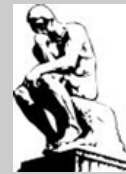


First Coast

FreeThinker



The newsletter of the First Coast Freethought Society

January 2007

Volume 5, Issue 1

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Curtis Wolf

If you think that religious fraud is a fairly recent phenomenon, think again. According to Lucian, the Roman empire was full of religious charlatans.

Lucian of Samosata was a second century Roman rhetorician who was known for his satirical writings. One hundred fifty of his manuscripts survive. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucian>).

In one of his books about religious charlatan Alexander, Lucian wrote about the apparent "miraculous" birth of a snake-god. As debunker, Lucian pointed out that the birth of the snake was faked with a

newly born snake inserted into an empty goose egg which then was found in dramatic fashion by Alexander after he convinced a crowd of people to follow him to this spot. He promptly declared that the snake was the incarnation of the demigod of medicine and healing, Asclepius. If you think that was bad enough, think again. Alexander was just getting started.

Days later, Alexander showed up with a fully grown snake that had a human head! Since the populace were devoid of skeptics, many came out to see the snake-god. They were shuttled quickly through a darkened room in which they saw Alexander sitting on a

couch with the snake with a human head wrapped around his neck.



What the people did not know is that the real head of the snake, who was tame due to considerable contact with humans, was hidden within Alexander's arm-pit. The "human head," which replaced it, was made of linen upon which human expressions were painted. A fake mouth complete with forked tongue was built into the fake head which could be manipulated with horse hair to open and close. He even

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"Transhumanism has roots in secular humanist thinking, yet is more radical in that it promotes not only traditional means of improving human nature, such as education and cultural refinement, but also direct application of medicine and technology to overcome some of our basic biological limits."

Nick Bostrom, "Human Genetic Enhancements: A Transhumanist Perspective" *Journal of Value Inquiry*

January 2007 Meeting

Judith Ochrietor, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Dept. of Biology, UNF

"Genetic Engineering: Its Promise and Its Dangers"

Monday, January 15, 2007, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

(Upstairs in the Sanctuary - Doors open at 6:00)

Unitarian Universalist Church • 7405 Arlington Expressway • Jacksonville, FL

HUMANIST BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

When: 2:00 p.m., the third Sunday of each month.
Where: Borders Books, 8801 Southside Blvd., 519-6500, books are usually in stock.
What: Books/magazines planned for discussion:



- January 21, 2007 - *The God Delusion*, by Richard Dawkins
- February 18, 2007 - *The Moral Animal: Why We Are, the Way We Are: The New Science of Evolutionary Psychology*, by Robert Wright

February's selection, *The Moral Animal*, was named by the *New York Times Book Review* as one of the 12 best books of 1994 and has been published in 12 languages. Wright looks at the behavior, or the genetic self-interest, behind everything from our sexual preferences to our office politics--as well as their implications for our moral codes and public policies. The questions posed are intriguing and fascinating. Are men and women really built for monogamy? (No.) Is hierarchy inherent in human society? (Yes.) Are we prisoners of our gender? (Yes.) Is intellectual honesty possible? (Yes, but difficult.)

According to the *Economist*, "This clever and stimulating book is destined to become a classic . . . Like Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* and Richard Dawkins' *The Selfish Gene*, it could well change the way people think and feel about their lives--perhaps even how they behave . . . It is, into the bargain, an intellectual entertainment argued with wit and style."

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



**First Coast
FreeThinker**

The *First Coast FreeThinker* is published for members of the First Coast Freethought Society, other freethinkers, and potential freethinkers. We exchange newsletters with other freethought groups and obtain information from many diverse sources.

Readers are invited and encouraged to reprint our original materials provided they give credit to this publication.

The officials of the FCFS are not responsible for opinions or other statements expressed in this newsletter. It is intended to convey ideas and to stimulate discussion on a variety of subjects.

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We welcome submissions. Deadlines are the end of the **THIRD** week of the month for the following month. Submit contributions by e-mail to Hugo (see above), or mail to Hugo Borresen, 8831 Taurus Circle South, Jacksonville, FL 32222. Submit web site contributions by e-mail to Carrie Renwick at the address above.

