

## March AFS Meeting Georgia State Philosophy Professor Ben Burgis



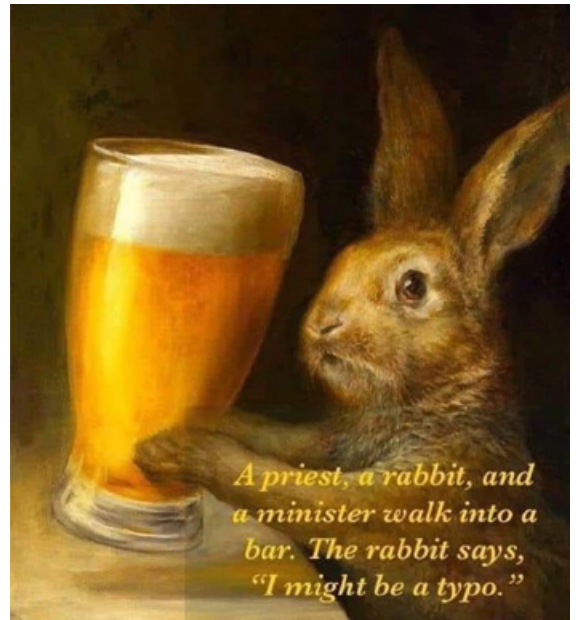
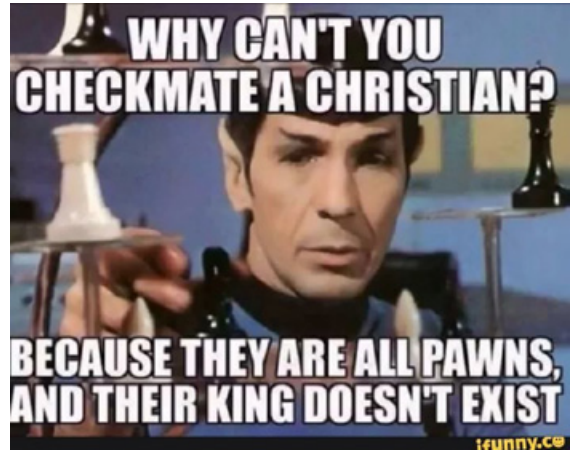
**Ben Burgis**

In November, **Ben Burgis** spoke at Atlanta Freethought Society and we enjoyed him so much we invited him back!

Many people believe that we can't truly be in control of our actions if we live a deterministic universe where everything that happens results from chains of cause and effect.

Some religious believers tell us that the only way we can make sense of the concepts of free will and moral responsibility is by viewing our freedom to control our actions as a mysterious gift from God. Drawing on the works of philosophers ranging from **John-Paul Sartre** to **John Martin Fischer**, Ben Burchis will argue that both of these ideas are mistaken."

Ben Burgis is a philosophy instructor at Georgia State University Perimeter College and the author of *Give Them An Argument: Logic for the Left*. He's also one of the authors of the forthcoming book *Myth and Mayhem: A Leftist Response to Jordan Peterson*. (The other authors are **Matthew McManus**, **Marion Trejo-McManus**, and **Conrad Hamilton**, and the introduction was written by **Slavoj Zizek**.) Ben is a regular weekly contributor to *Jacobin Magazine* and a twice a month columnist at *Arc Digital Media*. He also does a weekly segment on *The Michael Brooks Show* called 'The Debunk.'



### Calendar

Mar 1	Fellowship of Reason	10:30 a.m.
Mar 7	AFS Game Night	7:00 p.m.
Mar 8	AFS Board Meeting	11:00 a.m.
Mar 8	AFS General Meeting	1:00 p.m.
Mar 15	FFRF/AFS Meeting	4:00 p.m.
Apr 12	Potluck	12:00 p.m.
Apr 12	AFS General Meeting	1:00 p.m.

All events are at AF Hall unless noted and are subject to change.



Our next game night will be held on Saturday, March 7, starting at 7 p.m. Please bring snacks, beverages (beer and wine okay), and any games you'd enjoy sharing.

**For the latest in upcoming AFS events, join our Meetup group!**  
[meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society](https://www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society)

## Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at AF Hall, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Atlanta, GA, 30339 unless otherwise noted. Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:00 for socializing. Visitors are always welcome.

The views and opinions expressed by speakers at AFS do not necessarily reflect those of AFS members or its policy.



