

Atlanta Freethought News

An AFS Publication • Volume 10 Number 3 • March 2004

The March Meeting

The March 14 AFS meeting will include a talk by Joe Beck on "Religion: Stress Creator or Stress Reducer?"

Mr. Beck received a Master of Social Work degree from the State University of New York in 1969 and has been a New York State Certified Social Worker since 1970. He is also a Certified Humanist Celebrant. (See his website at www.humanismservices.com.) For the past three years he has produced and hosted the Humanist Perspective cable access TV show that airs from Long Island, NY. He is currently on the Humanist Tour Across America promoting equality for non-religious members of the military.

The AFS meeting will be at 1:00 at the **Atlanta Freethought Center**, Suite 500, 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Roswell, GA. Please feel free to arrive early for snacks and conversation before the meeting.

To get there from Atlanta, take I-400 north past I-285 by 8 miles to Exit 7B, which is GA-140. Take GA-140 (Holcomb Bridge Road) west about 1 mile and turn left at Grimes Bridge Road. Go 0.2 miles to 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, which is on the right.

AFS Activities

The next **AFS Social** will be at **Las Margaritas Restaurant** at 1842 Cheshire Bridge Road (Atlanta) on Friday, March 19, at 7:00 PM. To get there, take I-85 to the Cheshire Bridge Road exit (Exit 88) on the north side of Atlanta. Turn east at the light and go about 1.5 miles. The restaurant will be on the right.

The **AFS Discussion Group** will meet on Sunday, March 21, at 4:00 to 6:00 PM at the AF Center.

The **Tuesday Lunch Bunch** meets every Tuesday for lunch at Panahar Restaurant at 12:30. The address is 3375 Buford Hwy, Suite 1060, in Atlanta. Come on down and enjoy the Bangladeshi food buffet and the great company.

Humanists of Georgia Meeting

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the Atlanta Freethought Center at 12:30 on Sunday, March 28. HGA members Kathy Brooks, Priscilla Vandecar, Kelly Wilhoit and Kathy Sayeg will present a program on "Women in Humanism."

Meetings and Activities

Mar 14: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.
Mar 19: AFS Social, Las Margaritas Restaurant, 7:00 PM.
Mar 21: AFS Board Meeting, AF Center, 2:00 PM.
Mar 21: AFS Discussion Group, AF Center, 4:00 PM.

SOS Meets at AF Center

The **Secular Organizations for Sobriety** meets at the Atlanta Freethought Center every Tuesday evening at 7:30 PM. SOS is the secular replacement for AA (Alcoholics Anonymous).

Fellowship of Reason Meeting

The **Fellowship of Reason** meets on the first Sunday of each month at 12:30 PM at the Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 1025 Mount Vernon Hwy, in Atlanta. For details, see www.fellowshipofreason.com.

March 24 Rally for Secular Pledge

On Wednesday, March 24, oral arguments will take place before the Supreme Court of the United States in a case brought by California Atheist Michael Newdow to remove the words "under God" from the Pledge of Allegiance.

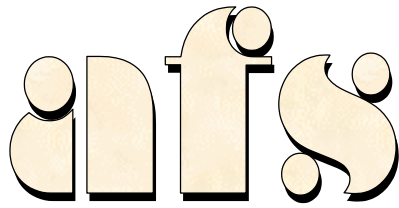
American Atheists and the **Godless Americans Task Force** will have a peaceful *Rally on the Steps* of the Supreme Court Building on the same day in support of this historic legal action. For details, see www.atheists.org.

The **Alabama Freethought Association** will also sponsor a *Restore the Pledge Rally* on March 24 from 11am to 1pm in Birmingham, AL. The rally is being co-sponsored by the **Birmingham Atheists** and the **Birmingham Freethought Society**. See www.alabamafreethought.org for details.

"Words uttered under coercion are proof of loyalty to nothing but self-interest. Love of country must spring from willing hearts and free minds, inspired by a fair administration of wise laws enacted by the people's elected representatives within the bounds of express constitutional prohibitions. These laws must, to be consistent with the First Amendment, permit the widest toleration of conflicting viewpoints consistent with a society of free men.

"Neither our domestic tranquility in peace nor our martial effort in war depend on compelling little children to participate in a ceremony which ends in nothing for them but a fear of spiritual condemnation. If, as we think, their fears are groundless, time and reason are the proper antidotes for their errors. The ceremonial, when enforced against conscientious objectors, more likely to defeat than to serve its high purpose, is a handy implement for disguised religious persecution. As such, it is inconsistent with our Constitution's plan and purpose."

— U.S. Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black, 1943



**Atlanta
Freethought
Society**

Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at the AFS Center, 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Roswell, GA, unless otherwise noted. Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:00 for socializing. Visitors are always welcome.

