

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

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

August 2009

Church and State and the Legislative Battle for the Heart of Texas

Postponed from the June General Meeting of FACT, (due to illness), Eric Lane, President of the local chapter of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, will present an update on the actions taken by the Texas legislature that affect church/state issues. Primary emphasis will be on the State Board of Education (SBOE) and the coming battle for the Social Science curriculum in our public schools.

Even with a newly-appointed chair, the SBOE retains the same conservative make-up and has appointed three ideological non-experts to balance out the three professional educators on an advisory committee which will review textbooks for use in Texas schools over the next ten years.

You recall this is the same technique the SBOE used in the discussion earlier this year regarding the inclusion of Creationism in science classes. That allowed them to argue that the two sides were equally balanced, and therefore, to be fair, both should be taught! The truth is that fact and fiction are two different things and can never be 'fair and balanced'!

We will explore and discuss this and other critically important Church/State issues and their possible impact on the future of Texas students and citizens. Bring your insights and ideas as we dissect the outcome on Church/State issues of the latest Texas legislative session.

General Meeting, Saturday, August 15th @ 1pm
Community Unitarian Universalist Church
4818 E. Beverly Mae

Brad Pitt Doesn't Believe

From an interview:

BILD: Do you believe in God?

Brad Pitt (smiling): "No, no, no!"

BILD: Is your soul spiritual?

Brad Pitt: "No, no, no! I'm probably 20 percent atheist and 80 percent agnostic. I don't think anyone really knows. You'll either find out or not when you get there, until then there's no point thinking about it."

Every Monday at 12:30 and 8:30 PM
Time Warner Digital Cable Channel 20
Grande Cable Channel 19
AT&T U-verse Channel 99

FREETHOUGHT FORUM
Hosted by Hugh Henry

Here's another Fine Pot Luck You've Gotten Us Into!

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.

FACT Members really know how to throw a fine shin-dig! About 20 folks gathered at a Harvey Kendall's house to talk, eat, see and do.

TALK: The conversation ranged from catching up on personal news to parsing the news of the day, from a freethinker's point of view. There were enough divergent opinions to earn our reputation as a contentious (but civil!) group.

EAT: There was a groaning board of dishes, salads and desserts, enough to leave plenty of left-overs. It is always amazing that, even without a sign-up sheet, individual choices of what to bring result in a good variety.

SEE: Part of the afternoon entertainment was to watch an episode of the Richard Dawkins BBC series "The God Delusion". As you can imagine, that was followed by some lively discussion.

DO: As part of our program of community outreach, pot luck attendees brought a variety of stuffed animals and other toys for donation to a program called "Dare To Love", under the Child Protective Services agency. It was agreed that we will conduct similar collections and donations for other worthwhile charitable groups at future events.

So, if you weren't there, you missed a good party, but we will have even a better one next time, when YOU show up!

Nick Lee



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
 To order or for further information, contact Sally Chizek
Sally.Chizek@FreethinkersACT.org or (210) 656-3796

New Blasphemy Law in Ireland

by John Allen Paulos

When a modern Western country whose economy is based on science and technology adopts an absurdly medieval law, one would think that this would be a news story of at least moderate size. Oddly though, almost no attention has been paid in the United States to the passing last month of a bill establishing a crime of blasphemy in Ireland.

Approved by the Irish parliament, it states: "A person who publishes or utters blasphemous matter shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable upon conviction on indictment to a fine not exceeding 25,000 euro." Furthermore, "a person publishes or utters blasphemous matter if (a) it is grossly abusive or insulting in relation to matters held sacred by any religion, thereby causing outrage among a substantial number of the adherents of that religion, and (b) he/she intends, by the publication or utterance of the matter concerned, to cause such outrage."

Even if I weren't the author of a book entitled "Irreligion: A Mathematician Explains Why the Arguments for God Just Don't Add Up," I would find this bill abysmally wrong-headed.

Even Parodies and Bad Jokes Liable to Fine

Although it provides for exceptions to prosecution if a "reasonable person" finds literary, scientific or other significant value in a work, it would allow for atheists to be prosecuted for denying the existence of God, a denial that clearly causes outrage in many.