**Mar 8: Ben Burgis**

**Apr 12: Richard Dien Winfield**

**May 10: TBA**

**June 14: TBA**

**July 12: TBA**

### AFS Email List

The AFS Announcements email list provides subscribers with reminders and updates on AFS activities. Send an email to [AFS-Announce-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:AFS-Announce-subscribe@yahoogroups.com) to subscribe. The AFS Forum email list is a place for discussions of freethought, atheism, agnosticism, church-state separation and religion. To subscribe to this list, send an email to [AFSForum-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:AFSForum-subscribe@yahoogroups.com). The AFS Facebook page is at [facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought](https://facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought). For calendar information on AFS activities, please join the [Meetup group](#). The AFS website is [www.atlantafreethought.org](http://www.atlantafreethought.org).

To keep up to date on the Atlanta Freethought Society calendar of upcoming events, please join our Meetup group: [meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society](https://meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society).

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*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 living a good life free from religion through attending AFS speeches, debates, and discussions. We employ protests, letters to the editor, broadcast appearances, and any other reasonable and civil means available to achieve our mission.

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 lack of belief.

We seek to educate ourselves on many topics but especially on religion and non-religion. We do this through a series of thought-provoking speakers and programs, and by maintaining a web forum and an 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. Any who are like-minded are welcome to join us.

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

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## Atlanta Freethought News An AFS Publication

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### Atlanta Freethought News

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## Humanists Decry High Court's Approval of "Wealth Test" For Migrants

[americanhumanist.org](http://americanhumanist.org)

Humanist leaders are alarmed that the Supreme Court cleared the way for new public charge regulations that allow the denial of entry to migrants who may depend on federal public assistance programs.

The rule change has been held up in lower courts for the past four months, but in a five-four decision, the Supreme Court allowed the rule change to go into effect in every state except Illinois. The court lifted the final judicial injunction in that state on Friday, February 21. This injunction was dismissed despite a hearing on the order being scheduled for next week.

The rule already impacted vulnerable communities, as **noncitizens are dropping out** of benefit programs in fear of immigration consequences, although it officially went into effect on Monday, February 24.

"The immigration process is already difficult to navigate properly, and the new public charge regulations don't help," AHA Executive Director **Roy Speckhardt** commented. "The administration is introducing more cruelty to the immigration process by denying those with the most need the chance to become a US citizen."

In her dissent, issued February 21, Justice **Sonia Sotomayor** noted that the federal government has sought emergency action from the Supreme Court in an unprecedented number of cases. Sotomayor argued that these emergency applications disrupt the "normal appellate process," taking authority from the state courts who are deliberating on these policy questions.

"Even the most hardworking among us may need help at certain points in our lives," argued **Sunil Panikkath**, President of the American Humanist Association. "A set of blind bureaucratic rules that do not recognize this would transform immigration into a mean-spirited and un-American exercise that callously turns away deserving future Americans."

At the most recent American Humanist Association board meeting, the organization expanded its scope of advocacy work to include immigration justice. The resolution demands that the humanity of refugees and migrants be front and center in our immigration policy.

[Read the AHA's new resolution in full here.](#)

## The Supreme Court Could Blow a Hole in Church/State Separation Next Term

[atheists.org](http://atheists.org)

On February 24th, American Atheists warned about *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*, an upcoming Supreme Court case that could allow religious organizations broad exemptions and unfettered freedom to ignore nondiscrimination laws.

Catholic Social Services, a foster-care agency, is suing the city of Philadelphia, claiming it is entitled to a taxpayer-funded contract to place children in foster care despite the agency's refusal to comply with the city's nondiscrimination requirements.

"Catholic Social Services wants to turn away atheist, LGBTQ, and religious minority parents yet demands government funding to promote and normalize their discriminatory behavior. This is beyond absurd," said **Alison Gill**, Vice President for Legal and Policy at American Atheists.

"As bad as that is, if they were to prevail, the ripple effects would be even more disastrous. Discriminatory religious groups would have free reign to ignore the laws they don't like and demand government money while refusing to serve all Americans," added Gill.

"Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and atheists—we all need to follow the same laws," said **Nick Fish**, president of American Atheists. "If the Supreme Court sides with discrimination, they'll be putting religious dogma above the interests of the most vulnerable children and the rights of all Americans."