Mar 14: Joe Beck will speak on "Religion: Stress Creator or Stress Reducer?"

Apr 11: Scott Lilienfeld will speak on "Science and Pseudo-science in Clinical Psychology."

May 9: Reginald Finley will speak on "Logical Arguments Against God."

June 13: TBA

July 11: TBA

To join the AFS Forum e-mail list, send a blank message to AFSforum-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. To join the AFS Announcements list, send a blank email to afs-announce-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. To join the Georgia Freethinkers Letter Writing Cooperative, send a blank email to flwc-ga-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

You can unsubscribe by sending an email to xxxx-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com.

The Atlanta Freethought Society is a member-run organization dedicated to advancing freethought and protecting the rights and reputation of freethinkers, agnostics, atheists and humanists. We welcome anyone who is interested in learning about the advantages of living life free of religious dogma through speeches, debates, discussions, protests, letters to the editor, broadcast appearances, and any other reasonable and civil means available.

We define freethought as "the forming of opinions about life in general and religion in particular on the basis of reason and the evidence of our senses, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief."

We actively support a strict separation of church and state as the best means to guarantee liberty for all, regardless of religious belief or, especially, lack of belief.

We seek to educate ourselves on many topics but especially on religion and non-religion, primarily through having a series of thought-provoking speakers and programs and by maintaining and using our own extensive library of freethought, religious, and related books, pamphlets, videotapes, and audiotapes.

We provide an organization where freethinkers and non-theists can develop friendships, talk freely, socialize and enjoy each other's company. We do not discriminate against anyone on such irrelevant grounds as race, sexual orientation, age, gender, class, or physical disability. We welcome members and leaders of all political parties and preferences.

Because we are designated by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) educational organization, contributions to AFS are tax deductible.

Any who are like-minded are welcome to join us.

Atlanta Freethought News
an AFS publication

Editor

Steve Yothment

How to Contact the Editor

Send correspondence to AFS at:
1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite 500
Roswell, GA 30075-3905
or phone Steve at 678-364-8703
or send e-mail to SteveYoth@aol.com.

Atlanta Freethought Society

President

Steve Yothment – 678-364-8703

VP for Internal Communication

Judy Thompson – 404-296-2020

VP for External Communication

Sue Garland – 404-875-7288

Treasurer

Bill Burton – 770-469-1228

Board of Directors

Freya Harris – 404-xxx-xxxx

Harriet Harris – 404-252-1962

Joel Kollin – 770-392-7958

Kate Miller – 770-xxx-xxxx

Lew Southern – 770-509-8272

The Atlanta Freethought News

Vol. 10, Number 3, March 2004
is copyright © 2004 by The Atlanta
Freethought Society, Inc.

Signed articles are all copyright ©
2003 by their respective authors.

For membership and subscription
information, contact AFS at:
1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite
500, Roswell, GA 30075-3905

Membership in AFS is \$25/year for in-
dividuals, \$35 for households, and \$10
for students/low income/under 21. Sus-
taining members (individual) \$100 and
sustaining members (households) \$125.

Subscriptions alone are \$20 for 12 is-
sues, \$25 to Canada/Mexico, \$30 for
other addresses. Please make checks
and money orders payable to
Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc.

Visit our World Wide Web site at
www.atlantafreethought.org.

Send E-mail to
afs@atlantafreethought.org.

AFS Webmaster: Ken Cummings
Call the AFS Infoline: 770-641-2903

Darwin Day a Big Success

The Atlanta Freethought Society celebrated Darwin Day 2004 at Georgia State University (GSU) this year. Ried Crowe, coordinator for the event, reports that it was a whopping success and that everyone had a great time!

Literally dozens of students came to peruse our booth. At any given moment there were at least ten passersby milling around, reading our posters, and, of course, getting free cake and snacks. In total, at least 50 students experienced Darwin Day. Ried says that AFS did a great job of raising appreciation for Darwin and his contributions to science, and for the current Georgia biology education controversy.

About 90% of the students we talked with were very sympathetic to our cause. Even the one or two who were unsympathetic were kind and willing to converse with us. There was no ill-will from any of the students. If anything, we were "preaching to the choir."

For next year, Ried would like to have the celebration at a more controversial location, such as Clayton State College or some public venue like Centennial Park. (Of course, both of these options were considered before we decided on GSU, and both were unavailable to us for various reasons.)

All AFS members who participated have agreed that AFS ought to do this again next year!

Ed Buckner, present at the celebration, reports that Ried was very busy handing out cake and talking, cajoling a few to reasonableness, encouraging all to think, and inviting all to support Darwinian evolutionary theory, science, science education, and, of course, to eat cake. Ried was quite effective. Many took flyers with AFS contact information and two students took the trouble to voluntarily sign up for more information about AFS.