Those writing parodies and bad jokes would also be liable to the 25,000 euro fine. Even an innocuous riff on God rescinding the Bible in the middle of the night the way Amazon called back the Orwell book from its Kindle reader could be prosecuted. And if the reaction of some irate readers of my book is any indication, so could an imagined instant message exchange between me and God that appears in the book.

But non-believers would not be the only, or even the primary, ones affected by this blasphemy bill. People, irreligious or not, presumably could be prosecuted for drawing cartoons of Mohammad. Christians could be prosecuted for expressing scorn or even disbelief in the Christian teachings of other denominations.

Likewise, Jews and others could be prosecuted for denying the divinity or even the existence of Jesus. Or, if atheism is considered a religion (which it is not), atheists also could claim to be outraged by the expressions of their religious countrymen, each of whom could then be required to cough up 25,000 euro.

Law Allows for Confiscation of Blasphemous Materials

The law also allows for the confiscation of blasphemous materials—novels, non-fiction books, short videos, full-length movies, etc. Interestingly, the blasphemy law is not the only medieval aspect of Irish law. The preamble to the Irish Constitution maintains that the state's authority derives from the most holy trinity, stipulates that no one can become president or a judge without taking a religious oath, and declares that all citizens have obligations to Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Similar but less overt sentiments and statutes exist in this country. Witness the arguments put forth by many that the U.S. is a Christian country. More analogous is a little-known example involving the state of Arkansas, which has not yet roused itself to rescind article 19 of its constitution: "No person who denies the being of a God shall hold any office in the civil departments of this State, nor be competent to testify as a witness in any court." A few other states have similar laws.

Same Impulse in Politics

The impulse to enact benighted laws of this sort gives rise to more than these Taliban-like religious laws. After all, it is not only all-mighty deities that need special legal protection. Generals and politicians do too, so the same fearful defensiveness also leads to draconian edicts to protect political leaders and parties from ridicule.

Pakistan, to cite a recent example, has just announced a prohibition of jokes about President Asif Zardari. Anyone sending e-mails, text messages or blog postings containing such jokes is subject to arrest and a 14-year prison sentence. I'm sure even more prohibitive restrictions exist in those hotbeds of free-wheeling political humor, Burma and North Korea.

It's instructive to contrast these authoritarian laws against blasphemy, jokes, political humor and free speech generally with the way people deal with dissent from established scientific laws. No laws prohibit people from denying that Earth is spherical, that evolution explains the development and diversity of life, or that the moon landing ever took place. The same holds for mathematics. No one claiming that pi is a rational number, that there are finitely many prime numbers, or that Godel's theorem is false has ever been hauled into court.

[Continued on the next page ...](#)

New Blasphemy Law in Ireland (Continued)

Of course, I by no means intend to equate the irreligious with scientific quacks. Just the opposite, in fact. It's simply that in most domains, those who insist on denying conventionally accepted beliefs are for the most part simply ignored. Statements that can stand on their own two feet (evidence and logic) don't need crutches (blasphemy laws) to support them.

As mentioned, Ireland is a modern pluralistic state with an educated population, a world-class literary tradition and a healthy economy that has transformed itself in recent years in large part through science and high-tech jobs. To continue this transformation, the religious and irreligious alike should reject this silly blasphemy law.

The religious should probably be most opposed to it, however. Placing punitive sanctions on the robust, or even the rude, expression of irreligious thought does not seem to say much for religion.

John Allen Paulos, a professor of mathematics at Temple University, is the author of the best-sellers "Innumeracy" and "A Mathematician Reads the Newspaper," as well as (just out in paperback) "Irreligion: A Mathematician Explains Why the Arguments for God Just Don't Add Up." His "Who's Counting?" column on ABCNews.com appears the first weekend of every month.

Source: <http://abcnews.go.com/>

God's Words Do Not Justify Cruelty to Women!

by Nick Lee

Those who feel that the words "liberal" and "Christian" do not belong in the same sentence should read the editorial by Jimmie Carter with the above title, which was published in the Guardian newspaper in England last month.