Ancient and Recent Iranian Perspectives on Human Rights

Fred W. Hill

Over two and a half millennia ago, an oriental king who ruled over an immense empire that at its greatest extent included Asia Minor and the Levant in the west, much of modern Pakistan and Kazakhstan in the east, and all between, decreed that all citizens of his empire had certain rights that should be respected. The decree was so unusual that it would take nearly all of the next 25 centuries until most of the leaders of the world would at least pay lip service to the idea of human rights.

Much more recently, a president from the same region has determined that a particular religious/ethnic group should not even have the right to exist, at least not in its current national base. As part of his campaign to purge that particular group, namely the Israeli Jews from the southern shores of the Levant, the president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran, has also asserted that the Holocaust, the attempted extermination of the Jews, among other “undesirables” in Nazi-occupied Europe, did not happen.

In December 2005, Ahmadinejad asserted, “They have fabricated a legend under the name ‘Massacre of the Jews,’ and they hold it higher than God himself, religion itself, and the prophets

themselves...[The West] deals very severely with those who deny this myth but does not do anything to those who deny God, religion, and the prophets.” <http://www.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/meast/12/14/iran.israel>.

On December 11 and 12, 2006, Ahmadinejad hosted a select group of guests from around the world to take part in the International Conference to Review the Global Vision of the Holocaust. Among the 67 atten-

Far too many are easily susceptible to believing all sorts of incredible suppositions based on misinterpreted, suspect or no evidence at all.

dees was David Duke, former Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, regular celebrator of Adolf Hitler’s birthday, failed Presidential candidate, tax evader, felon, white supremacist, and best-selling author of the *Jewish Supremacism* which has sold over a million copies worldwide, over half of those in Russia, and apparently uses predominantly Jewish sources to suggest a Zionist plot to dominate the world, with the Communist Revolution in Russia having been a part of the plot (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Duke).

Nazi-apologist and discredited historian David Irving was

there in spirit only as he is currently in an Austrian prison after having unsuccessfully challenged an anti-Holocaust denial law in the former Nazi state. Strangely, also attending were six Rabbis belonging to Neturei Karta, an Orthodox Jewish sect that does not deny the Holocaust – the Rabbis were the only non-deniers there -- but does oppose the existence of the modern nation of Israel as an affront to divine will, believing only God has the authority to recreate Israel and He will only do so upon the arrival of the Messiah.

Actually that opposition entirely explains their presence at the conference. Ahmadinejad opposes the existence of Israel, at least at its present location. He has suggested relocating the Jewish nation to Europe or North America. As little chance exists that the Israeli Jews will voluntarily abandon their homes en masse, Ahmadinejad seems committed to terrorizing them into leaving on pain of experiencing another attempt to eradicate them. Presumably, Ahmadinejad doesn’t care whether the Jews abandon Israel dead or alive just so long as they are gone so that for the first time since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, Muslims can claim dominance over the entire



region again.

Ahmadinejad, I suspect, doesn't really care whether or not the Holocaust happened. It is doubtful he expects to sway any objective, honest historians from the conclusion that the Nazis and their collaborators did, in fact, murder several million Jews who were singled out for extermination only because they were Jews. It is highly likely, however, that he expects to sow seeds of doubt in enough people around the world to cause sympathy for the Jews to wane and thus erode support for Israel.

Most people, after all, are not objective historians and are not trained in critical thinking. Far too many are easily susceptible to believing all sorts of incredible suppositions based on misinterpreted, suspect, or no evidence at all. Adolf Hitler himself referred in his autobiography, *Mein Kampf*, to the propaganda technique of telling such huge lies that no one would believe anyone "could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously." This was not, by the way, an admission by Hitler of his political techniques, but rather a sly, further propagation of the big lie of the "stab in the back" myth that Jews who supposedly controlled the German media had betrayed the nation by convincing Germans that their military had lost World War I on the battlefield.

The Iranian President, a religious extremist who has pulled Iran further to the right after a brief period of modest but hopeful progressive reform in the Is-

lamic Republic, also obviously hopes to shame the predominantly liberal western nations by pointing out the repression of free speech in several of them, where denying the Holocaust is a crime, while winking at Christian fundamentalists who have brayed for decades about their supposed repression by secularists who put down their precious god and won't let them lead prayers or use the Bible to teach science in public schools.