### Helping those who help themselves

*Sent to Marietta Daily Journal, 20 Feb 2020*

Dear Editor:

**Nell Ludwig Snipes** ("Who made the sun, the stars, and the moon?"—*Marietta Daily Journal*, Tuesday, 18 February) asks a question that Christians would answer differently from the way an atheist like me would answer. But I'll bet few Christians would share her glib confidence that a "Creator God" has "got this problem"—meaning the planetary climate crisis. I'd assume that most theistic believers would assume that any supernatural creator would surely expect humans to make good use of the brains that He (or it?) provided. And many *MDJ* readers would think the old Greek proverb that **Ben Franklin** adapted was wise even if not biblical: "The gods help those who help themselves."

Regards,  
**Ed Buckner**  
Vinings

# Five threats to America's public school system

By Rob Boston / Wall of Separation Blog • [www.au.org](http://www.au.org)

**Public Schools Week** (February 24-28, 2020) is a time to celebrate the achievements of our public school system. But it's also a time to be aware of the threats that the system faces. After all, to best defend the schools, you need to know who and what is out to undermine them.

With that thought in mind, here are five big threats facing public education in America today:

**President Donald Trump:** Trump is no friend of public education. He talks incessantly about private school voucher plans. Late last year, Trump hosted representatives from the private school lobby at the White House and promised them that a nationwide voucher plan was coming. Sure enough, Trump **touted the plan** during his State of the Union address and has added it to his budget. Under this scheme, an astounding \$5 billion would be funneled into the coffers of private, mostly religious schools. While no one expects Trump's budget to pass Congress as written, the fact that vouchers are so prominent in it is troubling.

**Education Secretary Betsy DeVos:** After being elected in 2016, Trump tapped DeVos, a Michigan billionaire with no educational experience, to lead the U.S. Department of Education. DeVos has a **long track record** of hostility toward public education. She's a longtime booster of vouchers and even founded a voucher front group called American Federation for Children. DeVos, one of the few Trump cabinet appointees who has managed to hang on since 2017, is the one who came up with the voucher plan Trump included in his budget.

**Private school lobbying groups:** Representatives from religious denominations that sponsor private schools have been pushing to tap the public purse for years – even though they have enough money to pay for their own

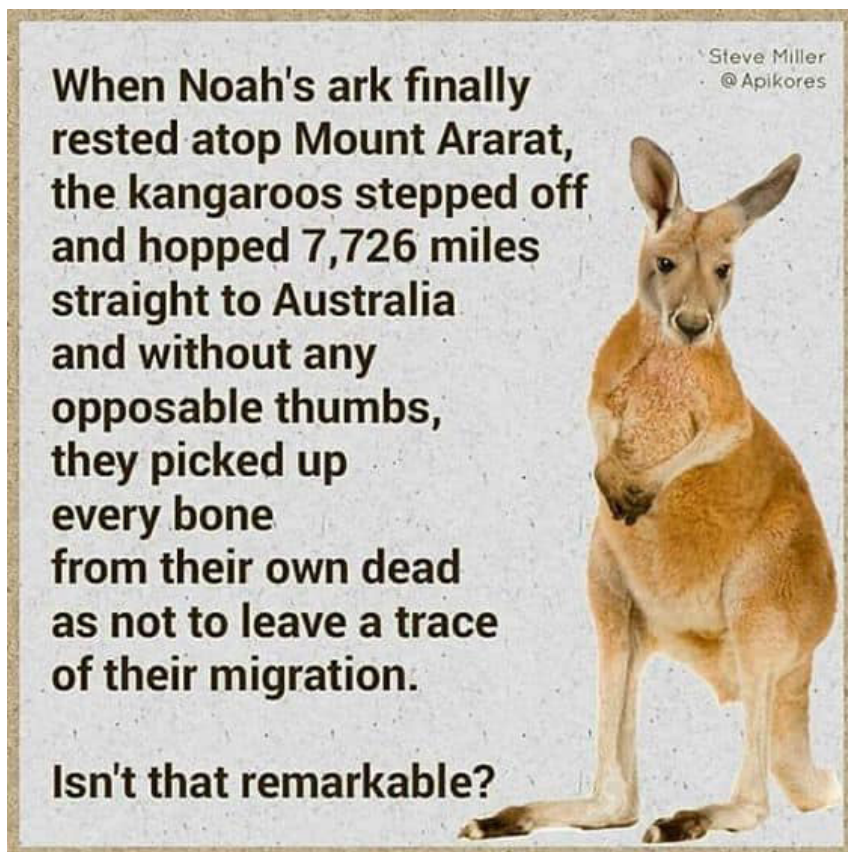
schools. They've agitated for voucher plans, going so far as to brazenly insist that they have some sort of "right" to taxpayer funds – even though these plans violate taxpayers' religious freedom, and even though these private religious schools don't serve the entire public and are unaccountable to the people.

