^{48}}{9 \times 10^{16}} = \frac{7}{10000}$ kilograms
 = .7 grams. There are 454 grams in a pound. so one ounce equals 28.375 grams, and .7 grams = 7/283.75 grams \approx 1/40 ounce.

Since Einstein's equation works in both directions, it takes 1 Hiroshima bomb's energy to create 1/40 ounce of matter. Considering this, you will realize how much of an energy investment you are since each 1/40 ounce of your body's weight took the creation energy of the atomic bomb that exploded over Hiroshima.

Knowing the conversion factors, we can now transform Einstein's famous equation so that mass is measured in ounces and energy in kilowatt hours. The conversion factors are: $3.6 \times 10^6 \text{J} = 1 \text{KWH}$, 1 kilogram \approx 2.2 lbs or 35.24 ounces.

The transformed equation is now:



$$e_{kwh} = \frac{9 \times 10^{16}}{(3.6 \times 10^6)(35.24)} \text{ ounces}$$

or

$$e = 709,420,000 \text{ kwh per ounce}$$

or $e \approx 453,014$ kilowatt-years per ounce.

Unfortunately, the conversion of fossil fuels to energy is very inefficient. Even atomic power generated in civilian power plants does not come anywhere near 100% efficiency. The Sun is much more efficient, converting about 5% of the hydrogen that it fuses into helium into energy. However, 5% would be a great achievement on Earth if we can build fusion reactors, for there is enough fuel in the form of heavy hydrogen bound in water molecules to supply the Earth with energy to spare for millions of more years. To get the remaining 95% of the energy out of matter, you would need to accelerate it to nearly the speed of light. This could be done by dropping it onto a black hole, but we are far from that kind of technology. Until we get a lot better at extracting energy from matter, turn the lights off and the thermostat down when you leave the house.



Secular Self-Help Support Group in St. Augustine

The Secular Self-help Support Group (in St. Augustine) welcomes compassionate, motivated people committed to working on self-improvement: mental (e.g., anxiety or depression), physical, or in overall well-being. We'll discuss the methods we use to improve our lives, such as good mental practices (e.g., meditation,



cognitive behavioral therapy), exercise, and nutrition, in a friendly environment. There are many good support net-

works for spiritual people. This group is intended for those who are NOT looking for support from God, a higher power, spirituality, or the supernatural. There is no charge for attending. Contact Imelda at: inthemail@bellsouth.net, or visit: <http://www.meetup.com/The-Secular-Self-Help-Support-Group> .



The Evolution of Religion

Shane Christian

Religion, like life, has evolved by Darwinian processes. The rise and fall of many religions can be traced throughout history. The following are only a few examples, of many, of the evolution of the virtual reality known as religion, with its merging and branching and dead ends.

Humans evolved a dual concept of reality. On one hand, we interact with people, places, and things; while on the other hand, we create a virtual reality—the stuff of gods, spirits, ghosts, angels, demons, heaven, and hell. Although the virtual reality is completely subjective and resides only within the minds of the believers, evolving religions have a profound influence on human societies. As with biological evolution, memetic evolution responds to stressful changes in the environment, such as wars, famines, plagues, natural disasters, and global depressions and recessions. When people suffer, they are more open to political or religious change. Some historians have speculated that extreme weather events in the sixth century may have set the stage for the rise of Islam.

I will begin with the Es-

senes, a transitional ideology between Judaism and Christianity, a Jewish sect founded during the second century BCE. The founder was crucified and his followers subsequently awaited his messianic return. Many biblical scholars believe that Jesus, or the person who would become known as Jesus, was a follower of the Jewish Essenes. Barbar Thiering, author of *Jesus and the Riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, proposed that Jesus conscientiously set out to fulfill the Essene prophecies to become the Teacher of Righteousness incarnate. Following the execution of James, the brother of Jesus, for teach-

included Zoroaster, Buddha, and Jesus, whose partial revelations were, he taught, contained and consummated in his own doctrines. Besides Zoroastrianism and Christianity, Manichaeism reflects the strong influence of Gnosticism. Mani was born into an aristocratic Persian family in southern Babylonia (now in Iraq). His father, a pious man, brought him up in an austere Baptist sect, possibly the Mandaeans. Between the ages of 12 and 24, Mani experienced visions in which an angel designated him the prophet of a new and ultimate revelation.



