

FACT
P.O. Box
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San Antonio,
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FACT

is an association of atheists, freethinkers, agnostics, secular humanists, rationalists, skeptics, and other non-theists serving the purpose of preserving the separation of church and state and promoting Freethought through education.

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A Matter of FACT & The Voice

May 2009

History of Freethought

In modern parlance, freethinking is usually conflated with anti-religious thought. But in broader terms, it is simply an approach based on logic and reason and rejection of any belief which is based solely on tradition or dogma.

In that sense, freethinkers, like the poor, have been with us always; and like the poor, have generally not been welcomed at the table. During times and in places where religion has been a dominant force, backed up by the political power, it has downright unhealthy to challenge dogma and ask for evidence.

At the May meeting of FACT, Nick Lee will present a survey of freethought, from pre-Christian times to the present. If you think you are in a hostile environment now, wait till you hear what happened to Giordano Bruno!

General Meeting, Saturday, May 16th @ 1pm
Community Unitarian Universalist Church
4818 E. Beverly Mae

Help Wanted

Data Entry Clerk. Work from home!
Low (read: no) pay, but work at your leisure!

For more than twenty years, FACT has produced a television program, "Freethought Forum", broadcast weekly on Time Warner Cable Channel 20. These programs, initially hosted by our founder Catherine Fahringer and later by Hugh Henry, have provided discussions and presentations of interest to non-believers and exposing a larger audience to the logic of rationality.

Due to a change in Texas state law, we have lost the studio facilities that made new productions of this program relatively easy, and we have been unable to gather the technical resources necessary to produce new content.

However, we have an archive of almost 300 VHS tapes from those years of broadcast. They need to be catalogued and sorted out. (Later, we will convert the best of them to DVD for rebroadcast.) Please volunteer to help this project by entering some identifying data into an Excel spreadsheet. I can deliver to you as many tapes at a time as you can handle. Would like to spread the workload around to as many volunteers as possible, so it will not be as big a burden.

Call Nick @ 288-2766

Every Monday at 12:30 and 8:30 PM

Time Warner Digital Cable Channel 20

FREETHOUGHT FORUM

Hosted by Hugh Henry

Elected Positions:

President, Nick Lee
 Vice President, Jane Tuck
 Secretary, Jim Evans
 Treasurer, Cathy Howard
 Publicity, Jim Barrott

Appointed Positions:**Newsletter**

Publisher/Editor, Marc Janssens
 Webmaster, Jim Evans
 Discussion Group Host, OPEN
 Librarian, Jimmie Barnes

**Texas Hill Country
Freethinkers**

(No Officers)

For Information contact

Julie Fisher:

zoezappa@hughes.net

FACT MEMBERS:

FACT wants your participation in communicating through our newsletter. Please contribute letters, articles, book reviews, highlights and comments on church/state separation, quotes, drawings, cartoons, etc. Please send contributions to FACT.newsletter@FreethinkersACT.org.

All submissions are subject to editorial revisions at the discretion of the publisher.

American Economic Recovery

At the April FACT meeting, member Denny Law spoke on his proposal for “American Economic Recovery and Uplifting”. He said he first drafted this proposal in the early 1970s, after the oil embargo, but shelved it after the crisis was over. Recent global events, however, have made the plan more critical than ever.

At the heart of his proposal for economic recovery is the need to drastically revise our energy usage. Denny has developed a ten-year plan for alternative energy to replace imported oil. He says “Americans have become ‘Oilaholics’, and unless this changes, the U.S. is headed for economic collapse. There is no way to borrow or buy our way out. We must stop the torrent of money going overseas to buy oil.”

To achieve independence, Denny has set the following goals, to be met by 2019:

1. Eliminate the use of imported oil,
2. Reduce air pollution by 20%,
3. Increase auto production,
4. Reduce unemployment to 4% or less,
5. Eliminate military expenditure in the Middle East, and
6. Reform Social Security and Medicaid.

Denny further explained that we need to develop an ‘electrail’ system, i.e. electrical transmission grids so that all cities of over 50,000 population can utilize electric transportation methods. We should substitute rail travel for air travel, and interstate trucking should be made obsolete. He opposed nuclear power in view of the problem of storage for spent fuel rods.

Denny says his plan would create new industries. The auto makers would convert to building electric cars. Research money will go into development of super-efficient batteries to run this electrical economy. As a corollary, we will need a reformation of public school curriculum to boost the understanding of sciences.

For his plan to work, Denny says there must be strong governmental leadership, and citizens must be motivated to make the necessary changes and personal sacrifices, just as was done to mobilize for World War Two, after Pearl Harbor.

