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September 2014

Volume 13, Issue 9

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September Meeting

- **What:** September FCFS Monthly Meeting
- **Who:** David Jaffee, Ph.D., Sociology Professor, Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work, University of North Florida
- **Title:** "Dredging for Commerce: A Critical Perspective on the St. Johns River Deepening Project"

- **When:** Monday, September 15, 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

Jaxport and the City of Jacksonville are requesting Federal, state, and local funds in order to dredge and deepen 13 miles of the St. Johns River to 47 feet in the hope of attracting the largest container vessels to Jaxport terminals. The total cost of the project could exceed \$1 billion. In this presentation, Jaffee will situate the rise and expansion of port logistics in the context of globalization, port competition, and the economic development aspirations of cities and regions. He will also highlight the reasons why this enormous public investment is unlikely to yield the claimed benefits.

About the Speaker

Our September speaker, Dr. David Jaffee, currently serves as Professor of Sociology in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work, at the University of North Florida. He received his Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, his MA in Political Science from Washington University-St. Louis, and his BA in Political Science from the University of Florida.

Jaffee's research, writing, and publications are in the areas of social and economic development, organization theory, political economy, and higher education. He is the author of two books—*Levels of Socio-Economic Development Theory* (Praeger) and *Organization Theory: Tension and Change* (McGraw-Hill)—and numerous articles. He is currently heading up The Ports Project at the University of North Florida that examines the socio-economic implications of a port economy growth strategy for cities and regions.



At the University of North Florida, Jaffee has held several different academic administrative positions, including Director of the Office of Faculty Enhancement, Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Acting Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and Assistant Vice President for Undergraduate Studies. During the 2010-2011 academic year, Jaffee was a visiting General Education Fulbright Scholar at the City University of Hong Kong.

Dr. Jaffee's title for his September talk is, "Dredging for Commerce: A Critical Perspective on the St. Johns River Deepening Project" Join us for this timely and pertinent talk!

September President's Message - America's Cultural Contradictions

Guest Author: David R. Simon, Ph.D.

FCFS 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.

At the heart of any given culture lies its value system, its beliefs about what goals to strive for in life and how to obtain those goals. America suffers from a very contradictory value set, and few of its citizens ever place these conflicts side by side so their consequences can be assessed. For example, during the American Revolution General Henry Knox wrote: "The people who are the insurgents have never paid any, or but very little taxes—But hey see the weakness of government... They feel at once their own poverty, compared with the opulent, and their own force, and they are determined to make use of the latter, in order to remedy the former. Their creed is 'That the property of the United States has been protected from the confiscations of Britain by the joint exertions of all, and therefore ought to be the common property of all. And he that attempts opposition to this creed is an enemy to equity and justice, and ought to be swept from the face of the earth.' In a word, they are determined to annihilate all debts public and private and have agrarian laws, which are easily effected by means of unfunded paper money which shall be a tender in all cases whatsoever."



ow notice what the good general was saying: He tells us that the people of the new land wanted—demanded—that the property of the United States be “the common property of all.”

Obviously, Knox's vision was not embraced by the rebellious colonists. In fact, America's value system had been established long before there was a United States. As Howard Sinn explained, the explorers who discovered America were not seeking political equality or religious freedom but gold. The form taken by this quest was one of violence, torture, and enslavement.

he Indians, Columbus reported, “are so naïve and so free with their possessions that no one who has not witnessed them would believe it. When you ask for something they have, they never say no. To the contrary, they offer to share with anyone. . . .” He concluded his report by asking for a little help from their Majesties, and in return he would bring them from his next voyage “as much gold as they need . . . and as many slaves as they ask.” He was full of religious talk: “Thus the eternal God, our Lord, gives victory to those who follow His way over apparent impossibilities.”

Because of Columbus's exaggerated report and promises, his second expedition was given seventeen

ships and more than twelve hundred men. The aim was clear: slaves and gold. They went from island to island in the Caribbean, taking Indians as captives. But as word spread of the Europeans' intent they found more and more empty villages. On Haiti, they found that the sailors left behind at Fort Navidad had been killed in a battle with the Indians, after they had roamed the island in gangs looking for gold, taking women and children as slaves for sex and labor.