The former President points out that he has been a member of the Southern Baptist Convention for sixty years, including as Deacon and Sunday School teacher, but has decided to break with that organization in view of their declaration that 'women must be "subservient" to their husbands and prohibited from serving as deacons, pastors or chaplains in the military service.' He said that this position is based on the Baptist leaders' misreading of very selective passages, and "is in conflict with my belief—confirmed in the holy scriptures—that we are all equal in the eyes of God". In support of his own position, he quotes Galatians 3:28:

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

Mr. Carter decries the abuses to women fostered by a misinterpretation of scripture, saying, "At their most repugnant, the belief that women must be subjugated to the wishes of men excuses slavery, violence, forced prostitution, genital mutilation and national laws that omit rape as a crime." "and continues to deny them fair access to education, health, employment and influence within their own communities."

He notes that, in the early Christian church, women served as priests, apostles, and prophets. But in the fourth century Christian leaders, predominately male, put a distorted spin on the scriptures to perpetuate their ascendant positions within the religious hierarchy. "The truth is that male religious leaders have had - and still have—an option to interpret holy teachings either to exalt or subjugate women. They have, for their own selfish ends, overwhelmingly chosen the latter. "

Mr. Carter declares: "The justification of discrimination against women and girls on grounds of religion or tradition, as if it were prescribed by a Higher Authority, is unacceptable", and calls on leaders of all religions to change the harmful teachings with justify discrimination against women.

He is not the only religious leader calling for equality of gender. Women play an important part in the governance and observances of most major religions. The exceptions are Islam and fundamentalist Christian sects.

Non-believers are overwhelmingly in favor of equal rights for women, and it is comforting to know that even prominent Christian leaders are challenging the narrow views espoused by some of their numbers.

Letter to the editor published in the Boerne Star newspaper on July 17, 2009

State Board of Education (SBOE) member, Ken Mercer, in his reply to Carol Carpenter's exposition of the board's last session concerning science standards for Texas schools ("New world class science standards for Texas students," Friday, July 3, 2009), stated that "...the only point of contention was whether students should have the right to ask questions and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of any theory, including the theory of evolution." This is disingenuous. The issue has never been whether or not students can ask questions but, rather, whether students—in science class—should be fed non-scientific, creationist ideas concerning the development of life on earth. There is nothing in Texas law, as it now stands, that prohibits any student from asking any question in school. What the SBOE was attempting to do was insert pseudo-scientific jargon (i.e. "strength and weaknesses") into the Texas science standards so that biology teachers would be forced to discuss intelligent design (creationism) in their classes. This would be akin to demanding equal time for the flat earth theory in geography classes, theories of alchemy in chemistry classes, and the geocentric theory of the universe in astronomy classes. Nothing prohibits students from asking questions about those theories but to demand that our science teachers include such theories in their curricula is absurd. Certainly, if the schools want to teach these theories in a philosophy or history classes— or in the currently approved high school Bible classes—that is perfectly permissible. As far as I can tell no person or group has suggested otherwise.

As a person who teaches philosophy courses at one of our state's flagship universities, I begin all my courses with discussion of how to think critically and to make cogent arguments based on evidence and rationality. We discuss, among other things, fallacies of reasoning and the use of evidence. Mr. Mercer, in his article, has called upon many of the fallacies to support his position. First, he uses scare quotes (i.e., he referred to the opposition as "experts") to indict the qualified scientists and educators who testified for quality science standards in our schools. But nowhere in his article did he explain where even a single expert gave faulty testimony. He then claims that these experts were arguing, "High school students are unqualified to ask questions." I followed the hearings quite closely and it is my recollection that this was not what the experts were claiming. Rather, their point was that students were not qualified to make scientific judgments based upon the faulty science standards inherent in the various creationist theories that many of the SBOE members preferred. Next, Mr. Mercer resorts to ad hominem attacks (another fallacy of reasoning) by referring to the experts as "Darwinists, atheists, ACLU members and at least one bona fide signer of the infamous Humanist Manifesto III, in an attempt to provide indoctrination over critical-thinking skills." By implication, if one is a Darwinist, atheist or member of the ACLU (whatever that means) they are unqualified to be an expert in any field of science. That is illogical. As for the "infamous Humanist Manifesto III" that Mr. Mercer so decries, I simply ask that anyone who is concerned with that manifesto simply go on line and read it. I just read that document and it looks to me as if a large part is concerned with empirical observation and testing, i.e., modern science. Further, Mr. Mercer keeps asserting, "various experts on evolution still opposed giving students the freedom to discuss and honestly question all scientific theories..." I challenge him to find in the record of any SBOE meeting wherein any expert took such a position. He misreads the fact that the real experts do not accept the "strength and weaknesses" subterfuge of the Board as synonymous with a non-acceptance of questioning attitudes. This is an apple and oranges sleight of hand. (The straw man fallacy.) After all, the whole basis of science is to questions one's most cherished beliefs. Finally, Mr. Mercer seems to be claiming that if there are problems with the theory of evolution then his theory of creationism must, by default, be correct. (This logical fallacy is known as the false dilemma fallacy.) When all is said and done, however correct Mr. Mercer might be, he would not receive a passing grade in any course, which relied on critical thinking skills.

