

[View this email in your browser](#)



August 2014

Volume 13, Issue 8

Table of Contents

- [This Month's Meeting](#)
- [August President's Message - Today's Challenge to Reason](#)
- [August Olive Garden Social](#)
- [Should Someone Be Exempt from a Law Merely for a Religious Reason?](#)
- [Humanist Book Discussion Group - Jacksonville](#)
- [Humanist Book Discussion Group - St. Augustine](#)
- [Animal Consciousness](#)
- [2014 NPR Corporate Sponsorship Fund Drive Update - HELP!!](#)
- [About our newsletter, the First Coast FreeThinker](#)
- [Dignity U Wear - Volunteering Continues!](#)
- [About the First Coast Freethought Society](#)
- [Announcing the FCFS September Meeting](#)
- [Northeast Florida Coalition of Reason](#)
- [Calendar of Freethought Events on the First Coast](#)
- [Directions to Monthly Meeting](#)
- [FCFS Month-at-a Glance](#)
- [Membership Application](#)

This Month's Meeting

- **What:** August FCFS Monthly Meeting
- **Who:** Richard T. Hull, Ph.D., Bioethicist; Professor Emeritus, Department of Philosophy, SUNY Buffalo; Author; Editor; Humanist
- **Title:** "Huntington's Disease: Medical and Moral Dimensions"
- **When:** Monday, August 18, 2014, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. (doors open at 6:00)

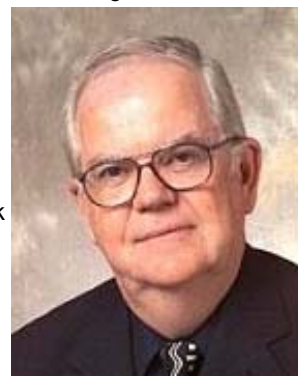
- **Where:** Buckman Bridge Unitarian Church, 8447 Manresa Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32244 (Driveway located on Collins Rd., 400 feet east of Roosevelt Blvd.)

Meetings Free and Open to the Public • Plenty of Free Parking

Meeting Description

Huntington's disease is a late-onset, degenerative, genetic disease that finds itself expressed in individuals after their childbearing days are past, thus recurring generation after generation. It is passed from one affected parent to 50% of his or her offspring.

In this illustrated talk, Richard Hull, retired bioethicist, acquaints us with his fascination with this disease and those it affects. He brings to his talk videos that illustrate the horror and the dilemmas of the disease as science begins to develop methods of predicting it. His talk ends with a review of current research and its promise for eventually conquering this disease, long misidentified as a divine retribution for the sins of past relatives.



Richard Hull holds a Ph.D. in Philosophy and for over 30 years has served as a faculty member at several universities including the University of Buffalo, Texas State University, and the University of Montana. Ethical issues in medicine have long been his specialty.

August President's Message - Today's Challenge to Reason Guest Author: David R. Simon, Ph.D.

President Earl Coggins is taking a few months off from his President's Message responsibilities in order that he may devote the time to a play he is writing, scheduled for our November monthly meeting. Thank you to FCFS member and friend David Simon for authoring this feature.

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is a theory developed by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, which states "The structure of a language determines or greatly influences the modes of thought and behavior characteristic of the culture in which it is spoken."⁽¹⁾ This hypothesis is very difficult to test empirically and has recently morphed into a form of neo-Whorfism, "—a position of linguistic relativity—[that] argues that...language 'is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas, but is itself a shaper of ideas, the program and guide for the individual's meaningful activity'. In short, language determines (or shapes) our perceptions of reality.

The classic literary example of this is the 'newspeak' of the [totalitarian](#) rulers of George Orwell's *1984*. The most famous commonly cited examples in social science are probably those of



the Hanunoo, who have 92 names for rice, each conveying a different reality, and the Eskimo, who have over a hundred words for snow. Such fine differentiation permits these cultures to see important facets of their culture more clearly.”(2)



By logical Orwellian implication, then if language can shape thought, it can also shape nonthought. Sociologists view language as a cultural institution. This means that those who participate in this institution are role players. Some role players invent lingual patterns and disseminate them to the wider culture. Users of language rarely invent new words and concepts and are merely consumers of language. There are additional role players as well who contribute the specialized lingual patters created in bureaucracies and specialized professions. In contemporary culture, by far the most destructive creators of language are people in control of the mass media and social media.

What mass sources of communication create is the opposite of critical thinking. Stated otherwise, critical thinking is the process of thinking about things in an abstract, "big-picture" manner. A critical thinker doesn't just take information in and regurgitate rote-learned results. A critical thinker understands why things happen; rather than just recites "two plus two equals four." A critical thinker will understand where the answer comes from.(3) The Twentieth Century's greatest American sociologist, C. Wright Mills, put the matter succinctly: "If we accept the Greek's definition of the idiot as an altogether private [person], then we must conclude that many Americans are now idiots."(4) By this, Mills does not mean that people do not merely retreat into antisocial cocoons and cease to communicate with one another. Instead, citizens are no longer afforded a voice in the democratic communication process. Propaganda and its related techniques are inherently one-way processes, with those who own the means of communication more able to hold sway over the masses.



C. Wright Mills
American Sociologist
(1916 - 1962)

Lately, the most irate citizens tend to form cult like groups (e.g., young world evolutionists, domestic terrorists, or the Tea Party) wherein Manchurian Candidate-like persuasion ensures that the members of extreme enclaves engage in differential association wherein they communicate only with like-minded members, hence closing off any hope of critical thinking from different perspectives.