In truth, Americans are, in part, the sons of Calvin. John Calvin preached that the pursuit of wealth and the preservation of property is a Christian duty. He taught that the temptations of the flesh demand a discipline as strict as that of the military profession. He created an ideal type of man theretofore unknown to both religion and society, who was neither a humanist nor an ascetic, but a businessman living in the fear of God. Two centuries later, this new type of man came under the influence of John Wesley. "We exhort all Christians to amass as much wealth as they can, and to preserve as much as they can; in other words, to enrich themselves." For President Madison, "The American political system was founded on the natural inequality of men." Correlatively, the moral philosophy of the United States is based on success. At the end of the Eighteenth Century a Frenchman, the Chevalier de Beaujour, wrote on his return from North America, "The American loses no opportunity to acquire wealth. Gain is the subject of all his conversations, and the motive for all his actions. Thus, there is perhaps no civilized nation in the world where there is less generosity in the sentiments, less elevation of soul and of mind, less of those pleasant and glittering illusions that constitute the charm or the consolation of life. Here, everything is weighed, calculated, and sacrificed to self-interest." Another Frenchman, the Baron de Montlezun, added, "In this country, more than any other, esteem is based on wealth. Talent is trampled underfoot." How much is a man worth?" they ask. Not much? He is despised. One hundred thousand crowns? The knees flex, the incense burns, and the once-bankrupt merchant is revered like a god."



John Calvin
Theologian, Journalist
(1509–1564)

Seymour Lipset wrote that "Foreign visitors to the United States or travelers in America were struck, from its earliest days, with the greater emphasis on materialism here, on economic gain, as contrasted to that present in Europe... A detailed analysis of the writings of English travelers in America, from the end of the revolution to the age of Jackson, sums up the evidence...[one writer] attributed the eagerness to accumulate to the fact that in the absence of titles and all acknowledged discussion distinctions in rank, wealth constituted the primary basis of contrast between individuals." At any rate, this trait became to foreigners an integral part of the American nature," completely contradictory with the poverty advocated by Christianity, the patriotism favored by certain Enlightenment thinkers, or the kind of political freedom and equality claimed by the Declaration of Independence.

To a shocking degree, social status in America stems from having made money, not from the way one has accumulated it. Pursuing wealth, when taken to an extreme, can become amoral, even sociopathic. Achieving success via force and fraud has always been considered smart, so smart that for a number of

decades, our culture has lionized criminals. It began with pirates and privateers.

To a shocking extent America was founded on piracy. Historian Nathan Miller notes: "Unbridled kleptomania on both sides of the Atlantic helped bring about the American Revolution. In fact, it is entirely within the realm of possibility that had not corruption become one of America's major growth industries, the final break with Britain might have been avoided—at least for a while."

Piracy began in earnest in America after England's Glorious Revolution of 1688. William and Mary were so busy dealing with troubles at home that they had no interest in dealing with discontent in the colonies. By 1790 in Boston, pirates were so welcome that even complaining about their presence could result in a threatened lynching. The pirates were sharing their booty with the governor and were protected by him. The pirates were generous consumers who frequented taverns, dram houses, and other merchants. They also sold their booty (spices, cloth, gold, and other goods) to merchants untaxed. It took the British crown years to crack down on tax evasion, but when they did (in part by attempting to levy new taxes) it led to the American Revolution.

Pirates became the first celebrity American gangsters. England had its Robin Hood, but America embraced Blackbeard and Captain Kidd, romanticism, danger, and often justice--a justice outside the country's laws. Myths about pirates emphasized their brutality, kidnaping of women, and their debauchery in taverns and whore houses. In truth, many of the pirates were homosexuals who enjoyed the company of the men with whom they were at sea. Women prisoners were quickly released.

Note

For additional reading and references, see David R. Simon, *Elite Deviance* 10th Edition (Boston: Pearson, 2012): Chapters 2.