One disappointment was the inattentive media. AFS sent out press announcements, but the news about gay marriages probably trumped our celebration. Either way, it was fun.



Bush Pushes for Anti-Gay Marriage Amendment

On February 24, President Bush called for a Constitutional Amendment to “protect marriage” by defining marriage as the legal union between one man and one woman. He said that this action is a result of his concern that “activist judges” in Massachusetts have “redefined marriage” by indicating that they will order the issuance of marriage licenses to applicants of the same gender in May of this year. (A result of the judges’ ruling is that there have been numerous same-sex marriages across the nation in the past month.)

“Activist courts have left the people with one recourse,” Bush said. “If we are to prevent the meaning of marriage from being changed forever, our nation must enact a Constitutional Amendment to protect marriage in America. Decisive and democratic action is needed, because attempts to redefine marriage in a single state or city could have serious consequences throughout the country... Ages of experience have taught humanity that the commitment of a husband and wife to love and serve one another promotes the welfare of children and the stability of society.”

Negative reaction to the President’s statements has been noteworthy. For example, an Atlanta Journal-Constitution editorial noted that “It’s difficult to imagine how a gay couple exchanging wedding vows poses a threat to children or American Society at large. It’s also hard – no, impossible – to explain rationally how extending rights to others necessarily impinges on those who already enjoy those benefits.”

The AJC’s editorial cartoonist Mike Luckovich expressed his opinion by showing a copy of the Constitution with the words “(Except for Homos) – G.W.B.” scrawled across it.

Letters to the editor in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution called Bush’s idea for a Constitutional Amendment “un-American, anti-gay, anti-family

and anti-Constitution.”

The AJC editors noted on the second day after Bush’s statement that “We received no letters in support of President Bush’s proposed gay marriage ban amendment.” So, they printed three letters that were firmly against his proposal.

The Unitarian Universalist Association responded to Bush’s proposal in a press release, saying that “Amending the United States Constitution to deny same-gender couples the rights and responsibilities of marriage would be to enshrine discrimination into the document that provides the foundation for our democracy. While the Constitution has been amended in the past, it has never been altered with the express intent to deny equal protection to an entire class of citizens, and now is no time to start. Instead, successive generations of Americans have found new ways to honor the spirit of the constitution by extending its promise to an ever-widening circle of American citizens. The document that granted freedom and full citizenship to African Americans and gave women the right to vote must not be used as a weapon with which to attack the families of our country’s gay and lesbian citizens.”

In a press statement on March 3, Barry Lynn of Americans United for Separation of Church and State said, “I’m not worried about gay marriage. I am, however, very worried about the marriage between President Bush and Religious Right zealots. Our Constitution has never been amended to take away minority rights, and we should not be taking such an action now.

“The reaction to the Massachusetts ruling has been shrill and over-the-top. There is nothing radical about preserving individual liberty and demanding equal protection for all,” Lynn continued. “Nor is it extreme to uphold the separation of church and

state, which is what that decision did.”

Even American anthropologists criticized President Bush’s proposed constitutional ban on same-sex marriage, and gave a failing grade to the president’s understanding of human cultures, according to a report in the San Francisco Chronicle.

“The results of more than a century of anthropological research on households, kinship relationships and families, across cultures and through time, provide no support whatsoever for the view that either civilization or viable social orders depend upon marriage as an exclusively heterosexual institution,” said the executive board of the 11,000-member American Anthropological Association.

Bush has said the union between male and female is the only proper form of marriage, or “one of the most fundamental, enduring institutions of our civilization.” American anthropologists say he’s wrong.

“Rather, anthropological research supports the conclusion that a vast array of family types, including families built upon same-sex partnerships, can contribute to stable and humane societies,” the association’s statement said, adding that the executive board “strongly opposes a constitutional amendment limiting marriage to heterosexual couples.”

The statement was proposed by Dan Segal, a professor of anthropology and history from Pitzer College in Claremont (Los Angeles County), who called Bush’s conception of the history of marriage “patently false.”

“If he were to take even the first semester of anthropology, he would know that’s not true,” said Segal, a member of the anthropological association’s Executive Committee.

[This article is from a Feb. 24 White House press release, a Feb. 26 AJC editorial, a Feb 24 UUA press release, a March 3 Americans United press release, and the March 3 issue of Humanist Network News.]

“Religion is the source of all imaginable follies and disturbances. It is the parent of fanaticism and civil discord. It is the enemy of mankind.” - Voltaire

Scientists Charge “Suppression of Information” in Bush Policy

WASHINGTON -- President Bush’s administration distorts scientific findings and seeks to manipulate experts’ advice to avoid information that runs counter to its political beliefs, a private organization of scientists asserted On February 19.

