

The Humanist Society of the Suncoast

A Socratic society dedicated to the proposition that the fully examined life is well worth living.

Member organization of the [Humanists of Florida](#), the [AHA](#), [COR](#), and [CSH](#). Find us at www.suncoasthumanist.com

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Manufactured Landscapes

How man has changed the face of the earth

by **Luke Melton**, for the Tampa Bay Post Carbon Council

With the departure of America's once formidable industrial infrastructure to less developed parts of our planet, it is not so immediately obvious to many of us how drastically humanity has altered the natural landscape of our planet. The concentration of population in the great urban areas, with the retreat from many exurbs, has resulted in the abandonment of more than a few towns and villages throughout many parts of the country. Reforestation and the revival of wild meadowland in parts of the Midwest has altered the character of the country and healed a variety of environmental sins.

Meanwhile, the developing world becomes increasingly industrialized, replacing forests and jungles with scenes of an alien world with strange forms and colors, as the natural and biological is replaced by barren mineral pits, spoil mountains, and relentless waste. Can balance be restored as the aspirations of billions are met?

Luke is an Environmental engineer, photographer, communications specialist, world traveler, and Founding member of the Tampa Bay Post Carbon Council, now a special adjunct of the society.

Please support the Humanist Society.
Renew your membership—thanks!

Don't Forget...



Tampa Bay Harvest Please...

bring as many boxed and canned food items as you can to this meeting.

With the important help of **Glenn Paul** and **Tampa Bay Harvest**, we can do our part to help relieve significant human suffering in our area.

This year's goal: 600 pounds. **It's the Humanist thing to do!**

Coordinator, Glenn Paul says that Tampa Bay Harvest food deliveries in the past year - statistics -

TB Harvest delivered 2,765,517 pounds of food to 220 agencies who feed the hungry in Pinellas and Hillsborough counties last year. That's 5,531,000 meals to feed the hungry by TBH's calculations.

**Please join us
for this
free and open
discussion.**

**On Saturday,
Jan. 8th
at 2 PM:
Clearwater East
Library
2251 Drew St.
Clearwater**

Following our meeting, many of us will dine and argue together at the

**Farmer Boy
Restaurant**
at 2129 Drew St. just 2 blocks west of Library.

Volume 20 No. 1

January, 2011

Join us in our effort to ignite critical thinking, and embrace reason, & compassion in life.

~ Join or Renew ~

*The Humanist Society
of the Suncoast.*

☞ Trial - 3 month - free news

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☞ Reg. Couple - \$30.

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☞ Life Couple - \$250.

☞ Limited income - \$10.

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(Privacy respected)

Send to: Glenn Paul, Treasurer
Suncoast Humanist Society
2507 First St. #E
Indian Rocks Beach
33785-3010



Help Pakistan, Haiti, Chile, etc.
through secular charity.

**Now, Find the Humanist
Society on [Facebook!](#)
Be a Friend!
Thanks to Bob Byrch!**



Humanists work to build a world in which happiness is the enduring criterion of social policy.

What do Humanists Want?

1. To extend a human centered approach to the critical problems of life and society.
2. To encourage attitudes of kindness, compassion, tolerance and a loving generosity in human relationships, and in our treatment of all life. These attitudes help us to see ourselves in the lives of others and encourage appreciation for the remarkable diversity of human culture and experience.
3. To develop and popularize the skills of creative and critical thinking that empower people to challenge prejudice, superstition and irrationality in every area of life. Such empowerment enables the individual to reach the highest levels of achievement.
4. To exalt those artistic and imaginative expressions of life which have been the source of the greatest pleasure and enlightenment, and which reflect compelling human truths. Through music, literature, art, dance, and other expressions, we embrace the essence of the human spirit.
5. To explore the grounds of ethics and morality within the unfolding history of our evolving culture. Such knowledge will enable us to become effective protagonists for the happiness of the individual person. JP

Our monthly social dinner,
The Moveable Feast for January will be at:

On January 16, 2011, we will hold our January Social at

Thai Bay Restaurant.

Many fine (many mild) flavors of Thailand can be found, often at quite low prices - \$8-12. The usual conviviality and friendly faces can be expected, yours included.