September Olive Garden Social

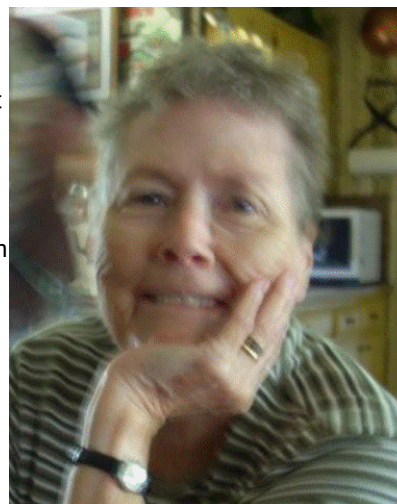
- Where: **OLIVE GARDEN** on Philips Highway, across from the Avenues Mall. The hostesses will know where we are seated. Proceed directly to our room.
- When: Tuesday, **SEPTEMBER 23**, 2014 at 6:00 p.m. Social hour at 6:00. Dinner at 7:00. We order from the menu.
- RSVP: E-mail CarrieRen@att.net (or call 904-268-8826) by Tuesday morning, if you plan to attend!

Believing Is Easier Than Thinking

Beth Perry

To introduce myself, I am a visual artist by education, and a writer by choice. I have lived in this city for 56 years and have watched the churches, especially the First Baptist church take over vast amounts of untaxed property ...especially in the downtown area.

We would be 1,500 years ahead if it hadn't been for the church dragging science back by its coattails and burning our best minds at the stake. However, I'm not writing this to drag down religion. I respect opposite beliefs and I would greatly appreciate people of faith to respect my beliefs, although they have a hard time doing so. Many also have a hard time associating with free-thinkers. When I'm in a room with prayer going on, I keep quiet and let the prayer be said. I expect the same from people of faith. However, religious institutions have opposed virtually every major scientific advancement, whether of a theoretical or a technological nature. From the heliocentric theory of the solar system to biological evolution, and from the lightning rod to anesthetics, science has always had to wait for religion to get out of its way. Newsweek's proposal that science has, at times, received the support of religion, and that the relationship between science and religion is like a harmless sibling rivalry is simply a historical lie.



The most important issue politically at this moment is keeping the First Amendment intact and keeping church and state separate. That amendment has been good to this country for over 200 years, and it will continue to do so as long as the religious zealots don't force the issue with blackmail of our legislature. Jacksonville is especially lax about observing the wall of separation between church and state. One instance is the free entrance to the Jacksonville Fair with a church bulletin. I have fought this, one ignored voice, until I'm exhausted. However, I did fight, and drafted some of my artist friends (the majority are on the cusp if not free-thinkers) [to protest] the Public TV station doing the same thing with their Spring Festival at Metro Park. They only did this one year. People, no matter what their beliefs, seem to not think about mixing church and state until it is shown to them. Our mayor's prayer breakfast is an instance of mixing church and state. That takes place on public property. A few years ago the rental payment for a Christian concert in protest of a Marilyn Manson concert was paid by taxes.



A lot of us probably had something more productive to do than pray that day -- such as washing dishes, working, feeding pets, playing trivia...

For many years during my life I was a firm believer in the trinity. Since babies are born atheists, and taught from age 2 on about god, is it no wonder that so many of us are devout in our religious beliefs? I was. People are afraid not to believe. Then about 25 years ago when I decided to put to good use my kids college funds since they weren't interested, I started college at then known as FJC. There I took a course on World Religions. It opened my eyes.

I also learned from an excellent Art History professor at UNF and later from several books on archeological history that the first gods were women. Every icon found in all the archaeological diggings are pregnant women as goddesses. And for hundreds of years, the women were the power in a household. The men slept together in a great house like some aboriginal tribes still do in Indonesia. They were only with a woman when she chose to be. The men were hunters and the women were gatherers. The men were not very successful at hunting with their primitive weapons and rarely brought home the bacon, yet the women, from their labors of gathering usually provided the food... and who had the food had the power. Women invented agriculture to make gathering easier. They invented animal husbandry to make sure they could have meat. They invented architecture, as they are the ones who built their homes. Then women made a mistake and taught the men to barter with other tribes while the women worked in the village. Eventually, the men became powerful in their bartering and took over ownership of the things the women had accomplished, and even to the point of bartering their women since they were physically stronger. And then when men realized they actually had something to do with a woman's pregnancy, they really felt powerful.