“I’ve never seen it this bad,” said Dr. Gordon Orians, a professor of zoology at the University of Washington and member of the prestigious National Academy of Sciences. “People will always disagree on the interpretation of facts, but what’s going on now is the systematic suppression of information.”

In a 37-page report signed by Orians, 20 Nobel laureates and many other world-renowned scientists, the Union of Concerned Scientists contended that “the scope and scale of the manipulation, suppression and misrepresentation of science by the Bush administration is unprecedented.”

They cited areas such as climate change, power plant emissions and overpopulation.

“We’re not taking issue with administration policies. We’re taking issue with the administration’s distortion ... of the science related to some of its policies,” said the group’s president, Kurt Gottfried. The organization called upon scientists to report “abuses” by the administration and urged Congress to work toward restoring independence and integrity to the scientific community.

White House spokesman Scott McClellan said he had not seen the report but that the administration “makes decisions based on the best available science.”

White House science adviser John Marburger said he found the report “somewhat disappointing ... because it makes some sweeping generalizations about policy in this administration that are based on a random selection of incidents and issues.”

He added, “I don’t think it makes the case for the sweeping accusations that it makes.”

Marburger acknowledged that the complaint was signed by a wide assortment of prominent scientists, including Nobel Prize winners and recipients of the National Medal of Science.

But the stature of those making the complaint, he said, is a sign that communication between the White House and the scientific community needs to be improved.

“We need to have a dialogue about what is actually happening, but this report does not do it,” Marburger said.

Orians said the critique provides plenty of examples of the Bush administration’s attempt to suppress or distort scientific findings it doesn’t like – as well as deliberate attempts to mislead or “just lie” in order to achieve a desired policy.

Last year, for example, while he was serving as chairman of a National Academy group asked to evaluate regulations on arsenic in drinking water, Orians said administration officials rejected the findings of the top experts as unsound.

“They didn’t say why and just ordered another study,” he said.

On another blue-ribbon panel he served on reviewing water resource problems in Oregon’s Klamath Basin, Orians said administration officials completely misrepresented the panel’s conclusions.

“None of what they were saying was in our report,” the UW scientist said. “Our chairman had to write responses to a lot of people explaining what we said, and what we didn’t say.”

F. Sherwood Rowland, Nobel laureate known for his studies of ozone, was particularly critical of the administration’s approach to climate change.

He said the consensus of scientific opinion about global warming is being ignored and that government reports have been censored to remove views not in tune with Bush’s politics.

In another example, a panel of scientists that advises the Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention on lead poisoning was recently planning to strengthen the lead poisoning regulations, in response to science showing that smaller amounts than previously understood could cause brain damage in children.

Before the panel could act, Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson rejected the recommendation and replaced two members of the panel with individuals tied to the lead industry.

The researchers also took issue with a White House Office of Management and Budget bulletin regarding peer review, a process fundamental to science by which researchers check each other’s work for accuracy and balance before it’s published. The bulletin, drafted in August 2003, would allow the government to hand-pick scientists to second-guess scientific research, opponents say.

Luminaries from a broad array of scientific disciplines signed the Union of Concerned Scientists’ letter. Among the Nobel signatories are David Baltimore, Leon Lederman, Norman Ramsey, Harold Varmus and Steven Weinberg.

Among the union’s findings:

- ▶ A 2003 report that the administration sought changes in an Environmental Protection Agency climate study, including deletion of a 1,000-year temperature record and removal of a reference that attributed some warming to human activity.
- ▶ A delay in an EPA report on mercury pollution from some power plants.
- ▶ A charge that the administration pressed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to end a project called “Programs that Work,” which found sex education programs that did not focus only on abstinence were still effective.

On February 18, when the American Association for the Advancement of Science held its annual meeting in Seattle (the world’s largest general science conference), the chief executive

“Suppression of Information” (*continued*)

officer of the organization expressed concerns similar to that of Orians and the others who signed the report.

“Neither ideology nor policy concerns should constrain the research agenda in any way,” said Dr. Alan Leshner, CEO of the AAAS. Leshner

said there is a “frightening trend” in this direction now, in which scientists whose findings appear to run counter to the dominant political agenda are losing funding or appointments.

“We’re all really worried about this,” said Orians, who served on the

first scientific advisory board to the EPA during the Nixon administration. This is more than just typical political meddling, he said.

“This is dangerous,” said Orians. [From a February 18 article in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*.]