Jane Tuck

NDOP Protest

On Thursday, May 7th, several fundamentalist congregations will observe the National Day of Prayer (NDOP) on the steps of the City Hall in San Antonio. Although this event dates back 60 years to a Presidential proclamation of a general nature, in recent years it has become dominated by extreme Christian sects to flex their muscles. Mainstream churches and non-Christians do not participate. This event is usually accompanied by a formal proclamation by the Governor and the Mayor. Freethinkers and Atheists object to this event on two grounds:

- The Proclamations are an official endorsement of religion (and worse, specifically of the extreme right-wing of the Christian religion); and
- The event is held on public property, i.e., the steps of the City Hall, and often involve public officials (e.g., the Mayor) in their official capacity.

Both grounds are a violation of the separation of church and state. National organizations (Freedom From Religion Foundation and Americans United) have filed lawsuits against this practice, and local Freethinkers and Atheists often stage counter protests to the NDOP.

Several FACT members have indicated their intent to demonstrate in San Antonio on the day of NDOP. In the past this has included displaying protest signs to alert the media that this observance on public property is not acceptable. If you would like to join them on May 7th, please contact Frank Hernandez (infidel_one@yahoo.com) or Sally Chizek (schizek@satx.rr.com), and coordinate the meet-up.

Nick Lee

Was Darwin Wrong?

by Clem Wiechecki

This article is a report of the "Was Darwin Wrong?" debate between Evolution and Intelligent Design, which took place on April 28th at Gregory Gym, UT Austin. The event was advertised as "A Skeptics Forum and Scientific Scholar Debate." The Department of Biomedical Engineering of UT at Austin, Hill House Austin, the Atheist Longhorns, the Hill Country Institute for Contemporary Christianity and Reasons to Believe, Austin Network sponsored the program.

The "A" Team panel consisted of Dr. Michael Shermer and Dr. Sahotra Sarkar who backed Darwin and Evolution, and Dr. Austin Gleason who represented the Physics Department at UT Austin. The "C" Team panel consisted of Dr. Hugh Ross and Dr. Fazale Rana who represented Reasons to Believe, and Dr. Kenneth Wheeler who represented the Biomedical Engineering Department at UT Austin. Dr. Juan Sanchez was the moderator.

Nick and Vibeke Lee, Len Wheeler and myself; Clem Wiechecki, attended. We were down in the front row!

Considering this was my first time attending one of these events, I was interested in determining how something based on a lack of evidence (Intelligent Design), which in turn is based on a book of fiction (the bible), could be debated against anything with a plethora of evidence such as Evolution.

Both panels were loaded with education's highest achievements and experience. There were more doctorates, qualifications and years of experience than you could shake a stick at; Biomedical Engineering, Physics, History and Philosophy just to name a few. PhD in this instance really meant "Piled Higher and Deeper." The gymnasium was packed and I figured I was in for a treat!

The "C" Team was up first. Drs. Ross and Fazale bombarded the audience for an hour with power-ball screens of useless mathematical information based on verses from the bible in an attempt to justify their god's creation and predictions. Their presentation seemed to be based on the adage; "If you can't dazzle them with brilliance, then baffle them with bullshit!" Some of their main references were from the book of Job. The two Drs. knew that the book of Job is devoted almost entirely to poetry. Job, and the god Yahweh, fill the entire 42 chapters of the book with poetry. The good Drs. based most of their so-called factual presentation on a bunch of fictional poetic verses.

The comment from Dr. Ross that just about did it for me was: "God created man in order to eliminate evil." What does that have to do with intelligent design? Dr. Ross didn't mention Isaiah 45:7 in his presentation, which says that Yahweh is responsible for evil. That evil statement by Dr. Ross was one of the stupidest things I've ever heard anyone with his educational qualifications say in defense of Intelligent Design. What's worse is that he believes every word of it!

When it was Dr. Shermer's turn, he proceeded to refute every biblical reference provided by the "C" Team and pointed out that predictions from the bible were really post-dictions in that the "predictions" were written after the event happened which makes it a lot easier.

One of the main concepts Dr. Shermer covered was "Patternicity." It revolves around the fact that; "Whenever the cost of believing a false pattern is real is less than the cost of not believing a real pattern, natural selection will favor patternicity. For example, believing that the rustle in the grass is a dangerous predator when it is only the wind doesn't cost much, but believing that a dangerous predator is the wind may cost an animal its life." (www.michaelshermer.com) In other words, "natural selection will favor strategies that make many incorrect causal associations in order to establish those that are essential for survival and reproduction." Gods and their creations, predictions and miracles are easier to believe in than not, even if they are wrong.