The restaurant is located at 1300 East Bay Drive, Largo. Please reserve your place at the table with **Carolyn Frase** by email frasec@aol.com or phone 727-533-2279.

Laugh Lines Puns

For Those With a Higher IQ*

Those who jump off a bridge in Paris are in Seine.

A man's home is his castle, in a manor of speaking.

Dijon vu - the same mustard as before.

Practice safe eating - always use condiments.

Shotgun wedding - A case of wife or death.

A man needs a mistress just to break the monogamy.

A hangover is the wrath of grapes.

Dancing cheek-to-cheek is really a form of floor play.

Does the name Pavlov ring a bell?

Condoms should be used on every conceivable occasion.

Reading while sunbathing makes you well red.

When two egotists meet, it's an I for an I.

A bicycle can't stand on its own because it is two tired.

What's the definition of a will? (It's a dead give away.)

Thanks to *Connie Purdum*

*...Ahem

HUMANIST SOCIETY OF THE SUNCOAST

A chapter of the American Humanist Assoc.
the Association of Secular Humanist Societies

Board of Directors

Meets Sept., December, April

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~*~*~*~*~

Jim Butler Publisher.

Jim Peterson, Editor

Have an Idea, opinion or essay you want to share?

E-Mail us at:

jim@suncoasthumanist.com

Challenges in our future.

As a result of the recent November Elections, the Humanist community in Florida, and its many allies, face a situation of unprecedented deterioration in many aspects of everyday life. Education, environment, business regulation, finance, and politics are all in play in a great contest between the radical right and its reactionary agenda, and an enlightened vision of how the greatest good might be served in the interest of the greatest number within the context of a rapidly growing understanding of the limits of traditional methods of creating everything needed to satisfy the essentials of a good life.

The challenge for everyone is to our imagination, rationality, and the will to engage in public dialog to persuade our fellow citizens to explore new paths. It won't be easy, but it is necessary.

Jim Peterson

The American Humanist Association responded today to news from NASA that a form of life has been discovered that can substitute arsenic for phosphorus, changing previously understood paradigms about the nature of biochemistry. The discovery is seen by many as potentially “redefining life,” broadening the scope of conditions capable of sustaining life on Earth.

Researchers at Mono Lake, California, have discovered the first known organism on Earth able to live and reproduce using arsenic, as opposed to phosphorus. Phosphorus, a chemical element within DNA and RNA, was considered an essential component to all living cells. This discovery will open new doors in a multitude of scientific fields. The AHA pointed to the discovery as something that gives rise to philosophical and theological questioning, adding that this is likely to lead to greater skepticism of established, revelation-based religion.

“The polite thing to say is that discoveries such as this don't really impeach the credibility of established religion, but in truth of course they really do,” said David Niose, President of the American Humanist Association. While acknowledging that there is debate even among scientists as to the exact significance of the new discoveries, he added: “The fact that life can spring forth in this way from nature, taken in context with what else we've learned in recent centuries about space and time, surely makes it less plausible that the human animal is the specially favored creation of an all-powerful, all-knowing divinity.”

Humanism is a philosophy that approaches life from a natural standpoint, deriving truth not from ancient texts or claimed revelation but from ordinary observation, rational thinking, logic, and empiricism. While appreciating the emotional, artistic and the creative aspects of life, humanists reject supernatural explanations, often putting them at odds with conservative religion.

“It's unlikely that this discovery will change the minds of those who insist on a literal interpretation of the Bible,” Niose said. “To them, the world is about 6,000 years old and evolution is a hoax, and no amount of scientific evidence will change that. For the rest of us, however, this discovery is indeed profound, and it adds to the mountains of evidence that already point to the humanistic lifescape as being our best hope.”

“This break-through not only offers the promise of a deeper understanding of Earth,” said American Humanist Association Executive Director Roy Speckhardt, “but it also poses a question to those doubtful of the world's scientific origins: as science moves forward, shedding light on what religion masks in darkness, how can ignorance remain without sacrificing discovery, innovation, and most of all, a better world?”

Our Humanist Society is actively looking for interesting speakers with novel and well thought out ideas on just about any subject of interest to a general audience - even if not from a distinctly Humanist perspective.