Mr. Mercer goes on to claim Don McLeroy was denied chairmanship of the SBOE because he is a Christian. I doubt that this is so. Some of the world's most scientifically literate Christians wholeheartedly support evolutionary theory. Dr. Francis Collins who headed the Human Genome Project is an ardent supporter of modern evolutionary theory and he is a fervent evangelical Christian as well. Many of the experts that so bothered Mr. Mercer at the SBOE deliberations are also faithful Christians, e.g., Professor Ken Miller of Brown University is a practicing Catholic. Most mainstream religions of all stripes have no issue with evolutionary theory. What torpedoed Dr. McLeroy's bid for chairmanship was his firm belief that our school children should be taught—in science class—that evolutionary theory is not science and that creationism is an equally valid, scientific theory. (To say nothing of Dr. McLeroy's belief that there is scientific evidence supporting the view the earth is only a few thousand years old and, presumably, that should also be taught as a valid scientific theory.)

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.

Continued from the previous page ...

The bottom line in this debate is that the SBOE is not making its decisions based upon the advice of educators and scientists but rather on the very narrow views of a select few of its members. Texas has the capability of becoming a state with first class educational institutions at all levels. This will never happen, however, if we continue to pander to the views of an elected board of officials who have personal agendas of their own which take priority over solid educational and scientific theory. All Texans should keep in mind that the primary purpose of our schools is to offer the children of our state the finest educational opportunities possible. It is important we all keep this in mind when we vote for our SBOE representative in 2010.

Oak DeBerg

Oak is a Ph.D. candidate in philosophy at Texas A&M University and also a lecturer on the faculty there. He also has degrees in chemistry (B.S. from the University of California at Berkeley) and in aerospace engineering (M.S. from the Air Force Institute of Technology). He spent much of his adult career in the scientific and engineering fields and is now involved in education. This subject is very important to him but more importantly should be of major concern to every Texan who desires a quality education for his or her children.

Profiles of the Godless

Luke Galen, associate professor of psychology at Grand Valley State University in Michigan, has released the findings of his study and published an article summarizing the results in the most recent issue of Free Inquiry magazine, the flagship publication of CFI's sister organization, the Council for Secular Humanism.

In his article, Galen notes that other researchers have collected mountains of data about the attitudes and characteristics of believers, but there's far less information about nonbelievers. Even worse, what little data does exist has often been collected accidentally.

Galen's study is the first to direct a full range of sociological survey questions specifically at our population of "nones" (as nonbelievers have usually been identified by pollsters). Here's a sampling of what he found:

Self Identification:	Spiritual (n = 117)	Agnostic (N = 608)	Atheist (n = 3296)	Humanist (n = 1386)
Variable				
% Male	48	72	75	73
Age	53	49	47	51
Strength of Group Identification	Medium	Low	High	High
Belief Certainty in No God	Not Sure	Somewhat	Mostly	Mostly
Number Non-Family Confidants	High	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Life Satisfaction	Lower	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Agreeableness	Higher	Lower	Lower	Moderate
Emotional Stability	Lower	Lower	Higher	Higher

Major distinguishing characteristics as a function of primary self-label.

To learn more about the study, you can download a PDF of the article or read the on-line version on the Free Inquiry website.