Ahmadinejad himself is no ava-



Cyrus the Great

tar of free speech or any other human rights, having ordered the closing of newspapers and imprisoning of people critical of his policies, and persecuting university professors he deems too liberal or secularist. Defending human rights is very low on his agenda.

Once, however, Ahmadinejad's homeland was the site of the earliest known recognition of human rights. On an ancient, cuneiform-script-covered cylinder, discovered in the ruins of Babylon in 1879, a decree from

the distant past was deciphered. It was issued in 539 BCE by Cyrus the Great, King of Persia, following his conquest of the ancient capital of what is now part of modern Iraq. Beating both the 1st and 13th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution by over 2000 years, Cyrus announced that citizens of his empire were free to choose and practice their own religion without repression and that slavery was abolished (see http://www.parstimes.com/library/cyrus_cylinder.html). Furthermore, Cyrus permitted the Jews who had been held captive in Babylon to return to their homeland, in the region of modern Israel and Palestine, on the westernmost shores of his empire.

Much has changed in the ensuing centuries. Many more empires have come and gone from the region. The Jews were time and again subject to cycles of oppression and tolerance in the various empires and kingdoms where they were dispersed, until, after the most intensive attempt yet to destroy them in what had previously seemed to be an at least moderately civilized society, Jews who had recently or many decades before migrated back to their long lost homeland seized an opportunity to reclaim it by force.

Unfortunately, in the intervening centuries, that same territory had also become the ancient homeland of Palestinian Arabs. The result has been a mess with no easy, humane solution, especially as extremists of

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Lucian And His War on Religious Fraud

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induced the snake-god to speak by having an assistant use a crane's windpipe whose end was inserted into the fake head to create an illusion of a voice projecting from the snake-god's mouth.

He immediately turned this religious fraud into a money-making machine by having the snake-god offer oracles and intercessory prayers to anyone willing to pay for it. The snake-god became so popular that people came all the way from Rome to see it.

Even the "wise" Roman phi-

losopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius sought its oracles! Just in case it is thought that this is nothing but harmless fun, the instructions in the oracle which



Coin bearing the image of Alexander's snake-god

apparently assured the emperor victory over his Germanic foes were followed precisely and resulted in the death of twenty

thousand Roman troops. Like the Delphic oracles, Alexander slipped out of this certain refutation of the snake-god's prophetic power when he argued that the snake-god had assured victory, but did not state who would win.

Lest you think that the Romans were stupid and superstitious people unlike our generation, look around and take note of the weeping statues, "miraculous" cures of saints like Mother Theresa, UFOs, ghosts, New Age silliness, alternative medicine, and other pseudoscientific beliefs. Even in our scientific age, we have a long way to go before future Alexanders will be met with widespread skepticism and rejection.



Ongoing FCFS Activities

Dinners For Atheists (and Freethinkers, Humanists, Agnostics, etc.)

Sign up to attend or host a dinner yourself. Sign-up sheets will be at the back table at the monthly meetings. For further details on how this works, see page 9 of the February 2006 *Freethinker*, or ask the hospitality ladies at the back table.

Atheist Sunday Morning (or Sunday Morning in the Park)

For those of us seeking more freethought fellowship, conversation and camaraderie, here is an opportunity to get together on Sunday mornings. Contact June Applen at JApplen@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org or call 904-762-0627.

No Atheist Left Behind (or Are You Going My Way?)

If you are seeking a ride to an FCFS event, contact **Hugo Borresen** at HBorresen@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org or call 904-779-6883.

Caring Tree

If a telephone call to any member or anyone interested in our group might serve a purpose--such as a ride to our meeting or some other personal need-- please contact **Nita Pitts** at 904-996-0879 or e-mail her at pitrymnd@comcast.net. Otherwise, leave a notation on the sign-in sheet at the front table during one of our meetings.

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 550591
Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591
(904) 288-6291
<http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the First Coast Freethought Society is to serve the needs of the nonreligious of Northeast Florida, to promote freethought and secular humanism, and to provide an opportunity for agnostics, atheists, skeptics and other free-thinkers to exchange ideas.