February Board Meeting Minutes

In attendance: Steve Yothment, Sue Garland, Bill Burton, Kate Miller, Harriet Harris, Freya Harris, Bruce Herr

Minutes taken by: Harriet Harris

Time/Date of meeting: 2:00 PM, February 15, 2004

- ▶ The Minutes of the previous (January) meeting were approved as they appeared in the newsletter.
- ▶ Steve introduced our newest board member, Freya Harris, who also maintains our website.
- ▶ Bill reported that the text for Mike Ledo’s book “A Skeptic’s View of the Christian Bible” is completed. The cover design is in progress.
- ▶ Bill reported that our total average expenditures over the past year have been about \$1500/month. We carry a positive balance in our current account.
- ▶ We discussed the fund-raising letter. Sue will finalize the letter, after getting additional financial information from Bill, and will present it to the board for comments and approval. Freya will do a mail merge so that everyone will receive a personal letter. Steve will be in charge of the mailing.

- ▶ The AFS Info Line is still not functioning. Steve will continue to pursue this matter.
- ▶ Steve reported that the Building Committee still needs to place a patio outside the glass doors. This has been delayed due to bad weather.
- ▶ In spite of the inclement weather, Darwin Day was a success. Our thanks go to Pam and Ried Crowe, who organized the event – and to about 10 volunteers who assisted.
- ▶ Because we have an oversupply of books, we decided to have spontaneous book sales, i.e., when an AFS meeting day is nice and sunny, Freya will set up a table out front containing books at sale prices.
- ▶ We decided to promote a Ten Commandment Competition. Sue suggested the term, “Rational Commandments.” Everyone is invited to submit suggestions. Coincidentally, member/visitor Bruce Herr, already had a similar idea and he submitted his entry on the spot.
- ▶ The board discussed how AFS might get involved in charitable work. No decisions were made.

The letter below was written by Richard Russell, former President of Atheists and Agnostics of Wisconsin (not an AFS member). The letter was in the Madison, WI *Capital Times* on February 27.

It’s good to see Walter Cronkite taking alarm at the excesses of fundamentalism in “Christian zealots threaten a damaging religious war” (Feb. 19). However, even the normally perceptive Cronkite, after acknowledging that most Americans are Christians, feels obliged to offer the polite disclaimer that “Their faith is admirable.”

Well, no, it’s not, and it’s high time we stopped pussyfooting around the subject. Faith is, at bottom, a method of arriving at decisions – a particularly bad method. Here are the contending methods, in decreasing order of reliability:

- * Logic (rigorous, rule-based drawing of conclusions from clearly stated premises; the basis of all math and computing)
- * Reason (inferences based on careful observations; the legal standard in court)
- * Confidence (belief that things that have behaved reliably will continue to do so)
- * Trust (belief that people who have behaved honorably will continue to do so)
- * Chance (flipping a coin between 2 alternatives of roughly equal likelihood)
- * Hope (wishing for something unlikely but at least plausible)

- * Faith (belief without any evidence and often in the face of evidence to the contrary)

Nobody invokes faith if any of the more reliable methods is available. Even preachers who endlessly sing its praises won’t close their eyes and rely on faith when crossing a busy street. People only haul out faith when they desperately want to believe something that’s clearly not true, like the existence of poetic justice or life after death.

Here are some other things that faith has done for us lately:

- * Faith (belief despite the utter absence of any evidence) that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction got us into a war with Iraq.
 - * Faith in unlikely good fortune leads people to send their money off to the notorious e-mail penis-enlargement and Nigerian money-laundering scams.
 - * Faith in a virgin-laden paradise caused 9/11.
- Faith has an entirely undeserved good reputation. Let’s recognize it for what it is: the last resort of the mindless and the first resort of the unscrupulous.

*Richard S. Russell
Madison, WI*

Clipped

Letters to the Editor from AFS Members

Ed Buckner's letter was in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on February 23.

Ried Crowe's letter was in the Naples (Florida) *Daily News* on January 28.

Tony King's letter was in the *Rome News Tribune* on February 5.

Proponent's Agenda Clear

State Rep. Lynn Westmoreland's facts, history and logic are wrong ("Bill recognizes religious values' influence," *Equal Time*, Feb. 19):

- He condemns "activist judges" for supporting the Constitution but admires an Alabama judge who was thrown out of office for trying to subvert the Constitution.
- Not only is the Declaration of Independence not based on the Ten Commandments, but it also violates the first commandment by referring to a deistic god ("Nature's God") rather than the biblical God.
- There are thousands of public places in Georgia, including prominent churches, where religious documents can be freely displayed.

Westmoreland shows that the purpose of his legislation is religious; no legislator can make religious decisions for Georgians.

Ed Buckner

Buckner, of Smyrna, is Southern director of the Council for Secular Humanism.

Editor, Naples *Daily News*:

In Dorene McShea's January 16th letter ("I am shocked"), she heavily emphasizes that she is "more than offended" that somebody would dare to try to protect the religious liberties of all by attempting to replace the Collier County School Board's sectarian invocation with a moment of silence. She further justifies her stance by stating how a "vast majority" agrees with it, thus making a thinly-veiled appeal to the "majority rules" argument of government.