**Anti-government extremists:** The simplistic idea that anything the government does is bad has a powerful hold on conservative thought in America. Because public schools are a very common manifestation of a public, government-provided service, they're a high-profile target for ideologues who favor privatization of as many public services as possible. (These activists often sneeringly refer to public schools as "government schools," furthering the crude narrative that if something is run by the government, it must be bad.) Never mind that **public schools educate the vast majority** of American schoolchildren and **serve the public good**.

**Millionaires looking to make a profit:** In her new book *Slaying Goliath*, education writer **Diane Ravitch** focuses on a band of millionaires (in some cases billionaires) who have decided to make education "reform" a priority. The problem, Ravitch writes, is that these would-be reformers don't have backgrounds in education and naïvely insist that "market solutions" from the business community can be applied to a public service like education. Too often, Ravitch writes, their end goal is privatization and shifting education from the public sector to the for-profit one, where, conveniently, some of them plan to invest and make a lot of money.

The public can play a role in stopping these opponents of public schools. Polls show that most Americans support public education, and, when given an opportunity to vote on vouchers directly through ballot referenda, people always **vote these plans down**. But all too often, we get stuck with vouchers anyway because candidates who push the plans assume public office. Candidates for the local school board all the way up to the presidency must be questioned about their support (or non-support) for our public schools.

If Americans want public schools to be a priority, they'll have to make that abundantly clear – by word and deed. **One action you can take right now – urge your legislators to oppose private school vouchers.**



## AG Barr once again attacks secularism

ffrf.org

Attorney General **William Barr** has yet again blamed the lack of religiosity in America for all of the country's problems.

In remarks at the 2020 National Religious Broadcasters Convention on Feb. 26, Barr grossly misrepresented the American Founders' views on the importance of religion, while giving lip service to the separation between state and church. **He bizarrely claimed:**

"Experience teaches that, to be strong enough to control willful human beings, moral values must be based on authority independent of man's will. In other words, they must flow from a transcendent Supreme Being. Men are far likelier to obey rules that come from God than to abide by the abstract outcome of an ad hoc utilitarian calculus."

Barr made it clear he does not think that laws should be based on trying to make the world a better place. Instead, he thinks that laws should seek to "control" humans by convincing them that if they do not obey the rules, they are displeasing a "Supreme Being." There is a word for this approach to lawmaking: theocracy. In Barr's case, he is a proponent of the Christian Nationalism version of theocracy.

In his address to the religious broadcasters, Barr

castigated secular government as "totalitarian democracy," "based on the idea that man is naturally good." He defined "totalitarian democracy" as "almost always secular and materialistic."

The Freedom From Religion Foundation condemns Barr's distorted reading of secular government. America's secular government allows people of all religious beliefs, and none at all, to work together to make the country better for everyone, without fear that the majority religious sect will impose their rules on the rest of the populace. Trying to control citizens with rules based on religion is thoroughly un-American and unconstitutional. It's an embarrassing disgrace for the attorney general to endorse such an idea.

It is equally appalling that Barr implicitly condemns more than half a century of firm court precedent guaranteeing civil rights and liberties to both federal and state citizens (based on post-Civil War amendments to the U.S. Constitution). This includes voting rights, privacy rights such as abortion and contraception and LGBTQ equality, secular public education and other such basic liberties. Civil rights by definition should not depend on the state in which one happens to live — but that's what Barr espouses when he condemns secular, utilitarian federal laws.

The western world has tried what Barr is proposing. The centuries-long humanitarian catastrophe that resulted — aptly called the "Dark Ages" — is what made the Founders of this country realize that religion and government should never be mixed. We must insist on exactly what Barr is attacking: laws that are aimed at making the world a better place for everyone, justified not by some religion's promises of an eternal reward, but by the best available data and an appeal to universal moral principles. We must reject all calls for basing laws on religious doctrine. It's dismayingly and shameful that the U.S. attorney general, who is tasked with enforcing the law, is an enemy of true religious liberty.