Language Idiocy Today

What Mills implies here is that most users of language today are mere consumers of words and concepts fed to them by the dominant institutions of modern life. A few examples from each will suffice here, but the reader is encouraged to consult reference no. 5 found in Notes, at the end of this article.

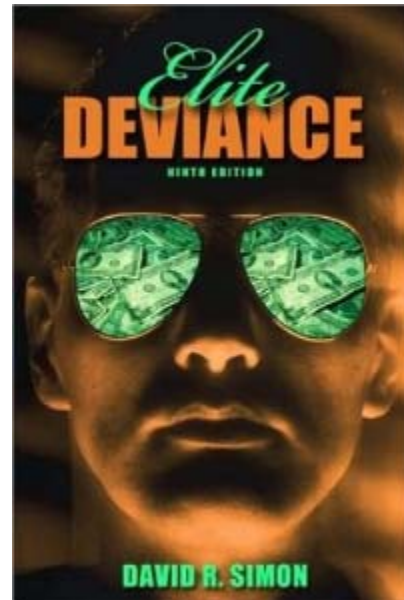
Corporate Advertising & Government Propaganda

Business is a nearly \$200 billion a year persuasion machine that is loaded with techniques that mark the ruination of the English language and constitute new forms of manipulation. One characteristic of the new advertising is inauthenticity. This manipulative technique is used in both advertising and politics continuously. It consists of the creation of positive overt appearances and negative underlying realities. We're constantly urged to eat unhealthy foods, drink alcohol "responsibly," and buy things we do not need with money we do not have. The underlying result is a plague of obesity and affluenza (the diseases of affluence). These consist of crimes for money by a deprived and envious lower class, a heavily indebted and often bankrupt working and middle class, and an endlessly greedy upper class (which is now buying our democracy with money that has been termed free speech).

Government inauthenticity works in a similar way. The current "humanitarian crisis" on the U.S. border is but a most recent example. The government has promised humanitarian treatment of the children involved, with rapid administrative processing of their cases. Underneath, this means sending them back to the hell holes from which they came, as soon as possible.

If a maniac commits mass murder of little school children, it means, as Obama stated, that "God has called them home," not that the government is going to do anything about mentally ill people getting their hands on guns.

Elite Deviance **(10th Edition, 2012)** **by David R. Simon**



Advertising nearly always consists of inauthentic lies. A more subtle form of deceptive advertising is called *puffery*. This term refers to the practice of making exaggerated claims for a product. Although advertisers routinely make such false claims and the result is deception, the law considers such practices to be legal. These unverifiable claims are often made in the form of empty slogans.

- "A new kind of family"—ABC Family
- "Be the first to know"—CNN International, 2002–present
- "No limits"—Showtime (1997–present)
- "A better world is our business"—Samsung
- "Connecting people"—Nokia
- "Ideas for life"—Panasonic
- "Imagination at work"—General Electric

- “Like no other”—Sony, 200
- “Come see the softer side of Sears”
- “Design for all”—Target
- “I don’t wanna grow up, I’m a Toys ‘R’ Us kid”
- “Every kiss begins with Kay”— Kay Jewelers

Such claims are false or unsubstantiated. Even though they are considered legal, their intent is to mislead. The goal, as is always the case with advertising, is to use whatever means will sell the product. If that includes trifling with the truth, then so be it.

Even though knowledge concerning puffery in advertising is far from complete, some important facts have emerged from research on this topic:

People perceive more content in ads than the ads actually contain. Additional values are perceived by consumers and attached to products. For example, one study of sweaters concluded that when sweaters were shown with belts and captions were read by someone with a Scottish accent, consumers were twice as likely to perceive that the sweaters were imported.

Implied deceptions (puffery claims) are believed more than are outright lies. In one study of seventeen puff claims, 70 percent of respondents felt that the claims were either wholly or partially true.

Puffery claims are often indistinguishable from factual claims. In another study, a sample of 100 people were placed in a room and presented with both real and puff claims. The researchers found that “many of the puff claims were believed by a large proportion of the respondents...The subjects could not tell that these puffs might not be literally true.” Researchers found that the factual claims were believed just as often as the puff claims used in their survey. Puffery has the potential to deceive consumers and, as well, injure the credibility of advertising.

In summary, research indicates that a large proportion of the sample interprets the [puff] claim to suggest superiority. Consumers fed a constant diet of puffery ads may confuse fact and fiction. Moreover, they may actually come to distrust advertising, on the one hand—yet unconsciously be manipulated by it, on the other.

A small group of power holders tends to develop precepts and customs delicately balanced between conventional and criminal (deviant) behavior, as well as objectives that may be obtained through both deviant and nondeviant means. Part of this subculture of elite behavior consists of norms and sentiments that make deviance permissible. That is, deviant acts are filtered through a sanitizing, ideological prism, which gives them the appearance of not being criminal or deviant. Their overall effect is to lead the nation down the path toward a mass society wherein freethought is diminished, and a repressive elite increasingly imposes its undemocratic will on a deeply divided mass of people.

There is much more to say on these and related topics, and I look forward to having the opportunity to do so in the next few issues of the *FreeThinker*.

Notes

1. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Sapir-Whorf+hypothesis>
2. http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Theory_of_linguistic_relativity.aspx

3. Read more: http://www.ehow.com/how_8450832_identify-critical-thinking-process.html
4. C. W. Mills, "Structure of Power in America," *British Journal of Sociology* 9 March, `1958).
5. The following discussion is based on David R. Simon, *Elite Deviance* 10th Edition (Boston: Pearson, 2012): Chapters 3, 4, and 8.