I also learned from Dr. Ted Reynolds (now deceased) that Christians chose December 25th as Jesus' birthday because it was already a popular holiday to celebrate the god Mithras birthday. My curiosity began to peak and I took a course called Mysticism: East v. West. Hinduism has long had a god named Krishna. Notice how much like Christ sounds to Krishna. Then, again from religious history, I learned many of Jesus' supposedly original quotations were plagiarized from Zoroaster, a previous religious reformer much like Jesus only hundreds of years earlier from what is now Iran. People still quoted his teachings so Jesus picked up on them. Many such religious faiths from the near and far east, as well as various pagan and pantheist beliefs positing many gods of nature or equating god with nature were all circulating within the Greco-Roman world of which Israel was a part during the reputed time of Jesus and aspects all fed into what would become Christianity.

**Just a few characters who came
back from the dead and have
had substantial devotees before
and after Christ.**



The course on world religions opened my eyes on the fallacy of religions. I learned that the Byzantine era was called the Dark Ages because the Roman Catholic Church...the most dominant Christian church of the time (but never the only and certainly not the original Christian church, despite propaganda to the contrary) ... was called so because people were kept ignorant. They did not know how to read or write. They forgot everything that the Greek and Roman civilizations passed along including even how to make concrete. The only people allowed to learn were monks and priests. Keep them ignorant and they will believe anything! They had the proletariat build massive, beautiful cathedrals that took thousands of workers and many years, and while building these churches, the monks and priests indoctrinated the people. If they were to enjoy their labors, they had to believe. If they wanted to stay alive, they had to believe. To enter the church, they had to pay a tax from their very meager earnings. The church kept them not only ignorant, but desperately poor.

Of course, there were also the Crusades, the Inquisitions, religious wars of every stripe that are still going on now. It seems people's beliefs in something they cannot see, feel, touch is stronger than any belief

there is. And along with all this, the belief that women are to be kept down. To be a "servant" to their man. Elizabeth Cady Stanton once said, "Woman's discontent increases in exact proportion to her development.

The first permanent English settlement in this country, contrary to popular belief, was not to escape religious persecution but for trade purposes -- Jamestown, Virginia. The Pilgrims arrived a few years later, to practice their religion as they saw fit, free from persecution by their homeland in England for not practicing the official state religion, but also from the influence of what they regarded as too much religious freedom in the Netherlands, where they had initially fled before heading to North America. When the United States was first chartered in the late 18th c. the Western world was in a period called the Enlightenment. Consequently, many of the founders of the United States, including Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and James Madison, did not believe in the divinity of Jesus, and hence were not Christians, generally following the Deists belief that god created the universe but then left it alone. They had seen and learned of the way the colonies fought among themselves over religion, just as European kingdoms did in centuries before them, and factions in the Middle East are doing today. For instance, Maryland was the only colony that would allow people of Jewish faith. Massachusetts ousted Baptist Roger Williams, who escaped by the skin of his teeth and founded Plymouth Plantation, now known as Rhode Island. There were the Cotton Mathers in many colonies who preached against witchcraft and other religions and slaughtered hundreds of settlers, especially women.

After the British were defeated and this country was formed, the hinterlands began to be developed. Along about the 1840s came the evangelicals who went forth into the "wilderness" and set up campgrounds for the settlers to travel for miles to gather and spend a week socializing, and while doing so the evangelists were hard at it teaching the word of god. Most of the settlers lived lonely lives with neighbors who lived too far away, and travel was too dangerous to socialize, so they looked forward to these camp meetings that were large enough to be safe from the Natives. At that time, the American people became evangelized, and it has stuck, becoming stronger every decade as people like Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Jim Bakker, Billy and Frank Graham, and all the other charismatic men brain-washed the people of this country. Promising the glories of heaven if you tithe your 10% to their pockets, and taking out of context the historical significance of *The Bible*. They rail against abortion clinics, yet god told the Amalacites to kill all of a certain tribe that he was angry with at the time, including ripping apart the women with child, tearing the babies from their bellies. It seems to me god must have believed in abortion. So why are the fundamentalists against it?