## McConnell's anti-choice bills are harmful grandstanding

ffrf.org

The U.S. Senate voted Feb. 25 on two punishing bills intended to pander to anti-choice religious extremists.

The first, the insidiously branded "**Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act**," bans nearly all abortions after 20 weeks. The second, the equally dubious "**Born-Alive Survivors Protection Act**," requires doctors to use all means available to "save the life of a baby born after abortion."

These bills are categorically unnecessary. According to the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**, late-term abortions (those after 20 weeks) accounted for just over 1 percent of abortions in 2016. Medical experts say there is no evidence that fetuses feel pain at 20 weeks, and fetuses "surviving abortion" is an event that is exceedingly rare and typically occurs when a doctor must induce labor to terminate a nonviable pregnancy. Both bills are sure to face an almost-certain demise in the Democrat-controlled House of Representatives should they pass the Senate.

As much as anti-choice advocates would like you to believe otherwise, Senate Majority Leader **Mitch McConnell** hasn't scheduled these measures for a vote today to improve maternal health or pregnancy outcomes. Rather, this is a thinly veiled stunt to activate the Christian Nationalist base of his party at the expense of women's safety.

FFRF has long held that access to safe, legal abortion is a state/church issue. The only organized opposition to abortion and contraceptive access is

religiously motivated. Anti-choice activists seek to legislate their personal religious dogma and inflict it on other unwilling citizens, even to the extent of forcing women to continue unwanted pregnancies at great personal cost to their future, health and existing families.

These cheap political gimmicks succeed in pandering to a conservative religious base, while they propel inflammatory, inaccurate anti-choice rhetoric that is intended to push abortion access further out of reach, especially for the most vulnerable women.

Limitations on abortion are unpopular among voters. Polls consistently show that more than six in 10 Americans want abortion to remain legal in all or most cases.

The decision whether to have a child is a personal and intimate one that ought to be made without interference from politicians. Late-term abortions in particular often arise out of unforeseen necessity during particularly difficult pregnancy complications.

# Other Meetings of Interest in Metro Atlanta

**The Atlanta Science Tavern** has several meetings planned. Please check meetup page for more information. ([www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern](http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern))

**The SOS (Secular Organizations for Sobriety)** meets on Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m. in Roswell. For more information, send an email to [donnajgore@yahoo.com](mailto:donnajgore@yahoo.com).

**We Agnostics Atlanta** meets on Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Galano Club, 585 Dutch Valley Rd NE, Atlanta, GA 30324. Clubhouse phone number: (404) 881-9188. This is similar to Alcoholics Anonymous group.

**Marietta Skeptic/Humanist Meetup** has various get-togethers and discussion groups. Several upcoming events. ([www.meetup.com/Marietta-Atheists-Meetup](http://www.meetup.com/Marietta-Atheists-Meetup))

**The Peachtree City Humanists** participate in social and educational activities such as dinners, lunches, coffees, outdoor recreation, discussion groups, and book clubs with topics that include science, psychology, philosophy. ([www.meetup.com/Peachtree-City-Humanists-PTCH](http://www.meetup.com/Peachtree-City-Humanists-PTCH))

**The Southern Crescent Freethinkers** Sunday Seculars at Starbucks, Peachtree East Shopping Center Sun mornings 10-12 ([www.meetup.com/Southern-Crescent-Freethinkers](http://www.meetup.com/Southern-Crescent-Freethinkers))

There will be a **meetup for Decatur Atheists** Sun, Mar 8, 6 pm, Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur. ([www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists](http://www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists))

**GUST (Gwinnett: Under-standing Secular Truths)** will meet at 7-9 pm, Mon, Mar 9 at UUCG, 12 Bethesda Church Rd, Lawrenceville. The topic is **The Good Place**. Have you ever thought about what kind of afterlife you would make if you had the chance? The Good Place is a TV show about four people who find themselves in the afterlife together. The show explores their actions as they learn how the Good Place works and what they can do to make it better. ([www.meetup.com/brights-295](http://www.meetup.com/brights-295))