Well I am more than "more than offended" by Mrs. McShea's audacity and ignorance of civics — I am *disgusted!*

In America, we do not have a "majority rules" form of democracy. We have a Constitutional form of democracy, whereby the laws and procedures of all branches of government are deemed unacceptable when they violate the civil rights of even one solitary citizen. Thus, it is just as unconstitutional to subject potential Hindu participants to exclusively Judeo-Christian prayers during public school board meetings as it would be to reinstate segregation, even if both practices were favored by a majority of the voting public.

Why is the concept of civil liberties for everybody so difficult for zealots like Mrs. McShea to understand?

Ried Crowe, Powder Springs, GA

"Intelligent Design"

State school Superintendent Kathy Cox is obviously a religious zealot intent on denying Georgia children a basic understanding of evolution and simple biology. Removing the word evolution in favor of using the term "biological changes over time" is a continuation of attacks on Darwin's concept by The Center for Renewal of Science and Culture (CRSC).

A few years ago a position paper of (CRSC) reveals an ambitious plan to replace the current naturalistic methodology of science with a theistic alternative called "intelligent design."

The CRSC, a program launched by the Discovery Institute in 1996, is the major force behind recent advances in the intelligent design movement. The Center is directed by Discovery Senior Fellow Dr. Stephen Meyer, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Whitworth College. Its mission is "to replace materialism and its destructive cultural legacies with a positive scientific alternative." The Discovery Institute hopes that intelligent design will be the usurper that finally dethrones the theory of evolution.

On March 3, 1999, a white paper from the CRSC entitled "The Wedge Project," which detailed the Center's ambitious long-term strategy to replace "materialistic science" with intelligent design. The paper describes the CRSC's mission with a sense of urgency:

"The social consequences of materialism have been devastating. As symptoms, those consequences are certainly worth treating. However, we are convinced that in order to defeat materialism, we must cut it off at its source. That source is scientific materialism. This is precisely our strategy. If we view the predominant materialistic science as a giant tree, our strategy is intended to function as a "wedge" that, while relatively small, can split the trunk when applied at its weakest points. The very beginning of this strategy, the "thin edge of the wedge," was Phillip Johnson's critique of Darwinism be-

gun in 1991 in *Darwinism on Trial*, and continued in *Reason in the Balance and Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds*. Michael Behe's highly successful *Darwin's Black Box* followed Johnson's work. We are building on this momentum, broadening the wedge with a positive scientific alternative to materialistic scientific theories, which has come to be called the theory of intelligent design (ID). Design theory promises to reverse the stifling dominance of the materialist worldview, and to replace it with a science consonant with Christian and theistic convictions."

Yes, Michael Behe is a scientist, but is "Intelligent Design" science? If so, it will be the first science established without a single technical paper published for peer-review, including zero by Behe himself. For some reason he has decided to completely bypass professional review and go directly to a Darwin-doubting public. In the last few years Michael Behe has become the new poster boy for certain religious and political groups who are hostile to evolution and Darwinism.

Evolution has long ago (at least in my mind) ceased to be a theory and entered the realm of facts. There is simply too much empirical evidence in the fossil record and DNA to find otherwise. The efforts to re-crucify Darwin now underway, is motivated by fear. I submit that it is important that scientists defend evolution, not only as a method of inquiry, but also as a scientific account of the cosmos and our place within it. The exoteric beauty and simplistic concept of evolution can be summed up in a few words:

"The diversity of life on earth is the outcome of evolution: an unsupervised, impersonal, unpredictable, natural process of temporal descent with genetic modification that is affected by natural selection, chance, historical contingencies and changing environments."

Tony King, Toccoa, GA

Clipped

Letters to the Editor from AFS Members

Ed Buckner's letter was in the *Marietta Daily Journal* on February 18.

Boyd McKeown's letter was in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on February 9.

Harriet Harris's letter was in the *Marietta Daily Journal* on February 7.

'Social Darwinism' not an evolutionary theory

DEAR EDITOR:

Gary DeMar, Bruce Horacek, and Don Grissom (Letters, Feb. 11) misunderstand what the arguments on evolution in public schools are all about. Science classes are places where science should be taught, not where adults should hash out their religious or political differences.

Mr. DeMar's logic is fundamentally flawed. Whether contemporary supporters of Darwin were racists, or even whether Darwin himself was, is irrelevant. Unfortunately, it was a racist age. Social Darwinism, developed by Herbert Spencer, not Darwin, is a discredited social theory, often used to support racism, eugenics and other evils. But it has nothing to do with evolutionary biological theory. And understanding the biological or genetic bases for horrors like rape is a far

cry from approving of or justifying it. Ethical standards are of crucial importance for society, but they cannot be based on false biology.