When the panels were finished with their presentations, the floor was opened up to questions from the audience.

Did you ever attend a wrestling match? You know it's fake, but before it's over you are jumping up and down and are involved in the moment and screaming epithets against the 'bad guy!' I felt the same way! I was fired up! I had to get up and say something!

My question was addressed to Dr. Ross and was in two parts: "We both know that there are two creations in Genesis 1 and 2. Genesis 1 is 300 years younger than Genesis 2, so which one did you use as the basis for your creation example and what do you get out of all of this?" (Dr. Shermer had previously mentioned that the first biblical creation in Genesis 1 was copied from the Babylonians [Enuma Elish].) Dr. Ross tap danced his way around the two creations I mentioned and advised me that he "used all of the creations." (I think Dr. Ross's statement included the creation of 15 billion BCE ago which is not in the bible?) Dr. Ross didn't want to admit that the Jewish creation of Genesis 2 took place in 3760 BCE according to the Jewish calendar and could not play any part in his calculations. I was under the impression that a specific creation in space and time would probably work better if it was the earliest in biblical chronological order. Apparently not?

Continued on the next page ...

Was Darwin Wrong? (Continued)

Dr. Ross answered the second part of my question by raising his hand with his latest book in it. (Which will not be mentioned here.) I then realized that gullible people were at the heart of his presentation and him raising his arm with the book spoke loud and clear. Apparently, intellectual dishonesty, lies, and hypocrisy in the search for wealth, propaganda and converts has no limits. But, when Dr. Ross raised his arm with that book, it became crystal that this was the only honest statement of the night made by the "C" Team.

Later on, there was a "meet and greet," and I wanted to check Dr. Ross's shoes for dancing taps. Sure enough, his shoes had taps on the soles and heels, which indicated to me that he had previous experience tap-dancing his way around the difficult questions.

This being my first rodeo, I was surprised at the depths these people would sink to in order to sell books, flummox gullible people and propagate their agenda in public. As I recall, there is no mention of democracy anywhere in the bible or in any of the doctrines and dogma of Christianity. Nor was it mentioned at this event. Christianity or any other religion must not be allowed to control our democracy and our Constitution. Democracy must always be in the forefront. The lies and hypocrisy used to achieve wealth and political power by the creationists are real challenges in the future for Atheism.

Once again the superior skill and cunning of Atheism triumphs over the lowly ignorance and superstition of intelligent design! Darwin wasn't wrong then, and isn't wrong now!

Protect Texas Public Education from Extremists!

via Eric Lane (President of the San Antonio Chapter of AU)

In the past few months, Texas has been at the center of a nationwide controversy regarding the teaching of creationism and other forms of "junk science" in public schools. Throughout the grueling battles that resulted, one man led the charge against teaching scientifically accurate information in Texas public schools: State Board of Education (SBOE) Chairman Don McLeroy. McLeroy, a dentist from Bryan, Texas, repeatedly rejected the Board's own appointed experts for the science standards, and said during the Board's final consideration of the standards, "I disagree with these experts. Somebody's gotta stand up to experts."

McLeroy was appointed as chair by Governor Perry in 2007 after the legislative session had ended, and thus never faced a confirmation hearing before the Texas Senate - until now. His nomination is currently before the Nominations Committee and could be considered by the full Senate very soon. The media is reporting that his confirmation is anything but assured. From defying the state legislature, to asserting unreasonable control over the curriculum standards and textbook-approval process, to advocating for creationist amendments to the state biology standards, McLeroy's SBOE has been a lightning rod of controversy throughout his tenure and people are starting to notice. Let's make sure the Senate does, in fact, do the right thing and not confirm McLeroy for another turn as chair.

In an effort to further rectify this situation, the Senate is now considering legislation to reframe the way that curriculum standards and textbooks are reviewed and adopted by the state. SB 2275 would transfer authority to approve curriculum standards and textbooks to the state's education commissioner, who must rely on the input of a team of experienced educators from across the state. By passing this bill, the Texas legislature could implement a much-needed reform to the educational system - a reform that would leave important educational decisions up to educators who understand the needs of students and the subject matters intimately - not to a group of scheming elected officials who lack in expertise, who promote their own ideologies over students' best interests, and who continually disregard the restrictions placed on them by the legislature.

Americans United believes that it would be irresponsible to confirm a leader whose policies have and will continue to lead the state down a dangerous path. We also believe that SB 2275 is a much-needed solution to rein in the many abuses of power of the SBOE. It is important that you contact your Senator immediately to ask for a NO vote on the McLeroy confirmation and to support SB 2275. Act now - the Senate could take action on these issues soon. Please take action now!