“As with biological evolution, memetic evolution responds to stressful changes in the environment, such as wars, famines, plagues, natural disasters and global depressions and recessions. When people suffer, they are more open to political or religious change.”

ing that his brother was the messiah, the Essenes disappeared from history after the Jewish revolt of 66 ACE.

During the era of Christianity’s rise, a major competitor in the religious marketplace was Manichaeism, named for its founder, the Persian sage Mani who lived circa 216-276 CE. Mani proclaimed himself the last prophet in a succession that

A few centuries later came Muhammad (570?-632) the founder of Islam and self-proclaimed last prophet. His revelations, encompassing political, social, as well as religious principles, became the basis of Islamic civilization and have had a vast influence on world history. Muhammad probably heard Christians and Jews expound upon their religious views at commercial fairs in Mecca; and, troubled by the questions they raised, he periodically withdrew to a cave outside Mecca to meditate and pray for guidance.

During one of these retreats, he experienced a vision of the archangel Gabriel who proclaimed him a prophet of God.

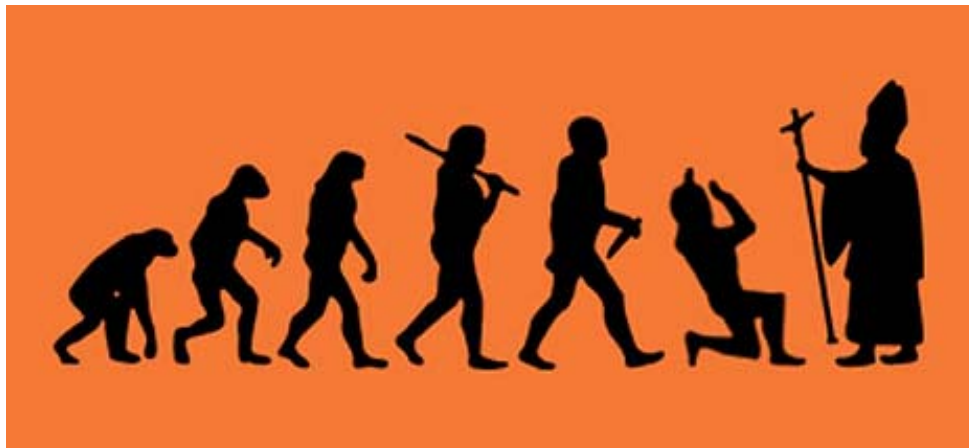
In the year 878, the 12th and last imam, or successor of Muhammad, disappeared. The Shia branch of Islam believes that the imam will one day reappear to save the world. For a short time after his disappearance, there was a succession of people who assumed the title of the Bab

(meaning "the gate") and acted as spokesmen for the imam. Over the next one thousand years, the religion evolved and had many

followers known as Babists. In the 1800s, the dominant Muslim rulers began to persecute the Babists. In 1844, a Persian named Mirza Ali Mohammad of Shiraz proclaimed himself the Bab. The Bab predicted that a new prophet, or messenger of God (Allah), would soon appear. This message spread rapidly throughout Persia and aroused the opposition of the ruling Islamic authorities. The Bab was executed in 1850, and more than 20,000 of his converts lost their lives in the persecution that followed.

A follower of the Bab, Mirza Hoseyn Ali Nuri, kept the belief alive even though he had been

imprisoned and exiled for his faith. In 1863, he proclaimed himself the long-awaited prophet. Known as Bahauallah, or Baha Allah, he became the founder of the Bahai faith. Most of the followers of the Bab acknowledged his claim. By the end of his life, Bahauallah saw his religion spread well beyond Persia into Egypt, the Sudan, Turkestan, India, and Burma (now Myanmar).