Source: <http://www.secularhumanism.org/>

“Atheism Advanced” by David Eller

A Book Review by Clem Wiechecki

David Eller is a cultural anthropologist by trade and part-time philosopher, linguist and semanticist. He has written a college textbook; *Introducing Anthropology Of Religion* and the AAP book; *Natural Atheism*.

Atheists tend to underestimate the everyday significance of religion and they tend to pooh-pooh the effect it has on their lives. Most of us have the habit of speaking and thinking in Christian terms and don't even know it. We have a tendency to “let Christianity set the agenda, identify the questions, and provide the language of the debate.” For example, in the chapter on “Speaking Christian; Atheism and the Language of Religion, when people talk about god, they usually refer to the Christian god, but as we all know there are a multitude of gods on our planet (And a multitude of religions.) God is a metaphor, but what is it a metaphor of? How many different concepts of god are there? Because we know god doesn't exist and isn't a “thing,” what is the point of talking about god in the first place? Do we really know what we are talking about when we discuss or debate the existence of god? What is the point of a religious language that is based on concepts and doesn't refer to anything concrete? The point is that we speak and think in Christian terms and its time to think and speak Atheist.

Christianity is nothing but words and concepts. There is no evidence for their god. No concrete facts to build a foundation on and no actual meaning to their religious discourse.

Eller finishes up by recommending that we remove the word belief from our vocabularies and replace it with know. We know that the burden of proof is on the believer, so if a believer can demonstrate the truth of the belief, then the belief becomes a fact. I've taken his advice to heart and from now on, I don't do belief; I do knowledge!

Eller wrote a highly readable book which can be used as a vehicle on a journey to developing an advanced outlook on Atheism. I recommend this book whole-heartedly for anyone who wants to increase their grasp of Atheism. .

“Atheism Advanced: Further Thoughts of a Freethinker”, by David Eller. American Atheist Press, 2007, ISBN: 978-1-57884-002-1, 468 p., Paperback \$22.00.



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

How to Spot a Hidden Religious Agenda

by Amanda Geffer

The following article was originally published in the February 28, 2009 issue of *New Scientist* magazine, and made available on its web site. A few days later, it was removed from the web site, after the editor received a legal complaint about the content. It has subsequently been re-instated.

As a book reviews editor at *New Scientist*, I often come across so-called science books which after a few pages reveal themselves to be harbouring ulterior motives. I have learned to recognise clues that the author is pushing a religious agenda. As creationists in the US continue to lose court battles over attempts to have intelligent design taught as science in federally funded schools, their strategy has been forced to... well, evolve. That means ensuring that references to pseudoscientific concepts like ID are more heavily veiled. So I thought I'd share a few tips for spotting what may be religion in science's clothing.

Red flag number one: the term "scientific materialism". "Materialism" is most often used in contrast to something else—something non-material, or supernatural. Proponents of ID frequently lament the scientific claim that humans are the product of purely material forces. At the same time, they never define how non-material forces might work. I have yet to find a definition that characterises non-materialism by what it is, rather than by what it is not.

The invocation of Cartesian dualism - where the brain and mind are viewed as two distinct entities, one material and the other immaterial—is also a red flag. And if an author describes the mind, or any biological system for that matter, as "irreducibly complex", let the alarm bells ring. Misguided interpretations of quantum physics are a classic hallmark of pseudoscience, usually of the New Age variety, but some religious groups are now appealing to aspects of quantum weirdness to account for free will. Beware: this is nonsense.

When you come across the terms "Darwinism" or "Darwinists", take heed. True scientists rarely use these terms, and instead opt for "evolution" and "biologists", respectively. When evolution is described as a "blind, random, undirected process", be warned. While genetic mutations may be random, natural selection is not. When cells are described as "astonishingly complex molecular machines", it is generally by breathless supporters of ID who take the metaphor literally and assume that such a "machine" requires an "engineer". If an author wishes for "academic freedom", it is usually ID code for "the acceptance of creationism". If an author wishes for 'academic freedom', it is usually code for 'the acceptance of creationism'

Some general sentiments are also red flags. Authors with religious motives make shameless appeals to common sense, from the staid - "There is nothing we can be more certain of than the reality of our sense of self" (James Le Fanu in *Why Us?*) - to the silly - "Yer granny was an ape!" (creationist blogger Denyse O'Leary). If common sense were a reliable guide, we wouldn't need science in the first place.