August Olive Garden Social

- Where: **OLIVE GARDEN** on Philips Highway, across from the Avenues Mall. The hostesses will know where we are seated. Proceed directly to our room.
- When: Tuesday, **AUGUST 26**, 2014 at 6:00 p.m. Social hour at 6:00. Dinner at 7:00. We order from the menu.
- RSVP: E-mail CarrieRen@att.net (or call 904-268-8826) by Tuesday morning, if you plan to attend!

Should Someone Be Exempt from a Law Merely for a Religious Reason?

Susan Ert-Ker

In June, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) used the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) to grant Hobby Lobby, Inc. an exemption from a current law. The case (see https://www.google.com/search?q=%28http%3A%2F%2Fwww.supremecourt.gov%2Fopinions%2F13pdf%2F13-354_olp1.pdf) might cause you to ponder these basic questions:

1. Do you think religious groups should be allowed (based on their religious beliefs or practices) special exemptions from laws that the rest of us must follow?
2. Does your answer depend upon whether or not anyone (other than the religious practitioner) is harmed?
3. Do you believe a strategy that allows a woman to choose between pregnant or not-pregnant is a necessary component of a woman's health? And if yes to that question, do you also believe that the decision for the best form of birth control should be between a woman and her doctor? Certainly family planning and the emotional consequences of sexual activity and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases are important, but here I am merely asking about one health issue as it concerns a woman.



4. Do you believe a cohesive group has a moral obligation to make available medical care for its group members? It is not a question about how to achieve the goal. Of course we would have to define group (family, country, city, state, etc.), and we'd have to define "available" once we decide whether or not a group has the obligation. I am trying to ask if you think an evolving community should want (as a group) to formulate a plan so that the medical needs of the group members can be met? Are treatment and prevention of health problems important enough to be given special consideration by a community/society/country?

My answer to question #1:

At one time, Justice Antonin Scalia didn't want to allow an exemption from laws for religious reasons. He is quoted as saying (<http://blog.constitutioncenter.org/2014/06/what-is-rfra-and-why-do-we-care/>):

"... would open the prospect of ... exemptions from civic obligations of almost every conceivable kind."

Shortly after Scalia made that statement, Congress passed RFRA. Here is an article about RFRA:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2014/07/01/dont-blame-alito-for-ruling-against-womens-health-blame-congress-first/>

I think RFRA should be modified. I don't mind if someone challenges a law if the law violates anyone's first amendment rights. In the spirit of Kant's categorical imperative (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Categorical_imperative), let the First Amendment benefit everyone. If you are fighting for civil rights, then fight for everyone.

My point is two fold:

1. RFRA should only allow an exemption from a law if no one (besides the religious practitioner) is harmed.
2. If RFRA will benefit the religious practitioner then modify the law (that RFRA is attacking) so that all citizens can take advantage of the benefit IF there is no valid reason for the law. If the law was a mistake, then it should be modified for everyone.

For example, RFRA was passed in reaction to consumption of peyote in a religious ritual. If you want to allow peyote consumption in certain situations, then outline WHEN it is OK. Outline the ritual and make it available to everyone, not just certain religious sects.

It is interesting that Scalia ruled against the use of peyote in a religious ritual, but he seems to be fine when it comes to restricting benefits to women if a religious group has an objection. I don't want religious nuts holding our country back. What's next? Schools will be forbidden from teaching evolution because a religious nut doesn't believe evolution is supported by the evidence? I don't think religious groups should be allowed to skirt the law. It is scary enough when a majority (that has it wrong) passes laws that are not based on evidence. It is even scarier to allow a minority to change laws that affect others. Please let a woman make her own choice about her own body.

My answer to question # 2:

Allowing Hobby Lobby to skirt the law hurts their female employees. Before the Hobby Lobby case, the female employees of Hobby Lobby had a certain benefit. After the Hobby Lobby case, they don't have that benefit. A decrease in benefits is one definition of harm.

My answer to question #3:

The Affordable Care Act (ACA), also known as Obamacare, emphasized preventative care. Part of preventative care for women is prevention of unwanted pregnancies. The decision should be between a woman and her doctor as to what is the best strategy for preventing unwanted pregnancies.

We don't want to go backwards to the time prior to Margaret Sanger. *"During Margaret Sanger's work among the working class of immigrant women she was revealed [exposed] to graphic examples of women forced into frequent childbirth, miscarriage, and self-induced abortion for lack of information on how to avoid unwanted pregnancy."* That is a quote from

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_Sanger#Social_activism .

You might counter that the preventative package in Hobby Lobby's health insurance policy does include some forms of birth control. However (after the ruling), their health insurance package now excludes the IUD and the morning-after pill. Shouldn't the decision be between a woman and her doctor? There are many examples of why the IUD might be the best choice for some women. Google it and you'll see. What about extreme instances (such as rape)? Wouldn't you want the woman to have access to the morning-after pill?

Contrary to Hobby Lobby's owners' mistaken beliefs, those two methods (IUD and morning-after pill) prevent the sperm and egg from uniting. They do not abort the merged egg and sperm. Here is some information about the evidence: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/02/upshot/how-hobby-lobby-ruling-could-limit-access-to-birth-control.html?_r=1.