Throughout the past 2000 years, there have been hundreds of similar examples of ever-evolving religions. When studying the origins of these numerous religions, I find common themes. The founders were obsessed with religion and many were persecuted or imprisoned. While imprisoned, they tend to withdraw deeper into their own virtual reality, often proclaiming themselves the chosen one incarnate. Korean writer and minister Sun Myung Moon, who spent nearly three years in a North Korean labor camp, is a good example of this. Sabbatai Zevi (1626-1676), yet another self-

proclaimed Jewish messiah, showed signs of psychotic behavior. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, writers such as Charles Taze Russel (1852-1916), founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses, would gain wide following after predicting the world would end in 1914. In 1954, science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard started a cult based on his book, *Dianetics*, with the cynical purpose of reap-

ing mass profits as a prophet, fleecing the gullible for all he could get. All it takes to start a new religion is enough charisma and story-telling skills

to fool enough people with too little capacity for skeptical analysis.

Cults continue to pop up all over the world every year. To see a good example of the mentality of a cult leader, check out the *National Geographic Channel* archives and watch, "Inside a Cult," about a doomsday cult leader, Michael Travesser, one of the more recent "messiahs" who predicted the world would end on October 31, 2007. Like every such prediction thus far, the date came and went without any such apocalypse, to the dismay of the disappointed true-believers.



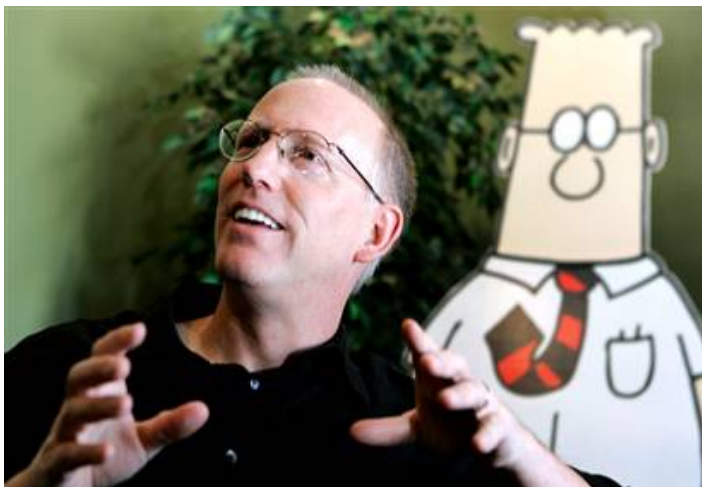
The Scott Adams Project - Part 1

Richard C. Keene

Most of us will recognize Scott Adams as the cartoon creator-writer of the daily strip, “Dilbert.” He has, however, much more and varied talents and interests as a print writer and has a life of overcoming physical and social conflicts. His political, business, social, and religious satire (often sarcastic) is worth reading, even in print-only format. This article is a project of familiarization with Scott’s works, particularly his most recent (2007) book, *Stick to Drawing Comics, Monkey Brain!* It will be a series of chapter quotes or reprints (each a short essay) from that work, as the entries particularly relate to the process of “freethought.” It is proposed as a frequently (but not fixedly) occurring article in the *FreeThinker*. This will be the first in the series. (Adams’ book is available in libraries and in purchase format, \$24.95 in hardback, from Penguin Group Press, 375 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014, or at your local book store.)

Scott was born in Windham, NY, in 1957, graduated valedictorian from Windham Central High, and obtained a B.S. from Hartwick College (Oneonta, NY) in 1979 and an MBA from U. Cal Berkley School of Business in 1988, qualifying in the top 94th percentile on the GMAT. He

worked as a software developer in the telecommunication engineering sections of Crocker National Bank and Pacific Bell (both in/near San Francisco) from 1979-1989, before the successful launch of “Dilbert,” and continued at Pac Bell from 1989-1996 (educated as an economist but designated by Pac Bell as an “engineer”) after publication and syndication. His fanciful and satirical sense of humor and sarcastic ideology manifested itself



Scott Adams and his creation

publicly in an impersonation of a management consultant for Logitech (by invitation of its CEO) proposing to senior staff, while in disguise, a faked “mission statement” which was so complicated that he later stated it was impossible to implement and had “no real context whatsoever.” He managed to spread his satirical talents to a few Sci-fi and comedy TV series and films, in cameo appearances.