Religion is superstition. Some of our most renowned women from the past century were without superstition. Take the suffragists. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Mary Wollstonecraft, Susan B. Anthony, Lydia Maria Child, Lucy Colman, in the 19th century. George Eliot, Meridel Le Sueur, Zona Gale, Ayn Rand, Barbara G. Walker, Margaret Atwood, Barbara Ehrenreich, and Taslima Nasrin in the 20th century, and more and more women of renown in this 21st century are all non-believers, who have done more for women than any religion....women who think before believing in something they cannot see, that has not been proven to them. The early women of the 19th century did not like being told to be silent. They did not like our history of Cotton Mather's religiosity of burning, hanging, or stoning the so-called witches of Salem. And, it was only 90 years ago that women got to vote in this country. All because of men's beliefs in *The Bible*. It has kept women down far too long. We need more women in power.

Carl Sagan (1934 - 1996): Just another "crackpot" who helped



shed some scientific light on a superstitious world.

It has not been easy living in the Evangelical and Fundamentalist South to declare my non-belief, but I am a free-thinker because in my search for truth I discovered that religious beliefs do not withstand the test of evidence and reason. As a free-thinker I see the dangers of fundamentalism, and I've belonged to the Freedom From Religion Foundation since its early years of inception. I encouraged and helped Earl to get our First Coast Freethought Society off the ground. We must continue working to keep state and church separate, and attempt to weaken especially the hold the First Baptist Church has on this city and our government. I am sure that most of the populace of Jacksonville look at our small organization as a bunch of crack-pots, but always remember this: "Blessed are the cracked for they shall let in the light."



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:
 - October 5, 2014 - *No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA, and the U.S. Surveillance State*, by Glenn Greenwald
 - November 2, 2014 - *The Genesis of Justice*, by Alan M. Dershowitz

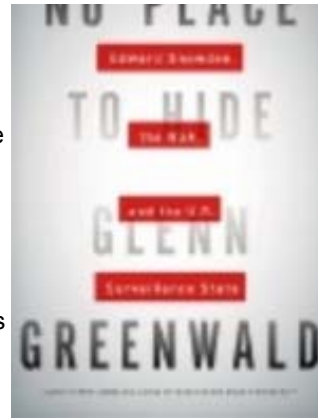
Link to Book Review: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/18213403-no-place-to-hide>

In May 2013, Glenn Greenwald set out for Hong Kong to meet an anonymous source who claimed to have astonishing evidence of pervasive government spying and insisted on communicating only through heavily encrypted channels. That source turned out to be the 29-year-old NSA

NO PLACE

contractor Edward Snowden, and his revelations about the agency's widespread, systemic overreach proved to be some of the most explosive and consequential news in recent history, triggering a fierce debate over national security and information privacy. As the arguments rage on and the government considers various proposals for reform, it is clear that we have yet to see the full impact of Snowden's disclosures.

Now for the first time, Greenwald fits all the pieces together, recounting his high-intensity ten-day trip to Hong Kong, examining the broader implications of the surveillance detailed in his reporting for *The Guardian*, and revealing fresh information on the NSA's unprecedented abuse of power with never-before-seen documents entrusted to him by Snowden himself.



Going beyond NSA specifics, Greenwald also takes on the establishment media, excoriating their habitual avoidance of adversarial reporting on the government and their failure to serve the interests of the people. Finally, he asks what it means both for individuals and for a nation's political health when a government pries so invasively into the private lives of its citizens—and considers what safeguards and forms of oversight are necessary to protect democracy in the digital age. Coming at a landmark moment in American history, *No Place to Hide* is a fearless, incisive, and essential contribution to our understanding of the U.S. surveillance state

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

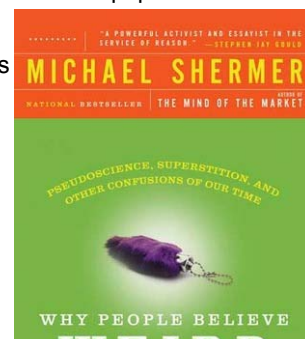
Humanist Book Discussion Group - St. Augustine

- **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:
 - October 9, 2014 - *Why People Believe Weird Things: Pseudoscience, Superstition, and Other Confusions of Our Time*, by Michael Shermer and Stephen Jay Gould
 - November 13, 2014 - *Religion for Atheists*, by Alain de Botton

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

In this age of supposed scientific enlightenment, many people still believe in mind reading, past-life regression theory, New Age hokum, and alien abduction. A no-holds-barred assault on popular superstitions and prejudices, with more than 80,000 copies in print, *Why People Believe Weird Things* debunks these nonsensical claims and explores the very human reasons people find otherworldly phenomena, conspiracy theories, and cults so appealing. In an entirely new chapter, "Why Smart People Believe in Weird Things," Michael Shermer takes on science luminaries like physicist Frank Tipler and others, who hide their spiritual beliefs behind the trappings of science.