Let me know if you would like to recommend a person, idea, or organization.

Call Jim at (813) 531-8138 or

E-mail me at:

jim@suncoasthumanist.com

Have an opinion, idea, or essay that needs to get vented? This newsletter is your space.

For editorial consideration for the next issue, contact Jim Peterson at:

jim@suncoasthumanist.com

Share your favorite restaurant.



Carolyn Frase

has graciously taken over as chair of the social committee. She welcomes your comments and suggestions for future

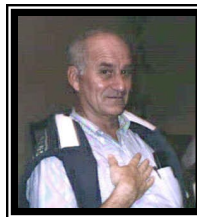
venues for our s mid-month dinner.

Frasec@aol.com

Many thanks to

Glenn Paul

for all of his work.



Read Humanist Periodicals:

The Humanist, Free Inquiry, Free Mind, Humanist Perspectives, Skeptical Inquirer, Secular Humanist Bulletin, The Florida Humanist Journal, Skeptic, Essays in Humanism, and many others.

Humanist Quotes

A key to a wonderful life is exploring the wonders of life.

Without the emotional drive of the clergy, there would be little or no terrorism.

Even a turtle can't go any where until he sticks out his neck.



Frank Prahl

Read
Steve Brown's thoughts
on [page 5](#)



HFA E-NEWS

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An Electronic News Update from The Humanists of Florida Association

From Jack Levine, Founder 4Generations Institute

Here's a 20-item emotional gift guide which I hope will be meaningful for you in this season of celebration. Please share it with family, friends and colleagues:

- To yourself....respect, confidence and faith.
- To a friend....a heartfelt and caring spirit.
- To a family member....dedication, communication and understanding.
- To our natural world....protection and preservation.
- To a good cause....generosity and ardent advocacy.
- To a traveler....an open door of hospitality.
- To our military and first responders....honor and appreciation.
- To a customer or client....excellent service.
- To the ill and hurting....concern and healing comfort.
- To the hungry and homeless....compassion and emergency services.
- To the abused, neglected and abandoned....hope and security.
- To someone with a special challenge....recognition and acceptance.
- To the addicted and troubled....a positive path to recovery.
- To an infant and toddler....attachment, attention and safety.
- To a child and teen....patience, guidance and a good example.
- To a parent in need....a helping hand.
- To an elder, reverence....gratitude and dignified care.
- To everyone you see, friends and strangers alike....a smile and positive energy.
- To people of every age....unconditional love.
- To all the peoples of the world....justice and peace.

Please visit
www.FloridaHumanist.org
to support HFA with your
membership & donations



**Humanists of Florida
Association**
Reason and Compassion in Action

Happy NewYear from the International Freethought Film Festival

2011 will be an exciting year for us. Not only is it our first season, but *IFFF is the first major independent film festival with an exclusive focus on freethought concepts*. Hosted by the Freethought Film Festival Foundation; the event promotes reason, critical thinking and freedom of inquiry through the medium of film.

www.freethoughtfilmfest.org

International Freethought Film Festival

When: May 13th -15th, 2011

Where: Tampa Theatre, 711 N. Franklin St.

Tampa, FL 33602

-- -- Auld Lang Syne

Well, so long 2010. It hasn't been much of a year. Obama continued to disappoint. More of the American people endorsed fiction over fact in their voting, maybe reflecting another year of diminishing intellectual resources. I'll use this column to go over some of my favorite areas of concern

Brazil's "Red Bishop" said, "When I give food to the poor they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food they call me a communist." (Dom Helder Camara 1909-1999, Archbishop of Olinda and Recife, banished by the government from public life 1970-1983).

Every time Americans boast about their charitable giving, or personally I'm asked to give, I have mixed feelings, including, not the least, anger and resentment. I ask myself why is such a thing necessary.

Shouldn't society, corporately, provide to those in need at least the basic necessities (say food, shelter, clothing and healthcare). Better still, it could offer jobs! Some societal responsibility may also apply to the niceties of life, like access to information. For example the charity of the very adequately profitable cable systems provides us C-Span 1-2-3. Shouldn't the government use the people's tax monies to provide this public good (and "C-Spans" 4-5-6-ad infinitum)? So I resent C-Span at the same time I'm grateful for it.