Tell your Senator you support strong educational leadership in Texas.

From letters published in the Texas A&M student newspaper The Battalion ("The Batt") on February 25, 2009

Re. Follow-up to a letter sent in response to the "Viva la sexual revolution" article published on February 13

In Tuesday's Mail Call, The Batt printed a letter in which the writer asserted, with great assuredness, that Texas A&M is a "Christ-following campus." I would like to remind your readers that there are many non-Christian students who find the constant references to Christ often heard on campus more than somewhat off-putting. Aggieland is, whether or not most students wish to admit it, a secular campus and part of its greatness is based on the very fact that it is so. That secular environment guarantees freedom for all points of view (as any great university must). The writer further implies he feels The Batt is somehow attacking his cherished Christian beliefs by discussing contemporary issues such as homosexuality in our culture. A campus newspaper, where education and understanding are paramount, is obliged to do just what you are doing, i.e., writing newsworthy articles which challenge the reader to continually assess her or his beliefs and the reasons why they hold such beliefs. Keep up the good work!

Oak DeBerg

The letter that Oak is referring to was printed in the February 24 issue of The Batt:

I'm proud to say that one of the reasons I chose to attend Texas A&M University is because it is a largely conservative and Christ-following campus. The people here are very friendly, have mainly Christian-based morals and tend to have Republican ideals. I understand there are some people who are extreme and need to be a bit more open to things in society (i.e. our president), but reading from someone trying to impose these secular and, in my opinion, immoral ideals nearly infuriates me. Telling people they should indulge in premarital sex, hetero- or homo-sexual, should not be something advocated by an Aggie-run newspaper. I am sad to open up The Batt almost every day and find someone new trying to force us to believe that homosexuality is acceptable, that we should have as much sex as we want as long as we're educated, and frankly, they pretty much tell us to drop our Christian beliefs. As a follower of Christ and a man with morals, I take a stand right now and say this should not be acceptable and we should receive informative articles and political discussions rather than one-sided babbling about subjects we don't agree with.

Andres Aguilar

If you are outraged by the Texas SBOE's shenanigans, consider this. A controversial Alberta bill will enshrine into law the rights of parents to pull their children out of classes discussing the topics of evolution and homosexuality. Several Albertan readers of Richard Dawkins' web site asked that freethinkers frequenting Dawkins' site voice their concern with the minister of education of Alberta. Here is one of the more interesting letters that was sent to the minister.

Dear Education Minister Dave Hancock,

We, at the Council for Dissemination and Misappropriation, applaud your efforts to eliminate mandatory education. The Council has long campaigned against such force-feeding of outlandish concepts such as evolution and Newtonian physics. In early 2002 we fought (albeit unsuccessfully) for the exclusion of the theory of electromagnetism in public high schools. We, at the Council, do not believe that electrons are "naturally" attracted to their complementary protons, and as such are against this worshipping of "Naturalism", and its close cousin, "The Scientific Process". We, at the Council, frequently step outside our 14th floor office window and DO NOT succumb to gravity. It is, after all, only a theory, one that the Council does not wish to follow, and nor should such preaching be compulsory in schools. We commend your decision to amend Bill 44 to accommodate all world views, so as we can choose which parts we wish our children to not understand or decide for themselves. The Council for Dissemination and Misappropriation hereby announce that Dave Hancock, along with our newest inductee, Gary Goodyear, will be honorary members in the CDM's prestigious Teapot of Irrational Thought. The CDM will assume you will support our latest campaign for the exclusion of the theory of thermodynamics in the upcoming months.

Thank you for your unbridled determination,

The Council for Dissemination and Misappropriation

HEY, LETTER WRITERS!

We're looking for well-crafted letters having to do with the separation of church and state, atheism, or any other relevant topic. Members are encouraged to forward published letters, or ones which were rejected by the mainstream media, for publication with the date that they were submitted.

Religious Doubts in the ICU?

by Nick Lee

A recent article in the New York Times highlights a couple anomalies in the belief systems of religious people. According to a study published in the Journal of American Medical Association, terminally ill cancer patients who drew comfort from religion were far more likely to seek aggressive, life-prolonging care in the week before they died than were less religious patients. They were also far more likely to want doctors to do everything possible to keep them alive. For instance, patients who were devout were three times as likely as less religious ones to be put on a mechanical ventilator to maintain breathing during the last week of life, and they were less likely to do any advance care planning, like signing a “do-not-resuscitate” order, preparing a living will or creating a health care proxy. The most religious patients were also more likely than less religious ones to be resuscitated in the last week of life and to be treated in an intensive-care unit as they died.