Shermer, science historian and true crusader, also reveals the more



dangerous side of such illogical thinking, including Holocaust denial, the recovered-memory movement, the satanic ritual abuse scare, and other modern crazes. *Why People Believe Strange Things* is an eye-opening resource for the most gullible among us and those who want to protect them.



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

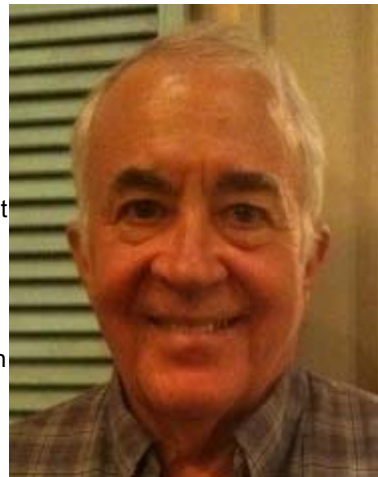
NOTE TO ALL! Books may be found in the library, purchased from local book stores or online. The First Coast Freethought Society will receive a small remuneration from your purchase (at no additional cost to you) if you first go to <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org> and then click the link to Amazon.com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

Of Kittens and Dogmas

Joque H. Soskis

Much has been written concerning why we hold religious beliefs. Theologians, theistic apologists, anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, atheists and agnostics, and those motivated to sell a book have written lists of the 100 best reasons to believe, or not to believe, in God, or god, or something ("...but surely, you're spiritual...").

I admit that I have not read exhaustively in that literature, for the simple reason that I regard the entire question as one that cannot with present knowledge and methods be settled, in either direction, by what we call proof. There remains nevertheless an interesting question with respect to why any intelligent, informed person would believe. In particular, the question focuses on why some intelligent, educated, rational and reasonable people persist in at least giving the impression of accepting religious dogma, in particular Christian dogma.



If we boil away all the extraneous tangle of assertions surrounding the Christian proposition, we are left with this:

1. There exists in the universe some entity, no one knows what or where, that created the universe and everything in it (perhaps via the big bang, and perhaps not), along with all the laws of physics (and therefore chemistry and all other sciences), either 6,000 years ago or at some much earlier time. We know nothing of this entity, except that it is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent, and it resembles a human male.
2. After creating the universe and everything in it, this entity then selected a microscopic speck of cosmic dust orbiting a mediocre sun on one of the spiral arms of an unremarkable galaxy, and on this speck created a strain of organisms called humans. The entity did this in order to have someone to worship him, and someone on whom he could bestow his love.



The cat swears he had nothing to with those silly humans taking a bite out of that fruit and wonders why god was dumb enough to put that tree in the garden if He didn't want them to eat from it. A whole planet and He picks this of all places!

3. The first two humans, however, disobeyed one of this entity's commands, and were therefore condemned to a hard life. Furthermore, in time the entity became displeased with the humans generally, and so resolved to drown all but one family.
4. After the surviving humans had repopulated the speck (leaving aside for a moment the issue of incest), the entity decided to come to the speck in person, got the wife of one of the humans (a virgin at the time) pregnant, and had the resulting son killed in a spectacularly gruesome fashion. He did all this so that he could forgive the humans for their various and sundry transgressions.
5. Anyone who truly believes and accepts the above will, upon his or her death, be brought in spiritual form to reside with this entity in perpetual bliss.

Now, what well-informed, emotionally stable person of normal intelligence and reason, not having been reared from childhood on that account, would be likely to find it persuasive upon first encountering it in adulthood? Practically no one, I submit, which is probably why those promoting the religious persuasions are at such pains to infect minds while they are still young, but more of that on another occasion.