In the majority SCOTUS opinion (see link in first paragraph), Alito said it didn't matter that Hobby Lobby's owners' beliefs weren't supported by the scientific evidence. All that mattered to Alito was Hobby Lobby's owners' "belief." How absurd!!!!

My answer to question # 4:

Society has a moral obligation to provide medical care for its citizens. We want to encourage clinics, doctors, and research. We want affordable medical care to be available to every citizen. This is the problem we want to solve.

The creation of the ACA was a series of compromises. Here is a link to an article discussing the difficulty of trying to solve the problem of citizens being unable to obtain medical care:

<http://content.healthaffairs.org/content/29/6/1112.full>

Excerpt from that article:

"Political pragmatism carried the day as reformers made compromises on a range of additional issues...in order to pass legislation. "

One of the solutions to the problem is to pool our money. Require that everyone pay into the pool, i.e., insurance.

Preventative care was a vital part of the ACA.

Conclusion

Religious groups should **not** be exempt from any part of the requirement to offer preventative care in their

health insurance package.

I thought the satire in the Borowitz Report

(<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/borowitzreport/2014/06/supreme-court-majority-calls-case-a-dispute-between-women-and-people.html>) encompassed the spirit of how Alito's SCOTUS majority opinion felt to me. Alito did seem to dismiss the rights of women. I think this SCOTUS decision puts women's rights below the rights of religious nuts. It is very sad. Please know that I do not consider all religious people to be nuts. I am using the word "nut" to single out a specific group that wants to ignore evidence in support of some archaic point of view.

If you have different answers to my 4 questions, please consider posting them on the Jax Freethought Yahoo Group discussion board. To Subscribe, send a blank message to: jaxfreethought-subscribe@yahogroups.com.



Humanist Book Discussion Group - Jacksonville

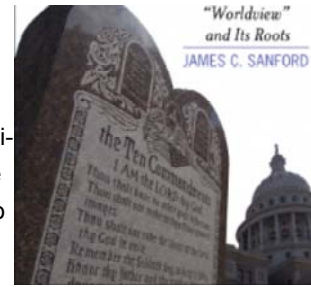
- **When:** 2:00 - 3:30 p.m., the first Sunday of each month.
- **Where:** Books-A-Million, 9400 Atlantic Boulevard, Jacksonville, FL 32225.
- **What:** Books planned for discussion:
 - September 7, 2014 - *Blueprint for Theocracy: The Christian Right's Vision for America*, by James C. Sanford
 - October 5, 2014 - *No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA, and the U.S. Surveillance State*, by Glenn Greenwald

Link to Book Review: <https://www.au.org/church-state/julyaugust-2014-church-state/books-ideas/dissecting-the-religious-right-its-origins-and>

From its beginnings in the late 1970s, the Christian Right has taken a confrontational stance toward contemporary America. It has vigorously opposed the nation's open, secular society, secret of its desire to erase sacred-secular distinctions and "return" the United States to its status as a "Christian nation." Given such controversial objectives, it is remarkable how little attention has been given to the ideology that shapes its thinking.



Blueprint for Theocracy brings fresh light to the subject by examining the nature and origin of the Religious Right's highly charged ideas. It traces its belief system, commonly called "Christian Worldview," to four thinkers of the last century (Kuyper, Van Til, Rushdoony, and Schaeffer) known for their anti-modernist, authoritarian, and in some cases overtly theocratic doctrines. The book then explores how the movement conveys this ideological framework to followers and uses it to advance a right-wing political agenda and assert unique claims to truth. The book discusses the danger the ideology poses to democracy and offers ways of confronting it.



James Sanford is a historian studying the roots of our current politics. He writes frequently in the electronic media and blogs on religion and politics at PoliticalOptic.com. This is his second book.

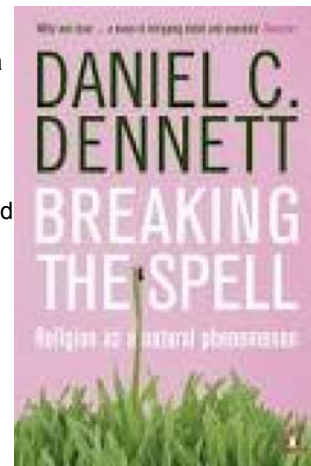
For More Info: Contact Herb Gerson at 12herbert30gerson@bellsouth.net, or call 904-363-6446.

Humanist Book Discussion Group - St. Augustine

- **When:** 7:00 - 8:30 p.m., the second Thursday of each month.
- **Where:** Clubhouse at a private condominium in St. Augustine (Anastasia Island).
- **What:** Book planned for discussion:
 - September 11, 2014 - *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* by Daniel C. Dennett (2007) Available in paperback or Kindle.
 - October 9, 2014 - *Why People Believe Weird Things: Pseudoscience, Superstition, and Other Confusions of Our Time* by Michael Shermer and Stephen Jay Gould

Link to Book Review: https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2067.Breaking_the_Spell

For a growing number of people, there is nothing more important than religion. It is an integral part of their marriage, child rearing, and community. In this daring new book, distinguished philosopher Daniel C. Dennett takes a hard look at this phenomenon and asks why. Where does our devotion to God come from and what purpose does it serve? Is religion a blind evolutionary compulsion or a rational choice? In *Breaking the Spell*, Dennett argues that the time has come to shed the light of science on the fundamental questions of faith. In a spirited narrative that ranges widely through history, philosophy, and psychology, Dennett explores how organized religion evolved from folk beliefs and why it is such a potent force today. Deftly and lucidly, he contends that the "belief in belief" has fogged any attempt to rationally consider the existence of God and the relationship between divinity and human need.