Evolutionary theory is probably the best-supported scientific theory ever, supported by masses of evidence and by nearly 150 years of developing and testing hypotheses. There are no alternative scientific theories at all. "Intelligent design" has gained no serious acceptance among scientists, and it does not really dispute much of evolutionary theory anyway.

Mr. Grissom does not understand the nature of scientific theories; theories do not somehow graduate into "laws" when they are confirmed. They remain accepted until and unless a better theory is developed, and none at all compares to the power of evolutionary theory to

explain and predict. The overwhelming acceptance of evolutionary theory by scientists worldwide is not because of any religious or philosophical implications—it is because the evidence is overwhelming. Nor does Mr. Grissom realize that the distinction between "microevolution" and "macroevolution" that he refers to is bogus, an invention of the creationist pseudo-scientists. No evolutionary biologist holds that species develop just by random chance; that is another false caricature of evolution repeated by pseudo-scientists.

President Jimmy Carter, renowned as a Sunday school teacher and who was trained as a nuclear physicist before he became a politician, needs no defense from me. Mr. Horacek's attack on Carter's "misunderstandings about science and the

Bible" betrays only Mr. Horacek's own misunderstandings. Evolution has never "been held to be immune from criticism or examination," as Mr. Horacek claims. It has been subjected to more questioning and examination than any other theory, from scientists and from religious critics as well. Darwin himself, in *Origin of Species* in 1859, raised nearly every objection that has been raised since. Darwin showed so convincingly, with evidence and logic, why the objections failed that the scientific world was persuaded in record time.

Keep religious and political arguments in debating halls and out of our children's science classes.

Ed Buckner
Southern director,
Council for Secular Humanism
Smyrna

Facts Play No Role in Creationism

Thanks to Colin Campbell for his column on creationism.

True science, hard science, starts with a set of observable facts, then piles one upon the other, seeing where they lead, to reach a conclusion. Creationism, or intelligent design, starts with the conclusion then works backward, accepting anything that supports a foregone conclusion and eliminating facts that do not.

Which of these methods would you prefer your doctor to use?

Boyd McKeown
Decatur, Ga.

Cox should quit

Kathy Cox should resign or be driven from office.

It is obvious that her primary goal is not the education of Georgia students, nor preparing them for the future, but the imposition of her personal prejudices upon them.

What makes her believe that she knows more than the members of the American Association for the Advancement of Science about what should be taught in biology classes? She is a disgrace and makes Georgia look foolish.

H. H. Harris, Atlanta

"I do not consider it an insult, but rather a compliment to be called an agnostic. I do not pretend to know where many ignorant men are sure. That is all that agnosticism means." — Clarence Darrow, Scopes trial, 1925

"Man is a Religious Animal. He is the only Religious Animal. He is the only animal that has the True Religion — several of them. He is the only animal that loves his neighbor as himself and cuts his throat if his theology isn't straight."
— Mark Twain

"The opposite of the religious fanatic is not the fanatical atheist but the gentle cynic who cares not whether there is a god or not." — Eric Hoffer

"I cannot imagine a God who rewards and punishes the objects of his creation, whose purposes are modeled after our own — a God, in short, who is but a reflection of human frailty. Neither can I believe that the individual survives the death of his body, although feeble souls harbor such thoughts through fear or ridiculous egotisms." — Albert Einstein

"Faith is such a successful brainwasher in its own favor, especially a brainwasher of children, that it is hard to break its hold. But what, after all, is faith? It is a state of mind that leads people to believe something — It doesn't matter what — in the total absence of supporting evidence." — Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene*

Become a Member!

(Or renew your membership with this form!)



If you've enjoyed what you've read, we enthusiastically invite you to join the Atlanta Freethought Society. Every month you will get our acclaimed monthly newsletter the *Atlanta Freethought News*, voting rights in the organization—and enjoyment of the superb speakers we have coming up, as well as the social and activist events that we sponsor!

Individual memberships: One person can become a member for \$25 per year.

Household memberships: A household is defined as two members sharing one newsletter, and is available for \$35 per year. Since some of our households have additional members, there will be a \$5 per year charge for each additional voting household member.

International members: because of international postage rates and special handling, we have been forced to add a surcharge of \$5 for members in Canada or Mexico, and \$10 for other foreign addresses.

Thank you for all your support and we look forward to your being with us in the coming months!

Annual dues are:

Membership	Dues	# of mems	Total
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$25	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Household (2 members)	\$35	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Additional household mems	\$5 ea	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Low income/Student/Under 21	\$10	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Subscription only	\$20	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Member	\$100	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Household	\$125	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Postage for Canada/Mexico	\$5	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Postage for other foreign addresses	\$10	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Extra donation (thank you!)		_____	\$ _____
TOTAL			\$ _____

Please send this form with payment to:
 Atlanta Freethought Society
 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite 500
 Roswell, GA 30075

Atlanta Freethought Society

1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite 500, Roswell, GA 30075
 Phone: 404-805-2020 e-mail: mirza404@aol.com

"Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprise, every expanded prospect." - James Madison, 1774

Why I Am Not A Christian — \$9

Lucid, comprehensive, engaging answer to Christian apologists by Keith Parsons. Respectful but devastating to all Christian claims. Wonderful follow-up to Bertrand Russell's great essay with the same title.