While these may be personal decisions, there are societal costs. Medicare spends about one-third of its budget on people who are in the last year of life, and much of that on patients at the very end of life, largely due to heroic measures to prolong their lives.

The puzzle is, why would people who frequently say that their lives are in God’s hands try to thwart God’s will by taking aggressive measures to stay alive. Further, why would people who devoutly pray for deliverance from “this vale of tears”, fight so vigorously to stay alive, rather than moving on to that angelic “Eden in the Sky?” Could it be that they are having second thoughts about the doctrinaire beliefs they have subscribed to all their lives? Perhaps they are no longer sure of receiving their “heavenly rewards” which they have devoted their lives earning?

Ah, but whoever said that religious belief was logical?

Churchgoers More Likely to Back Torture

The more often Americans go to church, the more likely they are to support the torture of suspected terrorists, according to a new analysis. More than half of people who attend services at least once a week —54 percent— said the use of torture against suspected terrorists is “often” or “sometimes” justified. Only 42 percent of people who “seldom or never” go to services agreed, according the analysis released Wednesday by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.

White evangelical Protestants were the religious group most likely to say torture is often or sometimes justified —more than 6 in 10 supported it. People unaffiliated with any religious organization were least likely to back it. Only 4 in 10 of them did.

The analysis is based on a Pew Research Center survey of 742 American adults conducted April 14-21. It did not include analysis of groups other than white evangelicals, white non-Hispanic Catholics, white mainline Protestants, and the religiously unaffiliated, because the sample size was too small.

A recent article on “Not All Nonbelievers Call Themselves Atheists” published at the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life reports that only about a quarter of nonbelievers calls themselves atheists, 15% agnostics, 35% nothing in particular and 2% don't know. The rest, about a quarter of people who say they don't believe in a god or universal spirit, call themselves Christians or other religious term! (see <http://pewforum.org/>)



FACT T-Shirts for Sale (Grey w/Black Logo)

Available Sizes: Small, Medium, Large, XLarge, 2X and 3X

Also Available: One Size Fits All Vests (Red)

Price for All T-Shirts and Vests: \$15.00

“Society Without God” by Phil Zuckerman

A Book Review by Nick Lee

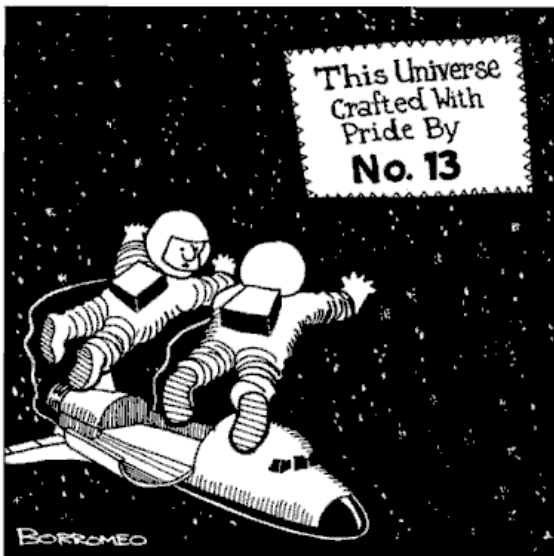
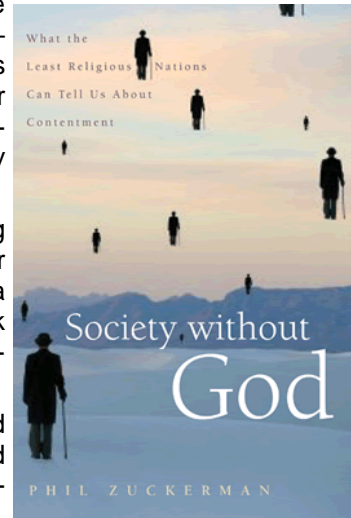
As an American non-believer of Scandinavian heritage, I take great pride in the fact that the countries which are the least religious have the most civil societies – lower crime rates, higher ‘happiness index’, and progressive social policies. This ‘inconvenient truth’ runs counter to the prevailing wisdom in the U.S. and other countries where religious dogma is the prevailing world-view. According to religious fundamentalists (Christian or Muslim), a society without God is a society without morals or social controls and leads to wide-spread anarchy and chaos.

Phil Zuckerman, a sociologist at Pitzer College in California, began wondering about this disconnect between ‘revealed wisdom’ and reality, and he spent a year in Denmark and Sweden and conducted in-depth interviews of 150 people from a cross-section of society. He has published the results of his study in the new book “Society Without God: What the Least Religious Nations Can Tell Us About Contentment”.