**Ethical Humanists of Atlanta:** Mixed group documentary night is Fri, Mar 13, 6:45-10pm at Unitarian Universalist Northwest Congregation, 1025 Mt. Vernon Hwy Sandy Springs. The film is either "Winnie" and is hosted in collaboration with various local groups. ([www.meetup.com/Ethical-Humanists-of-Atlanta](http://www.meetup.com/Ethical-Humanists-of-Atlanta))

**Recovery from Religion - Morrow Chapter** meets monthly at Barnes & Noble Booksellers Southlake, 1939 Mount Zion Road, Morrow, GA. Join the Meetup group for more information. There is no proselytizing of any kind allowed at these meetings. For more information and resources, please visit [www.recoveringfromreligion.org](http://www.recoveringfromreligion.org). ([www.meetup.com/Recovering-From-Religion-Morrow-Chapter](http://www.meetup.com/Recovering-From-Religion-Morrow-Chapter))

**Black Nonbelievers'** general meeting is Sun, Mar 15, 3pm, They are trying out a new venue: Community Movement Builders, 79 Welch St SW, Atlanta. **Kamau Franklin** will discuss the organization's mission. Please see Meetup page for more info. ([www.meetup.com/Black-Nonbelievers](http://www.meetup.com/Black-Nonbelievers))

**FFRF** will meet Sun, Mar 15, 4-6 at AFS. The subject had not been posted at press time, so check the Meetup page for more information. ([www.meetup.com/Freedom-From-Religion-Foundation-of-Georgia](http://www.meetup.com/Freedom-From-Religion-Foundation-of-Georgia))

**Sunday Assembly Atlanta's** upcoming assembly is on Sun, Mar 15, 5:30 pm at First Existentialist Congregation, 470 Candler Park Dr NE, Atlanta. The topic is **Possibilities**. The speaker is **Sara Miller**, who is an aeronautical engineer at

Georgia Tech specializing in optimizing engine propulsion systems for space travel. She will speak about women's contributions to space exploration. SAA is an extremely active community with a large number of upcoming events including rock chorus, secular support, mindfulness meditation, wonder club, urban wonder, book club, volunteering, queer beyond belief group, public speaking series, etc. Please check the Meetup page for other activities. ([www.meetup.com/Sunday-Assembly](http://www.meetup.com/Sunday-Assembly))

**Atlanta Astronomy Club** will meet on the third Friday at 7:30 pm each month at Fernbank Science Center, 156 Heaton Park Dr, Atlanta, GA 30307 unless otherwise noted. Check website for more info. ([www.atlantaastronomy.org](http://www.atlantaastronomy.org))

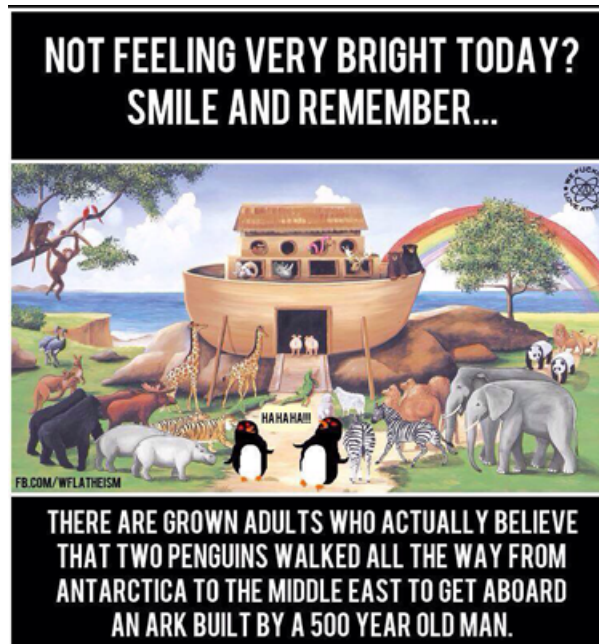
**Satanic Temple Atlanta** at press time has not listed their monthly meeting. They usually meet the fourth Sunday at 2 pm at The Highlander, 931 Monroe Dr NE, Atlanta. ([www.facebook.com/TSTATL/](http://www.facebook.com/TSTATL/))

**Atlanta Atheists Monthly Meetup** is Sun, Mar 22, 4 pm, Keegan's Irish Pub, 4687 S Atlanta St #224, Smyrna. ([www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists](http://www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists))