Religiously motivated authors also have a bad habit of linking the cultural implications of a theory to the truth-value of that theory. The ID crowd, for instance, loves to draw a line from Darwin to the Holocaust, as they did in the "documentary" film *Expelled: No intelligence allowed*. Even if such an absurd link were justified, it would have zero relevance to the question of whether or not the theory of evolution is correct. Similarly, when Le Fanu writes that Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* "articulated the desire of many scientists for an exclusively materialist explanation of natural history that would liberate it from the sticky fingers of the theological inference that the beauty and wonder of the natural world was direct evidence for 'A Designer'", his statement has no bearing on the scientific merits of evolution.

It is crucial to the public's intellectual health to know when science really is science. Those with a religious agenda will continue to disguise their true views in an effort to win supporters, so read between the lines!

"Of course the people don't want war. But after all, it's the leaders of the country who determine the policy, and it's always a simple matter to drag the people along whether it's a democracy, a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism, and exposing the country to greater danger."

Hermann Göring at the Nuremberg Trial

Something Exciting This Way Comes!!!

by Nick Lee

This Fall, FACT will present two major events that promise to be the highlight of your social season. So, mark your calendars and set aside the dates.

TEXAS FREETHOUGHT CONVENTION

On November 14th, from noon to 8:00 p.m. FACT will be the host for this State-wide gathering of atheists, agnostics, secular humanists, and freethinkers, at the Al-Fazar Temple on 1604 (near Hwy 281). This will be a new and improved edition of the event held last year in Austin.

The agenda is still being firmed up, but as of this writing, we have confirmed speakers from American Atheists, Atheist Alliance, and FFRF, as well as author Victor Stenger. We will have a raffle of autographed books by Stenger and Daniel Dennett.

This is a family-friendly event, and we will have a special area for children's activities.

NOTE: Since FACT is the host for the TFC this year, we need some members to step forward as volunteers to help with the set-up and clean-up of the facility, as well as to cover the registration and sales booths. Please show your support for this landmark gathering by contacting Nick Lee (Fact.President@FreethinkersACT.org, or 210-0288-2766) as soon as possible, to offer your services.

FACT WINTER SOLSTICE

Once again, the FACT Executive Board have planned an excellent celebration of 'the day the sun stands still'. This years' event will be held on December 12th, from 12:00 to 3:00 p.m. at the Pompeii Italian Grill, on Nacogdoches Road.

Our special guest speaker this year will be Kathy Miller, the President/Executive Director of the Texas Freedom Network.

Space will be limited, so when the invitations go out, be sure to RSVP quickly!

More information on both of these exciting events will be made available in the coming months, so keep tuned to this station!

Father Guilty in Prayer Death Case

by Robert Imrie

A central Wisconsin man accused of killing his 11-year-old daughter by praying instead of seeking medical care was found guilty of second-degree reckless homicide. Dale Neumann, 47, was convicted in the March 23, 2008, death of his daughter, Madeline, from undiagnosed diabetes. Prosecutors contended he should have rushed the girl to a hospital because she couldn't walk, talk, eat or drink. Instead, Madeline died on the floor of the family's rural Weston home as people surrounded her and prayed. Someone called 911 when she stopped breathing.

Sitting straight in his chair, Neumann stared at the jury as the verdict in a nearly empty courtroom was read. He declined comment as he left the courthouse. Defense attorney Jay Kronenwetter said the verdict would be appealed. He declined further comment. Prosecutors also declined comment, citing a gag order. Leilani Neumann, 41, was convicted on the same charge in the spring. Marathon County Circuit Judge Vincent Howard set October 6 for sentencing for both parents, who face up to 25 years in prison. Their case is believed to be the first in Wisconsin involving faith healing in which someone died and another person was charged with homicide.

Neumann, who once studied to be a Pentecostal minister, testified Thursday that he believed God would heal his daughter and he never expected her to die. God promises in the Bible to heal, he said. "If I go to the doctor, I am putting the doctor before God," Neumann testified. "I am not believing what he said he would do."