Professor Zuckerman found that, despite the presence of a state-subsidized church, Scandinavians are devoutly irreligious and remain generally unconcerned about the existence or non-existence of God or a hereafter. They live in the moment and enjoy life as it comes.

Sam Harris has said of this book: "Most Americans are convinced that faith in God is the foundation of civil society. “Society Without God” reveals this to be nothing more than a well-subscribed, and strangely American, delusion. Even atheists living in the United States will be astonished to discover how unencumbered by religion most Danes and Swedes currently are. This glimpse of an alternate, secular reality is at once humbling and profoundly inspiring — and it comes not a moment too soon. Zuckerman’s research is truly indispensable."

The book is published by NYU Press and available from amazon.com for \$25.20.



“THIS WILL PROBABLY UPSET SOME OF THE PREVAILING THEORIES.”

FACT SOCIAL EVENT

Mark your calendars and cancel all your appointments! Plan to attend a pot-luck in the afternoon of Saturday, May 23rd. Brisket and chicken will be provided. Choose your contribution from veggies, desserts, or beverages.

For reservations, and directions to the secret location, call Nick Lee @ 767-0769

FACT ON LINE

In addition to this monthly newsletter, don't forget to check out the FACT web site, at least once a week.

www.FreethinkersACT.org

Web Master Jim Evans has been hard at work keeping the pages there up to date, and new archived articles and newsletters can be found there. You will also find links to other groups and national organizations to guide you on your journey toward Freethought!

READ A GOOD BOOK LATELY? TELL US ABOUT IT.

Send your book reviews, recommendations, critiques, or top 10 list to:

FACT.newsletter@FreethinkersACT.org

Or P.O. Box 160881, San Antonio, TX 78280

Mayoral Candidates on Teen Pregnancy

by Marc Janssens

May 9 is mayoral election day in San Antonio. On April 3 Texas Public Radio (TPR) hosted a live debate with four of the nine major candidates vying for the office. TPR's Terry Gildea moderated a lively conversation between former Councilman Julián Castro, District 8 Councilwoman Diane Cibrian, political consultant Trish DeBerry-Mejia and District 2 Councilwoman Sheila McNeil. Joining Gildea with questions for the candidates were Tracy Idell Hamilton, reporter for the San Antonio Express-News and Elaine Wolff, editor of the San Antonio Current. They posed questions on a variety of issues of concern to the citizens of San Antonio. Here is what the candidates had to say in response to an e-mail question on the teen pregnancy in our city.

Terry Gildea- Let's get to one of those e-mail questions. This one is from Michael Carter. He says "Teenage pregnancy continues to be a major problem for San Antonio. Do the candidates support providing comprehensive sex education and family planning to the youth of the city." Diane, let's begin with you on this one.

Diane Cibrian- Well, thank you. Teenage pregnancy is a critical problem for the city of San Antonio. When I went to reach out to dropouts, here is what I found. Four of our groups had girls that were home pregnant. They weren't in school. I think we need to make sure that we [understand] the teenage pregnancy issue in our community as it impacts the high school dropout rates. But here is what I also believe. We need to continue to move forward the programs we have right now at City Hall. We have a very good program in PROJECT WORTH in the community that provides good [services], however, it is not a city-wide program. We need to make sure we provide the education that [is needed] to our children in relation to teenage pregnancy. [It] should be comprehensive in nature, a great educational program for the future in terms of providing protection, and it should be for girls and boys. It is a serious issue facing San Antonio and I support the program we have right now and moving forward education for our community.

Terry Gildea- Thanks Diane. Julián?

Julián Castro- Yes I do support that measure in the legislature. I believe that comprehensive family planning and age-appropriate sex education makes sense and will help us reduce teen pregnancies and reduce the spread of disease at the local level. What we [are going to do is to] invest in PROJECT WORTH and expand it. But we also, I believe, have to get creative and we have to put a real effort behind it. One of the things I'd like to do is to take young women who have gone through this experience, who are willing to share their experience and to mentor young girls about some of the challenges they faced and hopefully prevent young girls from getting pregnant before that happens. I also believe that at the city we need to make this issue a real priority. I don't feel it has been a priority over the last couple of years and we have to let folks know if they've gotten pregnant, if that's their situation in life, that we're not [going to] give up on them. I often feel that we take a position that almost assumes that they are not going to reach their potential. Many of these young girls; they are only fifteen, sixteen years old; we cannot do that. We're [going to] reach out to them to get them back in school, either with a diploma or GED, get them on the right track to go to college or job training programs so that they can provide for their families.