Breaking the Spell is not an antireligious screed but rather an eyeopening exploration of the role that belief plays in our lives, our interactions, and our country. With the gulf between rationalists and adherents of "intelligent design" widening daily, Dennett

has written a timely and provocative book that will be read and passionately debated by believers and nonbelievers alike.

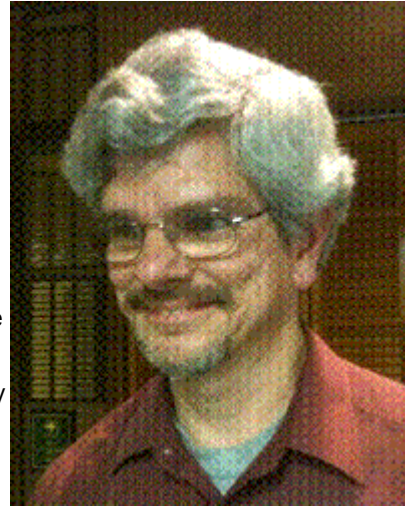
More Info: Contact Bill Stroop at bill@strooplaw.com for address, directions, and gate code.

NOTE TO ALL! Books may be found in the library, purchased from local book stores or 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://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org> and then click the link to Amazon.com for your purchase.

Animal Consciousness

Fred W. Hill

I am an animal. I am a subject of an incredibly diverse kingdom of multi-cellular, eukaryotic organisms, unique in that I belong to a particular group of animals that can type that phrase on a computer and send it out so that others of my kind around the world might read it. No other type of animal can do such a thing or even think or speak about it with comprehension. We humans take such pride in our uniqueness that many of the reputedly wisest of us have long insisted that among all living organisms only we can think, experience emotions, or feel pain. To insist otherwise is to commit the gross breach of anthropomorphism--ascribing human attributes to things that are not human. This applies whether I say that the walls in my den are angrily closing in on me or that my cat loves me and will bravely protect me from those mad walls. My cat, they would crossly inform me, can no more feel love or be brave than my walls can be mad. My cat is just an animal, after all. But, then, so am I. Are humans really so different from all other animals?



**Brave, mad, or both?
Cat takes on alligator.**

Certainly our mental capacity and dexterous hands enable us to reshape our environment, share complex ideas, and create multitudes of abstract and concrete artifacts, all in ways no other species can. Among our artifacts are religions and philosophies which tell us that humans have souls. Aristotle defined a soul, or psyche, as the form that makes a body a living thing. To his reasoning, all living things have particular types of souls for specialized functions of the body, such as obtaining nutrients, reproducing, moving or using senses, but only humans also had the intellective soul which was partially independent of the body. In Descartes's philosophy, however, body and soul were entirely divided, and the soul or "thinking thing" is "that which senses, imagines, remembers, doubts, thinks abstractly, and wills freely," as described by Helen Hattab in *Descartes's Body-Machine* (http://www.folger.edu/html/folger_institute/experience/textures_hattab.htm). Having thus separated the body from the soul, Descartes could then engage in mathematically describing the latter without undue fear of contradicting 17th century Catholic doctrine regarding the former and its importance to personal immortality and free will. As all the attributes of the soul were regarded as solely existing in living human beings, other living animals could be only "earthen machines," perhaps more complex than, say, clocks, but no more capable of free will or of anything resembling human thoughts. Subsequent philosophers and scientists apparently expanded on that idea to reason that if lower animals can't think and are only automatons, that means they can't feel and it is thus mere reflexive actions that cause a dog to make anguished-sounding howls when a nail is driven into its paw and not pain as a human (or supposed son of God) would experience it.

Descartes explains the body as a mechanical machine and describes the reflex arc. (From the *Leaning Tower* series by Niels Engelsted.)



This played well with the tenets of many dominant religious views wherein adherents received permission from god(s) to treat other creatures however they wanted, unless they happened to belong to someone else. In the holy books of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, all other animals were created for the use of Adam and Eve and all their descendants. Thus by religious dictate we have dominion over all other animals, and if we want to grind them up to use as fertilizer, we have the god-given right!

Good news for anyone who didn't want to risk feeling guilty about potentially causing sorrow to any of God's creatures when slaughtering them for food, fur or other goods; or torturing them in the pursuit of knowledge or entertainment. But then at the same time, presumably good people often found ways to assuage the psychic burden of enslaving, torturing or slaughtering other human beings by convincing themselves that the victims weren't really people, or that it was God's will that they must suffer, and anyhow, it's all for the greater good (even if the victims didn't quite see it that way). Such arguments were even once applied to half the human population – women – as a justification for denying them the right to vote, to own property or to make their own decisions as to who they would marry, among many other rights, which are still denied to them in too many nations dominated by religious dogma. Humans have been very good at finding ways to avoid feeling bad about treating other animals, including other humans, very terribly.



A rhinoceros calf mourning his mother, butchered for her horn's mythical magical properties and the money inhumane and inane humans will pay for it.