For the moment, I would like to focus on those who appear to be otherwise quite normal, but who calmly assert that they are Christian, and therefore by inference accept 1. - 5. above.

Curious kittens looking outside the box.



Curiosity

I define curiosity here as an innate inclination of an organism to explore, either experientially or intellectually, the features of its environment. Hence, the curiosity of a kitten and that of Galileo differ principally in that the kitten's is (so far as we know) only experiential, whereas that of Galileo was both experiential and intellectual.

I use the word "innate" advisedly. Admittedly the "nature vs. nurture" discussion is still underway, but when

a characteristic is observed in a large number of species, across a broad swath of the phylogenetic spectrum, we may be forgiven for assuming, arguendo at least, that it is not learned but ingrained in the genetic mapping of the species. And we do in fact see, most especially but not exclusively in the young of mammalian species (hence the kittens in the title of this piece), an apparently inextinguishable curiosity about themselves, other organisms and the world at large. Their every hour, from birth to adulthood, consists of eating, sleeping and some form of exploration. Needless to say, we humans appear to occupy the pinnacle of this hierarchy.

Perhaps the most significant difference between human beings and other species noted for their curiosity is the extent to which ours persists into adulthood.

Need for answers

My thesis, then, is this: our ravenous curiosity has as its necessary corollary a powerful need for answers. This has driven us to explore our planet in ever greater detail, to travel into space, and to make all the scientific discoveries that have brought us to our present condition.

We seem to be capable of patiently awaiting developments with respect to certain kinds of questions: what causes cancer; the role of dark matter and dark energy in the cosmos; the exact function of the Higgs boson, etc.

But with respect to the overarching existential questions about how the universe was created, the purpose of life, whether we are alone in the universe, what becomes of us when we die: might it be that our curiosity creates such a compelling need for answers that we prefer an answer that we know would not actually withstand careful scrutiny, to the torment of having no answer at all?

And perhaps the final irony is this: that this curiosity and its resulting desperate need for answers actually inclines us to interpret *The Bible* literally. After all, science seems to be filled with endless questions, the answers to which always lead to yet more questions. Biblical answers (as posited by one self-appointed "authority" or another), on the other hand, are put forth as final and absolute. Thus: the earth and all life on it, including human beings, is six thousand years old. As improbable as that is upon close examination, it does have the undoubted advantage of getting rid of all those nettlesome questions about exactly when the earth cooled enough to support liquid water, and therefore life, or which proto-humans became modern humans, and when.

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=10204412654700132&set=vb.1343900907&type=2&theater>



Galileo looks to the heavens with his telescope -- doesn't see god but does see moons orbiting Jupiter.



An AU Strategic Planning Session

- **What:** In light of AU's "Operation Inclusion," a planning session is scheduled to discuss the continued lack of diversity in the invocations being given at Jacksonville City Council meetings.
- **Who:** The local AU group (Northeast Florida AU Chapter) is holding a **DINNER MEETING** to discuss correcting this lack of diversity. **RABBI MERRILL SHAPIRO** will lead the discussion.
- **When:** Sunday, September 21, 2014, beginning at 5:00 pm
- **Where:** **Bella Vita Italian Restaurant**, 3825 Baymeadows Rd, Jacksonville, FL 32217. (See <http://www.bellavitajax.com/dinner.php>).
- **RSVP:** To au.ne.fl@gmail.com, if you plan to attend, as space is limited.

More info at: <http://www.meetup.com/AU-Americans-United-for-Separation-of-Church-and-State/messages/boards/thread/46787182/0/#124670372>

NPR Corporate Sponsorship Fund Drive is Not Over Yet

Carrie Renwick

We still need your help. 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.

Two-Thirds of the Way There

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, September 7, we still have received \$4,000, which makes approximately 2/3 of the way there. I know we can do it - and without praying about it, either!

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

NPR-o-Meter



and hopes to achieve and still wish to support our cause.

Easier Way to Donate - on a Monthly Basis!

AVAILABLE NOW - MAKE AN AUTOMATIC MONTHLY DONATION! You can now go to the FCFS website home page, <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>, where you will find a PayPal button to make an automatic monthly donation to our NPR fund. (Automatic monthly donations require you to have a PayPal account.)