He has received numerous awards and certificates for his

cartoon and written works, while still being recognized as one of the 50 most influential management thinkers in the 20th and 21st Centuries. In addition to the “Dilbert” strip, he has published both cartoon compilations and satirical essays, starting with the *Dilbert Newsletter* in 1994 and the current study work, *Stick to Drawing Comics, Monkey Brain!: Cartoonist Ignores Helpful Advice* (2007). His other non-artistic and non-

writing interests and advocacies involve being a trained hypnotist and an affirmed vegetarian. He is married (Shelly) and lives in Dublin (San Mateo County), CA. He states his political leaning as “Libertarian,” but “Contrarian” would seem to be more accurate.

Scott’s life has not been trouble free. In late 2004, he in-

curred an increased—and recurring—bout of *focal dystonia* (a condition affecting both his eyesight and drawing ability), and then a recurring episode of *spasmodic dysphonia* (a condition causing his vocal cords to vibrate abnormally and his words to be garbled) which limited his speaking engagements. Both nerve disorders are projected to improve as nerve pathways regenerate, and he continues to work through both, utilizing

(Continued on page 12)

The Florida Legislature Is Coming To Town. Should We Worry?

Curtis Wolf

It is time for my sixth annual review of bills coming before the Florida Legislature that may interest or even terrify free-thinkers 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 8th, 2011. 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? This does not invalidate the bill in and of itself, but it is imperative that arguments for and against the bill be based on reason and secular values. Does the bill advance or discourage pseudoscience?

Let's start with one of the perennial favorite culture-war issues—abortion. HB 321 would prohibit abortions of fetuses 20 weeks or older. HB 415 goes even further and prohibits all abortions except to save the life of the mother. HB 747 requires that fetuses born alive after a botched abortion would be treated like any other live birth. SB 1094 replaces the phrase “viable fetus” with the phrase “unborn child” at any stage of development in the Florida statutes concerning vehicular homi-

cide. HB 97 prohibits insurance policies receiving a government subsidy, and available in the state exchanges created by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, from being used for abortion services.

Another hot-button culture-war issue is gay rights. HB 337 recognizes domestic partnerships which could provide many of the same rights to gay and lesbian couples that are available to straight married couples. HB 361 prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation.

“...it is imperative that arguments for and against the bill be based on reason and secular values. Does the bill advance or discourage pseudoscience?”

Children having sex is also a big concern for culture warriors throughout Florida. SB 108 eliminates the requirement that public schools teach abstinence based sex education.

Promotion of religion is still in style in Florida. HB 309 allows prayers to take place at non-compulsory, secondary public school student events. HB 369 allows voluntary “faith- and character-based” programs within state prisons as long as they do not attempt to convert inmates to any religion. HB

4167 prevents the sunset of the Florida Faith-based and Community-based Advisory Council. SR 320 designates “Merry

Christmas” as the official state greeting for December 25th. SJR 1218 proposes a constitutional amendment to Article I Section 3 of the Florida Constitution to replace the requirement that no state or local government funds can be used for

the benefit of religious organizations with the stipulation that publicly funded program participants can choose religious vendors to provide to them the services associated with these programs.

Finally, HB 633 makes numerous changes in the law concerning the practice of chiropractic “medicine.”

Chiropractors are often criticized by science-based physicians for their questionable ideas concerning the relationship between spinal subluxations and health problems.

If you want to review the bills described above, see <http://www.my.floridahouse.com/Sections/Bills/bills.aspx> for Florida House bills; and

<http://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bills> for Florida Senate bills.



First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.
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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!

FCFS 2011 Board Members

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All FCFS personnel may be reached via e-mail at info@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org.