**Atlanta Skeptics** has "Drinking Sceptically" on the first Friday of each month at 7 pm, Taco Mac at the Prado 5600 Roswell Rd, Sandy Springs, though location is subject to change. ([www.meetup.com/AtlantaSkeptics](http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaSkeptics))

**Atlanta Atheists** has first Sunday meetups each month: the place varies. Check Meetup for info on the get-together. ([www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists](http://www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists))

**Fellowship of Reason** meets on the first Sunday of every month at 10:30 AM at AF Hall. Meetings for book discussion, philosophy, a classic film course, Ancient Greek language classes, and other events. ([www.fellowshipofreason.com](http://www.fellowshipofreason.com))



# Become a Member!

**(Or renew your membership with this form or online at [www.AtlantaFreethought.org](http://www.AtlantaFreethought.org)!)**

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 \$50 per year.

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**Life memberships:** Avoid the hassle of renewing every year. A life membership lasts a lifetime. **Paper newsletter:** We encourage members to receive the newsletter by email. This avoids the printing and mailing expenses. But if you really want the paper version of the newsletter, just let us know and we will send it to you at no additional charge. (You can also pick up a paper newsletter at any AFS meeting.)

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

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Person or entity displaying art: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Description of artwork (subject, color, dimensions, weight, frame, price, materials, other info — list on separate page if necessary): \_\_\_\_\_

Display dates: from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Owner if other than above: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Is artwork for sale? Yes / No \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Upon sale  
 owner agrees to pay AFS a 33.3% fee.

Terms: All artwork displays will be submitted to Atlanta Freethought Society art committee for approval ([afs@atlantafreethought.org](mailto:afs@atlantafreethought.org)). Installation & removal will be done by artist/owner overseen by AFS art committee. Damage to building will be repaired by artist/owner. The owner assumes all risk for artwork at all times. AFS will not be responsible for any damage or loss while artwork is in our possession.

Owner agrees to terms: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature/date \_\_\_\_\_

AFS Art Committee approval: \_\_\_\_\_

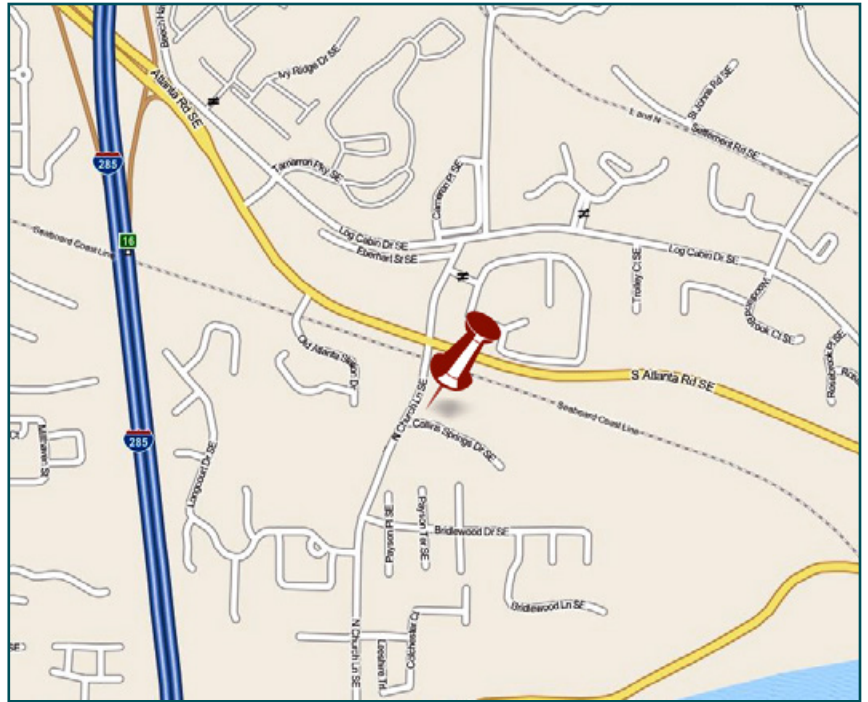
Signature/date \_\_\_\_\_

*Dare To Think  
For Yourself!*



**March 8th meeting  
1:00 at AF Hall  
4775 N. Church Lane SE  
Atlanta, GA 30339**

**Ben  
Burgis**



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