Terry Gildea- Thank Julian. Sheila?

Sheila McNeil- I am a strong advocate for education in any way that's [going to] help build and strengthen families in our community. But I think there is a fine line between how far we can go with education. Sex education in school is a very sensitive and volatile topic. I don't really think that it's government's responsibility to teach our children sex education. I think we have to be careful with how far we go. The City of San

Continued on the next page...

Teen Pregnancy (Continued)

Antonio has the FAMILY WORTH program that's a very good program. They're involved in working with teens. But I think it is a community responsibility, it's the church, it's the school, it's the family, it's the non-profits in our community coming together to help address the issue; talking to our teens, helping them to build strong self-esteem, and strengthening our families. We [have to] look at services that provide opportunities, strengthen families, to try and educate our students in school about sex education. It's more of a community-family oriented responsibility.

Terry Gildea- Trish?

Trish DeBerre-Mejia- Teen pregnancy here is a critical issue. Some twenty years ago when I was a senior at Trinity University, my senior thesis was related to the teen pregnancy rate here in Bexar County and I am here to tell you that not much has changed over the past twenty years. I think twenty years ago we led the rates for girls fourteen and under and we're number two, so we obviously have not come very far. We need more education programs. We need to engage the healthcare professionals we have in this community, education officials, church officials so that we are really critically addressing what is at core of this issue. And in writing that paper what I remember most is that the reason why most of these girls wind up being pregnant is because they don't have the support network at home, they don't feel loved and cared for. Many times when you ask the question why did you sleep with someone at such a young age and the answer is, well I just wanted someone to love me. Obviously the problem is systemic and we do need to address it in the community as a whole and it needs to be a priority and a focus because it impacts education here and the ability to keep more girls in school. So we need more education programs, very definitely, and we need palatable sex education programs, yes, in the school.

Terry Gildea- Thank you Trish.

I will leave it to you to figure out exactly what the candidates are planning to do.

In 2001 UNICEF published Issue No. 3 of the UNICEF Innocenti Report Card, "A League Table on Teenage Births in Rich Nations". Here are some key findings of this study:

- The five countries with the lowest teenage birth rates are Korea, Japan, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Sweden – all with teen birth rates of fewer than 7 per 1,000.
- The United States teenage birth rate of 52.1 is the highest in the developed world – and about four times the European Union average.
- In 10 out of 12 developed nations with available data, more than two thirds of young people have sexual intercourse while still in their teens.
- Rising levels of education, more career choice for women, more effective contraception, and changing preferences, have increased the average age at first birth in all developed countries. In 19 of the 28 nations under review, births to teenagers have more than halved in 30 years.
- Giving birth while still a teenager is strongly associated with disadvantage in later life. On average across 13 countries of the European Union, women who gave birth as teenagers are twice as likely to be living in poverty.
- Reducing teenage births offers an opportunity to reduce the likelihood of poverty, and of its perpetuation from one generation to the next.

The fact that Bexar county leads the nation makes San Antonio a major contributor to the sobering statistic that the U.S. teenage birth rate is by far the highest in the developed world. If the next Mayor is serious about addressing this problem, should she/he not be more aggressive and lobby for the adoption of an approach that has been proven to dramatically reduce teenage pregnancies in countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden? Of course that would imply a deviation from the failed abstinence-only policy and openly proposing such a drastic move is likely to be political suicide.

Source: Excerpts from debate transcribed from MP3 file downloaded from www.tpr.org

Are You a Critical Thinker?

by Nick Lee

In a recent article posted on-line, Linda Elder, an educational psychologist, set forth the need to improve our critical thinking skills if we ever hope to address the many pressing concerns that trouble our planet. According to Elder, "Everyone thinks; but we don't always think well. In fact, much of our thinking, left to itself, is sloppy, distorted, partial, uninformed, or prejudiced. Yet the quality of our life and all of the decisions we make depend precisely on the quality of our thought. At present, the act of thinking is virtually ignored."

She defines 'critical thinking as "a self-guided, self-disciplined thinking that aims to take the reasoning we all do naturally to a higher level. It is the art of analyzing and evaluating with the goal of improving thought. When making a decision, it is the difference between weighing information to come to a logical conclusion and making snap judgments without understanding the information." (Ms. Elder is the president of the Foundation for Critical Thinking.)

As an educator, she bemoans the lack of training in critical thinking skills in public schools. "With few exceptions, we are not teaching (students) how to fully and deeply comprehend what they read or write with clarity, precision, and purpose. We are not teaching students to integrate ideas within and among subjects. We are not teaching them to entertain (in good faith) viewpoints with which they disagree.... We must teach students that the only way to learn a subject or discipline is to learn to think within the logic of it, to focus on its purposes, questions, information, to think within its concepts and assumptions."