Tales of the Rational:

Skeptical Essays About Nature and Science — \$17

Massimo Pigliucci's essays examine and criticize both religion and science. He defends straw men, attacks creationism, and explains why scientists and other skeptics should be nontheists.

An Uppity Old Atheist Woman's Dictionary — \$10

By Carol Faulkenberry (illustrated by Amanda Faulkenberry); like Ambrose Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary*—but better: more biting, funnier. Guaranteed to make you laugh out loud and to challenge at least one idea you hold.

Bible Bloopers: Evidence That Demands a Verdict, Too!

(A Skeptic Answers Josh McDowell) — \$15

Mike Ledo's funny, scholarly book—over 270 pp. of effective dissection of biblical mythology, explanations of Bible contradictions, and detailed background on historical, mythological perspectives for modern Christianity.

Quotations That Support the

Separation of State and Church (2nd edition) — \$11

Compiled by Edward M. Buckner and Michael E. Buckner; ammunition against Christian-nation mythologists. Quotes from America's revolutionaries, constitution framers, Presidents, court decisions. Sources carefully documented, extensive index. Comb-bound—lies flat for easy copying.

Please add:

\$4 TOTAL S&H Charge for up to 2 books,

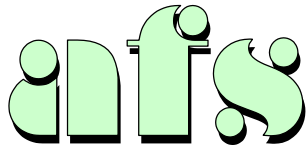
\$1.50 EACH S&H Charge for 3 to 9 books.

No S&H Charge for 10 Books or more.

(All Merchandise will be shipped USPS Priority Mail)

Send check or money order to:

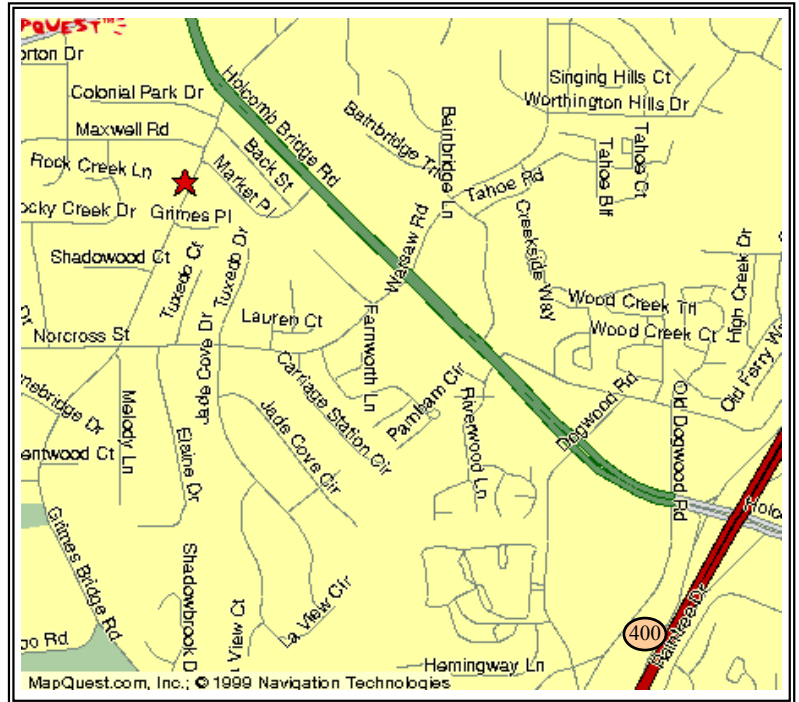
ATLANTA FREETHOUGHT SOCIETY
 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite 500, Roswell GA 30075



**Atlanta
Freethought
Society**

**The March Meeting:
Sunday, March 14
1:00 PM at the AF Center
1170 Grimes Bridge Road
Roswell, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:
Joe Beck**



Atlanta Freethought News is produced by the Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit, member-run, educational organization created to advance freethought and protect freethinkers. Any freethought, atheist, secular humanist, agnostic, or rationalist group is granted permission to reproduce anything from our newsletter not expressly labeled otherwise (acknowledgement of AFS and author appreciated). Articles published represent the official opinion of AFS only when that is clearly stated; all other opinion is that of the individual author.



If you label indicates "02 2004" or earlier, please renew. Thanks.

Atlanta Freethought News
Atlanta Freethought Society
1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite 500
Roswell, GA 30075