Doctors testified that Madeline would have had a good chance of survival if she had received medical care, including insulin and fluids, before she stopped breathing.

Source: <http://news.yahoo.com/>

Engineers, Terrorism, and Creationism

by Austin Cline

Have you noticed that there seems to be a curiously high number of engineers in the ranks of creationists—that in fact a great many of the "experts" and "scientists" cited by creationists are engineers? Recent research has also found an unusually high number of engineers among members of Islamic extremist groups. These two facts are not coincidental, but is there something about engineers which makes them more likely to join groups dedicated to political and religious extremism, which are anti-modernity and anti-science, or which are hostile to democracy and liberty?

Diego Gambetta writes in *New Scientist* (June 13, 2009):

The largest single group were engineers, with 78 out of 178, followed by 34 taking Islamic studies, 14 studying medicine, 12 economics and business studies, and 7 natural sciences. The overrepresentation of engineers applies to all 13 militant groups in the sample and to all 17 nationalities, with the exception of Saudi Arabia.

Our finding holds up quite well in another sample of 259 Islamic extremists who are citizens or residents of 14 western, mostly European, countries, and who have recently come to the attention of the authorities for carrying out or plotting a terrorist attack in the west. Although this sample contains far fewer people with higher education than the older members of the first group, nearly 6 out of 10 of those with higher education are engineers.

*We also collected data on non-Muslim extremists. We found that engineers are almost completely absent from violent leftwing groups, while they are present among violent right-wing groups in different countries. Out of seven right-wing leaders in the US whose degrees we were able to establish, four were engineers: for example, Richard Butler, the founder of the neo-Nazi group *Aryan Nations*, was an aeronautical engineer, and Wilhelm Schmitt, leader of the right-wing, extreme anti-government, prolocalism group known as the *Sheriff's Posse Comitatus*, was an engineer with *Lockheed Martin*. Among the total membership of the Islamic groups, however, the overrepresentation is still much higher.*

So a clear pattern exists not only across different Islamic extremist groups, but also across cultures—the disparity might not be as strong with American right-wing extremists, but it's still there. The obvious question raised by all this is: why? What is it about engineers or engineering that would lead, even indirectly, to such consistent and disturbing patterns?

According to polling data, engineering professors in the US are seven times as likely to be right-wing and religious as other academics, and similar biases apply to students. In 16 other countries we investigated, engineers seem to be no more right-wing or religious than the rest of the population, but the number of engineers combining both traits is unusually high. A lot of piecemeal evidence suggests that characteristics such as greater intolerance of ambiguity, a belief that society can be made to work like clockwork, and dislike of democratic politics which involves compromise, are more common among engineers.

Obviously not all engineers become extremists or even creationists, but I have seen a strong tendency at least towards conservatism and libertarianism among engineers — or perhaps I should say that I've seen lots of engineers among conservatives and libertarians. I wonder if a certain type of person is attracted to engineering professions or if engineering education and training helps produce a certain type of person.

I find it interesting that engineering is only associated with right-wing extremism and not left-wing extremism as well. There's a big difference between extremists of all sorts being associated with engineering and just having right-wing extremists being associated with engineering. Is there any particular sort of training, education, or career that can be correlated with left-wing extremism?

Source: <http://atheism.about.com/>

August Events

August 4th – THCF First Tuesday Lunch

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

Host: Julie Fisher

No Set Discussion Topic

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

August 12th – 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: "Recent Discoveries and Inventions in the Sciences (Medicine, Physics, Biology, Archaeology--what interests you?)"

Taste of China Super Buffet
3711 Colony Dr
(Off Wurzbach near I-10)

August 15th – The Lunch Bunch

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

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

August 15th – FACT General Meeting

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

Speaker: Eric Lane

Title of Presentation: "Church and State and the Legislative Battle for the Heart of Texas"

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

August 29th – FACT Discussion Brunch

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

Topic: Freewheeling Discussion

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

September Events

September 1st—THCF First Tuesday Lunch

September 9th—THCF Lunch in the Northwest

September 19th—General Meeting

September 26th—FACT Discussion Brunch

August 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					

September 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			

FACT
P.O. Box 160881
San Antonio, TX 78280
(210) 767-0769

www.FreethinkersACT.org

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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.