In passing this article along, long-time FACT member Hugh Henry included the following comments:

"OK so lets take a look at this. We must teach students that the only way to learn a subject or discipline is to learn to think within the logic of it, to focus on its purposes, questions, information, to think within its concepts and assumptions.

"Do atheists do this with Christianity? We can question whether we are considering the views of others to understand them, or to dismiss them. To dismiss them —that's what I see. And that's one of the reasons I left FACT. I didn't see critical thinking, I saw cheer leading. That's also why I don't like Dawkins or Hitchens or the Skeptical Inquirer. I don't see critical thinking. So many atheists cease critical thinking once they have concluded that there is no God. Perhaps the effort wears them out, I don't know.

"If you actually worked within the framework of Christianity, accepting their position and tactfully and carefully applying critical thinking and not with the goal of showing them why they should dismiss it, you might actually get some real Christians instead of the poor substitute we have now. You might get someone who understood the Bible and their religion instead of the demagogue-misled, verse-based, Lego Christianity we have now. You might get some people who believed in God and with whom we could share this planet. And, with such people, who knows? You might be able to not consider them stupid."

In rejecting belief based on dogma, freethinkers like to think of themselves as critical thinkers. But, as Hugh points out, there is a danger of atheism itself becoming dogmatic. It is easy to point out the foibles and excesses of religious extremism, and fun to pick apart the credulity of the 'sheeple.' But this will not make any converts to our cause, nor gain us a foothold in the halls of power. Although the number of non-believers and skeptics is growing, we are still a minority, and are limited on our ability to influence policy. Instead of religion-bashing, we need to be able to inter-relate with a wider group, including moderate mainstream Christians, who tend to be progressive thinkers and less dogmatic. As Hugh suggests, the application of critical thinking may be the vehicle to get us there.

Richard Dawkins during an interview for the Belgian news show Terzake on the occasion of being awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Antwerp on April 29, 2009:

Religion is a matter of childhood indoctrination. The remedy for it is to not teach children what to think, to teach children how to think, to teach children to question, to teach children that religion exists, to teach children the existence of lots of religions, encourage them to make up their own mind. Don't ever tell a child "you belong to this religion", that is child abuse.

Source: <http://www.deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws/mediatheek/1.516942>

May Events

May 5th – THCF First Tuesday Lunch

1:00 pm: Meet other Freethinkers at the Texas Hill Country Freethinkers' First Tuesday Lunch (held monthly)

Host: Julie Fisher

Discussion Topic: "Fresh Pure Water--Will There Be Enough?"

Naples Italian Restaurant
215 W. Bandera Rd, Boerne
NEW LOCATION!

May 13th – THCF Lunch in the Northwest

1:00 pm - Meet other Freethinkers at the Texas Hill Country Freethinkers' Lunch (held monthly)

Host: Julie Fisher

Discussion Topic: "Homes and Houses, Neighborhoods-- How will they be changing in the future?"

Sawasdee Thai Cuisine
6407 Blanco Road, Castle Hills (inside 410)

May 16th – The Lunch Bunch

11:30 am: Join us for good food before the Meeting

Sarika's Thai Restaurant
4319 Medical Dr (Near Fredericksburg Rd)

May 16th – FACT General Meeting

1:00 pm: General meetings occur on the 3rd Saturday of every month (unless otherwise announced)

Speaker: Nick Lee

Title of Presentation: "History of Freethought"

Community Unitarian Universalist Church
4818 Beverly Mae East (off Babcock)

May 30th – FACT Discussion Brunch

9:00 am - Join us for a brunch and discussion the last Saturday of every month.

Host: TBD

Topic: TBD

DENNY'S Back Room
4510 Fredericksburg Rd
(South of Crossroads Mall)

June Events

June 2nd—THCF First Tuesday Lunch

June 10th—THCF Lunch in the Northwest

June 20th—General Meeting

June 27th—FACT Discussion Brunch

May 2009						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

June 2009						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

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ANNUAL DUES (Jan-Dec)

A.	Individual Paying Member	\$30
B.	Family (2 or more members)	\$42
C.	Active Duty Military/Full-time Student (non-voting)	\$18

- Membership dues are due in January.
- Dues are non-refundable.
- New members who join after the 1st month of the year will pay a prorated amount for the remainder of the year.
- Members who paid dues the previous year, but who are paying late, will be liable for the entire year.
- Donations in addition to dues are always welcome.