First Coast FreeThinker

The *First Coast FreeThinker* is published for all freethinkers and potential freethinkers. Non-members may receive the e-mail version indefinitely. Non-members may receive three hard-copy issues free, after which they must join the FCFS to continue to receive hard copy.

Readers are invited and encouraged to reprint our original materials provided they give credit to this publication. The *FreeThinker* is intended to convey ideas that stimulate thought and promote discussion on a variety of subjects. Views and opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the First Coast Freethought Society.

Information for Contributors

We welcome submissions. Articles for consideration should be submitted via e-mail to the e-mail address shown below. Contributors who cannot submit manuscripts electronically may send them to Fred

Hill, 1817 Egner St., Jacksonville, FL 32206. The deadline for time-sensitive material is the FOURTH SATURDAY of each month for the following month's issue.

We prefer articles no longer than 1,000 words. Longer articles will be evaluated in terms of whether their importance and degree of interest to our readers warrant publication.

All accepted manuscripts are subject to editorial modification. Our style guide is *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Manuscript submissions cannot be returned. Authors are responsible for the accuracy of all quotations and for supplying complete references where applicable.

E-mail for Submissions

Editor@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

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

To advertise, contact Patrice Bennett, 904-352-7005, or info@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.

P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591 • (904) 419-8826

2011 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
904-419-8826 • CarrieRen@att.net • <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/>
All inquiries are held in the strictest confidence.

Upcoming Freethought Events of Interest on the First Coast

Monday	March 21	FCFS Monthly Meeting - 6:30 p.m.
Tuesday	March 22	FCFS Monthly Social at Olive Garden, Jacksonville - 6:00 p.m.
Saturday	March 26	FCFS Deadline to submit articles for March 2011 <i>FreeThinker</i>
Sunday	March 27	FCFS Secular Sunday in the Park, Jacksonville - 10:00 a.m.
Sunday	April 3	FCFS Humanist Book Discussion Group, Jacksonville - 2:00 p.m.
Monday	April 11	JAM Meetup at European Street Café in San Marco - 6:30 p.m.
Monday	April 18	FCFS Monthly Meeting, Jax - 6:30 p.m.
Sunday	April 24	FCFS Secular Sunday in the Park, Jacksonville 10:00 a.m.

First Coast Freethought Society (FCFS) • <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/>
Jacksonville Atheist, Agnostic, Secular Meetup Group (JAM) • <http://www.jaxatheists.com/>
Northeast Florida Coalition of Reason (NeFCoR) • <http://NorthEastFloridaCoR.org/>

The FCFS is a proud member of the Humanists of Florida Association and the Northeast Florida Coalition of Reason

(Continued from page 8)

massive self-control efforts to limit both writing and vocal impairments to his activities (from an entry titled "I'm the Loneliest Skeptic," p. 340, *Stick to Drawing Comics, Monkey Brain!*).

He goes on to say (and I quote): "It's lonely to be me. Skeptics hate my opinions as much as believers do. Every skeptic is different, of course, but I'm so far along the skeptic curve that other skeptics don't recognize me as one of their own. The difference has everything to do with one word extraordinary.

"Skeptics like to say that 'extraordinary claims require

extraordinary proof'. To which I say, 'What the hell does extraordinary mean to you?' It's thoroughly subjective. For example, if someone claimed to be able to hover above the ground just by concentrating, would you believe it based on the account of one reporter? How about several reporters and photographs? Would video be enough to sway you? Suppose a team of scientists set up controlled tests and published their results in peer-reviewed journals, would that convince you?

"Not me. I'd want to be alone with that guy in a room where he had never been before, so I could

watch him hovering up close. And I'd want to run a big hula hoop over him while he was doing it, to check for strings. And I'd want to supply the hula hoop myself. Then, when he'd passed all of those tests, I'd still think he was full of shit but I'd probably form a religion to worship him just in case he's either the messiah or an advanced alien sent to Earth to scout us. I figure it's a good idea to get on the inside track to be either an apostle or a traitorous lackey to the alien overlords, whichever is necessary. I'd want to hedge my bets. But I still wouldn't totally believe he hovered."