Please bear in mind, we have only one 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. Set up automatic monthly payments via PayPal for your donation;
3. Mail a check payable to the FCFS to P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255;
4. 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.

SecularityUSA

An ACTION PLAN to
Get Religious Bias Out of Government

Secularity USA - Update

Richard C. Keene

As we advised in the April 2014 Newsletter, FCFS is working with the American Humanist Association (AHA), Americans United for Separation of Church/State (AU), Florida Humanist Association (FHA), Jacksonville Atheist Meetup (JAM), the North Florida Atheist Meetup (NFA), and other Florida Freethought groups, and the National Secularity USA Movement (SUSA), to staff an "invasion of Iowa" between October 2015 and June 2016, to bring the existence and ideals of Secularism and Humanism to both the Democratic and Republican Party Caucuses, and to create a national media visibility, enhancing the public view and acceptance of the importance of the growing 15 to 20% nonreligious in the USA.

We are looking for volunteers to help staff that effort for a "Florida Week" of that "invasion" - sometime during that period. We realize that it may seem far away, but we hope to develop planning and travel coordinating committees within the next 12 months.

If you are interested, please fill out the sign-up sheet on our website, or complete the bottom of this form and turn it in to our FCFS Coordinator, Richard Keene, at the end of any monthly



meeting, or mail it to FCFS at P.O. Box 550591, Jax, FL 32255-0591, or e-mail Richard at rckeene@juno.com. Sign-up is neither mandatory nor binding, but we really would like to be part of the state-wide push, and contribute as many activists and live bodies to the event and cause as possible. Obviously, exact time(s) and all other details need to be worked out with SUSA, and details, dates, location(s), costs, funding (if any), etc., will be forthcoming - in the FCFS Newsletter, and directly to you by e-mail if you sign up.

Interested "Iowa Invasion" Volunteer

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone(s) _____ E-Mail: _____

Between October 2015 and June 2016

Date(s) you may be able to participate in any such travel or event:

Date(s) you would be precluded from any such travel or event

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@yahoogleroups.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

October Meeting

Carrie Renwick, Program Chair

On October 20, we will welcome **Matthew Groe, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Philosophy, Jacksonville University**, to the podium. FCFS president, Earl Coggins, heard Dr. Groe speak when he

attended a panel discussion last February at Jacksonville University, titled "TRUTH, Have It Your Way." Earl was impressed with Dr. Groe's presentation and thinks we would enjoy it, too.

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).

Freethought Events on the First Coast

- Monday, September 8 - JAM Session, 6:30 p.m. (See <http://www.meetup.com/jaxatheists/> for details.)
- Thursday, Sept 11 - FCFS Book Discussion Group - St. Aug, 7:00 p.m
- Monday, September 15 - FCFS Monthly Meeting, Jacksonville (Dredging for Commerce), 6:30 p.m.

- Friday, September 19 - [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, September 20 - Volunteer at Dignity U Wear, Jacksonville, 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
- Tuesday, September 23 - FCFS Monthly Social at Olive Garden, Jacksonville, 6:00 p.m.
- Saturday, September 27 - FCFS October Newsletter Deadline
- Sunday, September 28 - FCFS Secular Sunday in the Park, Jacksonville, 10:00 a.m.
- Sunday, October 5 - Humanist Book Discussion Group - Jacksonville, 2:00 p.m.
- Thursday, October 9 - Humanist Book Discussion Group - St. Augustine, Anastasia Island, 7:00 p.m.
- Monday, October 13 - JAM Session, 6:30 p.m. (See <http://www.meetup.com/jaxatheists/> for details.)
- Monday, October 20 - FCFS Monthly Meeting, Jacksonville - 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

- 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 - FCFS Dignity U Wear, 9:00 a.m.
- Tuesday, Sept 23 - FCFS Olive Garden, 6:00 p.m.
- Sunday, Sept 28 - FCFS Secular Sunday, 10:00 a.m.
- Monday, Oct 5 - Humanist Book Group - Jacksonville, 2:00 p.m.
- Thursday, Oct 9 - Humanist Book Group - St. Augustine, 7:00 p.m.