Meetings

The FCFS meets the third Monday of each month at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Jacksonville, 7405 Arlington Expressway, Jacksonville, Florida. 32211. (904) 725-8133. Doors open 6:00. Meeting time: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

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CWolf@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

January Social - All Welcome!

WHERE: STEAK & ALE at Baymeadows and I-95 South

WHEN: Tues., January 23, 2007. Gather in Lounge at 6:00 p.m., Dinner at 7:00 p.m.

RSVP: CarrieRen@att.net (or 268-8826) by January 22, if you plan to attend!

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.

P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591 • (904) 288-6291

2007 Membership Application



Name		Date	
Home address	City	State	Zip Code
E-mail address	Home phone	Business phone	
Occupation	Areas of interest and/or expertise		

How did you hear about us?

Membership level (please select one):

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regular (\$30/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Carl Sagan (\$50/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Charles Darwin (\$200/yr.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student (\$15/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Bertrand Russell (\$75/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Robert Ingersoll (\$500/yr.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior - 65+ (\$15/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Thomas Paine (\$100/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime (\$1,000) |

I'm interested in getting involved in the FCFS as a(n):

- General member Committee member Officer Financial supporter

Do you object to your name appearing on our membership list, which is only distributed only to other members?

- YES, I object. NO, I do NOT object.

Comments:

*You can make a lasting impact on the future of
freethought and secular humanism in this community
...if you provide for the First Coast Freethought Society in your Will.*

Your bequest will ensure that the FCFS continues to be a beacon for freethinkers on the First Coast and to remain a vital Voice of Reason in the Northeast Florida area. Several options are available for establishing a bequest (specific, percentage, residual, or contingent). We will be happy to provide the appropriate wording to you and your attorney, depending upon your wishes.

For further information, contact
Carrie Renwick, P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591 or
904-288-6291 • CarrieRen@att.net • <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/>
All inquiries are held in the strictest confidence.

Ancient and Recent Iranian Perspectives on Human Rights

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both sides regularly derail compromises that might bring about

peace and stability. Ahmadinejad, by calling for the destruction of Israel and resorting to the big lie claim that the Holocaust never happened, is just the latest to pour gasoline on the ruin-

ous fires of Middle Eastern troubles and betray the humane, progressive steps of his ancient predecessor to respect and protect the rights of all.



Join us at the **Annual Planning Meeting** on January 14, 2007 at 1 PM. It will take place at Wilhelmina's lovely house.

Call 642-8798 for directions.

At this meeting, we will discuss the upcoming year and what plans we have for it. This

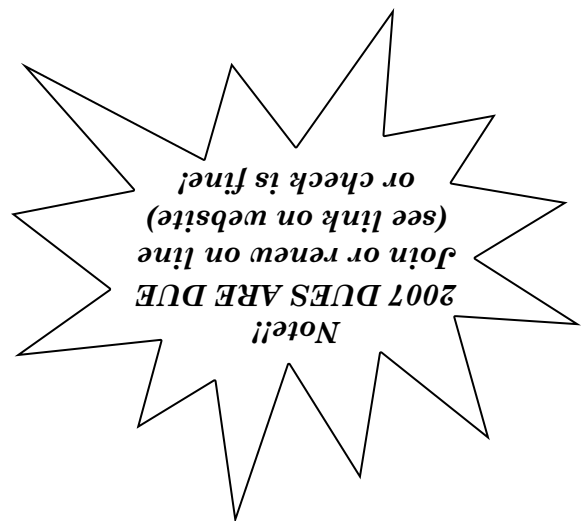
is your chance to get in your suggestions and ideas. Maybe, you would even like to volunteer to serve on a committee!



First Coast Freethought Society 2007 Events

January	15 - Monthly meeting	21 - Book discussion group	23- Social at Steak and Ale
February	19 - Monthly meeting	18 - Book discussion group	27- Social at Steak and Ale
March	19 - Monthly meeting	18 - Book discussion group	27- Social at Steak and Ale

Visit our website at <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/>.



Return service requested



First Coast Freethought Society
 8831 Taurus Circle South
 Jacksonville, Florida 32222