Despite near constant news reminding us of how horrible humans can be to other species and one another, as exemplified by elephants and rhinos being slaughtered for tusks and horns to feed the abominable fancies or superstitions of wealthy louts and the latest conflicts in the Levant, Ukraine, Iraq and Syria, there has, nevertheless, been some progress, some cause to retain hope. Slavery, for instance, still exists in underground sex clubs and sweat shops even here in the good ol' U.S.A., but is no longer protected by law anywhere – Mauritania became both the last nation to abolish slavery (in 1981) and the last to make slavery a crime (in 2007). As detailed in Stephen Pinker's massive tome, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, quantitatively the level of violence committed by humans has actually declined over the course of millennia of our history – our ancestors apparently did not live in very peaceable kingdoms. Moreover, statutory rights protected by law enforcement have increased significantly even within the last few decades for many once heavily victimized sub-groups. Even non-human animals now have rights to not be treated cruelly, even if those rights are often loosely enforced and by necessity hardly universal – the insecticide DDT was banned due to its negative impact on birds, after all, not because it was lethal to mosquitoes.

Moreover, there has been a significant change in scientific views towards our animal cousins, signaled by The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness of July 7, 2012, issued by “a prominent international group of cognitive neuroscientists, neuropharmacologists, neuroanatomists and computational neuroscientists gathered at the University of Cambridge to reassess the neurobiological substrates of conscious experience and related behaviors in human and non-human animals.” (<http://fcmconference.org/img/CambridgeDeclarationOnConsciousness.pdf>). In brief, the declaration admitted that “humans are not unique in possessing ...consciousness” and that it is possessed by “all mammals and birds, and many other creatures, including octopuses....” Finally, there is a growing consensus among scientists that the problem is not anthropomorphism when insisting that an elephant with tears rolling down her face may actually be crying, responding to emotional stimuli much like a human, such as being freed after decades of brutal captivity or losing a parent or other close family relation. Rather, the scientific folly is *anthropocentrism* – “[P]lacing humans at the center of all interpretation, observation, and concern, and dominant men at the center of that, has led to some of the worst errors in science, whether in astronomy, psychology, or animal behavior. ... It reflects a passionate wish to differentiate ourselves from animals, to make animals other, presumably in order to maintain humans at the top of the evolutionary hierarchy and the food chain.” (*When Elephants Weep*, Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson & Susan McCarthy, 1995, pp 41-42). Such belief in human exceptionalism, in the view of Christof Koch, Chief Scientific Officer of the Allen Institute of Brain Science, “flies in the face of all evidence for the structural and behavioral continuity between animals and people.” (“Consciousness Is Everywhere”, Koch, Huffington Post, 8/15/12).

Raju the elephant crying apparent tears of joy upon being unchained and

reunited with other elephants after 50 years of brutal captivity.



So contrary to the common insult, being an animal is not really the same as being an unfeeling brute, incapable of sympathy or compassion. Other animals do engage in horrific behavior – male lions force themselves onto a pride and deliberately kill the cubs fathered by a rival lion and chimpanzees engage in tribal warfare. But humans have engaged in equally atrocious behavior, as recorded in our most ancient history books and our most current news footage. And too many animals have been observed engaging in more gentle and altruistic behavior – such as elephants attempting to help a rhinoceros calf get out of a mudhole (ibid, Masson & McCarthy, pp 154-155) or a recent viral video of a bear pulling a struggling crow out of a moat and then leaving the crow alone to recover -- that cannot be explained away as purely instinctual, to be pooh-poohed away as merely anecdotal, not signifying anything important. Rather, they are more evidence that all animals are complex beings, many capable of a far wider range of behavior than previously acknowledged even within the scientific community. But unlike old holy texts, scientific knowledge can be changed after admitting mistakes and biases that skewed previous interpretations of data. For all our wisdom as *Homo sapiens*, after all, we are all still animals, evolved from and kindred to other animals rather than unique, divine creations. We are all of the Kingdom *Animalia* and still have much to learn about one another – both our human and non-human kin.

2014 NPR Corporate Sponsorship Fund Drive Update - HELP!!

Carrie Renwick

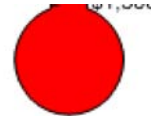
As you are aware, the First Coast Freethought Society fundraising campaign to keep our National Public Radio (NPR) announcements about the FCFS and our monthly meetings on NPR member radio station WJCT, 89.9 FM, continues. In all our previous years, we have reached our goal by the end of the second month.

For some unknown reason, donations continue to come in slowly this year. I wish I had better news for you, but we are not there yet. As of this writing, Sunday, August 10, we have received \$4,000, which makes us 60% of the way towards our goal of \$6,638. But on the bright side, we ARE more than halfway there.

Warmest thanks to those of you who have already contributed, but for those of you who



haven't yet done so, we REALLY NEED YOUR HELP, now. Please grab that check book or click on our "Donate" link! Surely \$2,000 is not out of reach. If every member who hasn't yet contributed gives ONE SPOT, that's \$56.73, we will achieve our goal. Perhaps you are a past member but still believe in what the First Coast Freethought Society stands for and hopes to achieve. You wish to support our cause!



We have successfully reached our goal since 2007, so I am confident we can rise to the occasion once again. Please bear in mind, this is our ONLY fund drive per year. We will not pester you with fundraising until summer of 2015. Keeping our NPR announcements on the air may well be the most significant project the FCFS undertakes for the community and for the cause of the freethought movement.

How to Contribute

1. Visit the website, <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>, where you will find the opportunity to contribute on our homepage. You can pay via PayPal or with any major credit card;
2. Mail a check payable to the FCFS to P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255;
3. Bring your contribution to a meeting or another FCFS event and give it to a board member.

Whichever method you select, you will receive a letter from the treasurer, suitable for your IRS records, acknowledging your tax-deductible contribution.

Thank you for your desperately-needed support!

About our newsletter, the *First Coast FreeThinker* Information for Readers

The First Coast FreeThinker is published for all freethinkers and potential freethinkers. Nonmembers and members may receive the e-mail version indefinitely. Nonmembers may receive three hard-copy issues free, after which they must join the FCFS to continue to receive hard copy. Members are entitled to receive hard-copy should they prefer. The e-mail version is encouraged, as the newsletter is optimized for on-screen reading.

Readers are invited and encouraged to share 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.

Information for Contributors

We welcome submissions. Articles should be submitted to Editor@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org. Contributors who cannot submit manuscripts electronically may send them to Fred Hill, Editor, 1817 Egner St., Jacksonville, FL 32206.

The deadline for time-sensitive material is the THIRD SATURDAY of each month for the following

month's issue, but submissions are welcome anytime.

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.

Subject matter must tie in with [freethought](#) or with the [Affirmations of Humanism: A Statement of Principles](#) (found on our website). All accepted submissions are subject to editorial modification. Our style guide is *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Printed manuscript submissions cannot be returned. Authors are responsible for the accuracy of all quotations and for supplying complete references where applicable.

Dignity U Wear

136 North Myrtle Avenue
Jacksonville, FL 32204

Phone: (904) 636-9455
Toll-Free: (888) 364-1305
Fax: (904) 636-8649
www.DignityUWear.org



Dignity U Wear - Volunteering Continues!

Celia Abbruzzese, Community Outreach Chair

What We Do

Since May 2014, FCFS members and friends, together with folks from the Jacksonville Atheist Meetup Group (JAM) and the North Florida Atheist Meetup Group (NFA), have been gathering one Saturday morning each month to volunteer at Dignity U Wear. From 9:00 a.m. to noon, we sort and fold new clothes for those less fortunate. We gather at the warehouse of Dignity U Wear, 136 North Myrtle Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32204. You do need to wear closed-toed shoes, as this is a warehouse environment. You do not need to pre-register, just sign in at the door, with your name and the name of your group.



Dates

Be advised: Volunteering has been **CANCELLED** for the two upcoming dates of **AUGUST 16** and **OCTOBER 18** due to the warehouse boss being out of town. **SO DON'T GO THERE!!**

Otherwise, we are scheduled to volunteer the **THIRD SATURDAY** of each remaining month in 2014, which includes

- September 20, 2014
- November 15, 2014 and
- December 20, 2014.

We are also scheduled for the third Saturdays in 2015! For clarity, the dates will be posted in the newsletter calendars, in e-mails, and on the website.

More Details

We work in an environmentally controlled warehouse, so it's cool summer and warm in the winter. The donated clothing is all brand new, but it must be sorted by gender, size, and color, folded and placed into boxes. That's where we come in! We sit at large tables, sort, fold, and catch up with each other. It really is a gathering of our community. Children as young as 5 may accompany their parents. Because we are working in a warehouse environment, we are required to wear closed-toed shoes. We encourage everyone to find a seat at the table and fold clothing to assist those in need.

About Dignity U Wear

Last year, 282 companies donated \$9,474,005 worth of brand new clothing to people in need via Dignity U Wear. Through September 2013, Dignity U Wear has distributed 8 million pieces of brand new clothing to more than 610,000 children, men and women, throughout the United States. The clothing is distributed to individuals through a network of 300+ nonprofit social service agencies in over 40 states. Their areas of emphasis include:

- School children - providing school clothing for children, thus removing a barrier to education by providing new clothing to school children in need;
- Veterans – providing work-appropriate clothing for veterans seeking employment, and basic clothing necessities for those who have become homeless; and
- Women and girls in crisis - helping women and girls who have suffered domestic violence, emotional and/or sexual abuse, or are at risk to drop out of school.

Dignity U Wear's Motto: NEW CLOTHES. NEW LIFE.

See <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org> or contact Celia Abbruzzese at catrn1957@yahoo.com, or 904-982-8431 for more info.

About the First Coast Freethought Society

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.

P.O. Box 550591

Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591

904-419-8826

<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 Buckman Bridge Unitarian Universalist Church, 8447 Manresa Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32244. (Driveway located on Collins Rd., 400 ft. east of Roosevelt Blvd.)

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

Other Activities

In addition to regular monthly meetings, we offer:

- two monthly humanist book discussion groups, one in Jacksonville and one in St. Augustine, (current books are listed in each newsletter, or for further details visit: <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/bdg>);
- a monthly social and dinner at the Olive Garden (see details in each newsletter);
- coffee and conversation in the fresh air on a monthly basis at Secular Sunday in the Park. We meet the fourth Sunday of each month, 10:00 a.m. to noon, at Losco Regional Park, 10851 Hood Road South, Jax 32257. (see Activities section of the FCFS home page: <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/>);
- Dinners for Doubters (when scheduled);
- volunteer opportunity on a monthly basis, currently at Dignity U Wear (visit: <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/component/content/article/50/150>); and
- a freethought Yahoo! Group (to subscribe, send a blank message to: jaxfreethought-subscribe@yahoo.com).

For information on all these activities, please visit <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>, or see the calendar of events at the end of each newsletter and on the website. You need not be a member to attend these activities!

FCFS 2014 Board Members

President - Earl Coggins: 904-521-5039

Vice President - Carrie Renwick: 904-268-8826

Secretary *pro tem* - Carrie Renwick: 904-268-8826

Treasurer - Stephen Peek: 904-742-5390

At-Large - Herb Gerson: 904-363-6446

At-Large - Fred Hill: 904-358-3610

At Large - Richard Keene: 904-386-1121

Other Appointments

Parliamentarian - Mark Renwick: 904-616-2896
E-mail Secretary - Carrie Renwick: 904-268-8826

Committees and Chairs

Editorial - Fred Hill: 904-358-3610
Community Outreach - Celia Abbruzzese: 904-982-8431
Finance - Stephen Peek: 904-742-5390
Fundraising - Carrie Renwick: 904-268-8826
Membership - Judy Hankins: 904-724-8188
Publicity - Carrie Renwick: 904-268-8826
Website - Mark Renwick: 904-616-2896

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

Announcing the FCFS September Meeting Carrie Renwick, Program Chair

On September 15, we will welcome back an outstanding teacher and lecturer, David Jaffee, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of North Florida. Dr. Jaffee's last talk to us, titled, "Understanding the Economic Crisis: A Neo-Marxist Perspective," was extremely well received.

In September, Dr. Jaffee will be talking about Jacksonville port economy and the Jaxport expansion/river dredging proposal. As a long-time friend and member of the First Coast Freethought Society, himself, David knows what we are about. When I asked him how this topic would tie in with freethought, David explained: "My presentation on the port economy and Jaxport expansion will depart from the dominant neo-liberal and urban growth machine paradigm/discourse; so in terms of "freethinkers," it will represent a critical analysis.

You will not want to miss this meeting!

Bequests

*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 can provide the appropriate wording to you and your attorney, depending upon your wishes. Or, just talk to your attorney. Our EIN is 20-1462737.

For further information, contact
Carrie Renwick, P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591 or
904-419-8826 • CarrieRen@att.net • <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>

All inquiries are held in the strictest confidence.

Northeast Florida Coalition of Reason

- First Coast Freethought Society: <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>
- Jacksonville Atheist, Agnostic, Secular Meetup Group (JAM): <http://jaxatheists.com>
- Secular Saint Augustine (SSA): <http://meetup.com/Secular-Saint-Augustine>

The FCFS is a proud member of the [Florida Humanist Association](#) (formerly the Humanists of Florida Association).

Calendar of Freethought Events on the First Coast

- Monday, August 11 - JAM Session, 6:30 p.m. (See <http://www.meetup.com/jaxatheists/> for details.)
- Friday, August 15 - [Secular St. Augustine Meetup](#) - St. Augustine, 7:00 p.m. (Meetups are generally the third Friday, but you need to visit website to RSVP and for meeting details.)
- Saturday, August 16 - **CANCELLED** - Volunteering at Dignity U Wear is cancelled for August 16, also October 18. (See article in this issue, and Ongoing Activities for more info.)
- Monday, August 18 - FCFS Monthly Meeting, Jacksonville, 6:30 p.m. (How Do We Know?)
- Saturday, August 23 - FCFS September Newsletter Deadline
- Sunday, August 24 - FCFS Secular Sunday in the Park, Jacksonville, 10:00 a.m.
- Tuesday August 26 - FCFS Monthly Social at Olive Garden, Jacksonville, 6:00 p.m.
- Sunday, September 7 - Humanist Book Discussion Group - Jacksonville, 2:00 p.m.
- Monday, September 8 - JAM Session, 6:30 p.m. (See <http://www.meetup.com/jaxatheists/> for details.)
- Thursday, September 11 - Humanist Book Discussion Group - St. Augustine, Anastasia Island, 7:00 p.m.

- Monday, September 15 - FCFS Monthly Meeting, Jacksonville (Huntington's Disease) - 6:30 p.m.

Directions to Monthly Meeting

Our monthly meetings are held at the **Buckman Bridge Unitarian Universalist Church (BBUUC)**, 8447 Manresa Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32244. The address is Manresa, but the main entrance to the church is located on Collins Rd..

- From I-295, take the Roosevelt exit. Go north on Roosevelt Blvd. to the first traffic light which is Collins Rd. Turn right onto Collins. Go 400 feet. The main entrance to the church is located on Collins Rd., on the right.
- Going south on Roosevelt, look for Atlantic Self-Storage on the left. This is the Collins Rd. intersection. Turn left onto Collins. Go 400 feet. The main entrance to the church is on Collins Rd., on the right. (If you come to I-295, you've gone too far, turn around, and you will turn right onto Collins Rd.)

MAP ON FCFS WEBSITE

See accurate map at this link: http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/lib/fcfs_bbuuc_map.gif (Please note, Google Maps, as well as other maps, may not be consistent with the actual street signs.)

FCFS Month-at-a Glance

- Saturday, Aug 16 - Dignity U Wear – CANCELLED!
- Monday, Aug 18 - FCFS Monthly Meeting, 6:30 p.m.
- Sunday, Aug 24 - FCFS Secular Sunday, 10:00 a.m.
- Tuesday, Aug 26 - FCFS Olive Garden, 6:00 p.m.
- Sunday, Sept 7 - FCFS Book Discussion Group - Jax, 2:00 p.m.
- Thursday, Sept 11 - FCFS Book Discussion Group - St. Aug, 7:00 p.m.
- Monday, Sept 15 - FCFS Monthly Meeting, 6:30 p.m.
- Saturday, Sept 20 – Volunteer at Dignity U Wear, 9:00 a.m.

Details in newsletter, e-mail reminders, and on website.

Membership Application



Use this PDF form

or join on our [website](#).

Copyright © 2014 First Coast Freethought Society, Inc., All rights reserved.

[unsubscribe from this list](#)