The way most Americans get their information, or, just as likely, misinformation, is deplorable. Gene Lyons, the syndicated Arkansas columnist, should have written this week's piece for Halloween, it's that scary. He cites Orwell's "Looking Back at the Spanish War," in which, Orwell says, "I saw newspaper reports which did not bear any relation to the facts...I saw great battles reported where there had been no fighting, and complete silence where hundreds of men had been killed...I saw newspapers in London retailing these lies and eager intellectuals building emotional superstructures over events that had never happened."

In Little Rock he discovers that "a front-page report of a highly publicized...murder trial bore no relationship to the actual courtroom testimony or crime scene photos introduced into evidence...Rather, the article reflected the crackpot theories of a publicity-mad sheriff who used the case as a [political] springboard...ending up in the U.S. Congress." He, especially as an Arkansan, takes note of "the great Whitewater hoax, during which the allegedly liberal Washington/New York press corps pummeled a Democratic president for eight years based on transparently false, trumped-up charges."

"Most disturbing to me," he says, "was realizing that the 'mainstream media' had acquired property rights in the bogus narrative. Correcting the record was seen as vandalism...Big-time political journalism operates according to celebrity rules. Fake a byline in Des Moines and you're finished. Help start a war by trumpeting cherry-picked and downright fabricated 'intelligence.' as The New York Times, Washington Post and the same TV networks that promoted Whitewater subsequently did, and win a guest shot on 'Meet the Press.'" Finally, following some acid comments about Fox News that put it in a class by itself, he cites a recent University of Maryland study "documenting Americans' lamentable ignorance of public events," concluding, "A deluded citizenry can't effectively govern itself...People, we're in deep trouble."

President/Five-Star General Eisenhower's now famous farewell warning against a military-industrial complex, was no last-minute thought. The speech was under development for 20 months, went through 21 drafts and the three-word phrase itself evolved from "war-based industrial complex" through "vast military-industrial complex" to the final version. In the last version of the entire speech the most pointed warning ("In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes") was underlined with several words in capital letters. The son of Eisenhower's chief speech writer recently turned over to the National Archives the drafts, with related memos and letter correspondence.

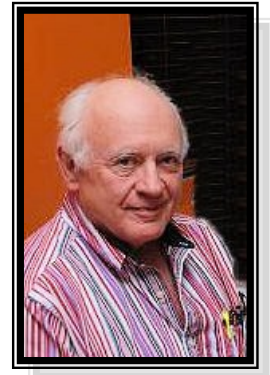
Early this year Susan Jacoby, ("The Age of American Unreason," "Freethinkers") in her Washington Post column, identified and addressed five myths the anti-atheists have concocted about us:

- Myth 1. The "new atheism" differs radically from historical atheism, deism and Enlightenment rationalism.
- Myth 2. Atheists think all believers are stupid.
- Myth 3. Atheism is a religion and 'atheist fundamentalism' is as intolerant as its theistic antecedent.
- Myth 4. Atheists believe that science explains everything.
- Myth 5. Atheists deny the possibility of 'transcendent experience.'

Her responses, mostly paraphrased for sake of brevity: The only differences in the new atheism are not in content but in that it isn't hidden under other labels (agnosticism, Deism, rationalism, etc.) and that atheists aren't showing the deference toward the religious to which the latter had become comfortably accustomed. Atheists don't believe believers are necessarily stupid -- many are extremely bright and accomplished -- but note a strong correlation, without equating education and intelligence, between increased levels of education (particularly in science, history and comparative religion) and diluted, lessened or abandoned religious belief. We have no sacred texts and no Pope (Jacoby's weakest argument). Science may never explain everything, but as a method of thought and exploration without any unchallengeable assumptions it offers the best possibilities for explaining what we don't yet understand. Transcendent experiences within nature are indeed possible, but cannot defy "time, space and the flesh-and-blood essence of human beings."

Hello, 2011. At least there're no elections in store.

Steve Brown



Be a more active Humanist!

Being an active agent of social change in many ways defines the practical meaning of Humanism. Despite the vast numbers of us on this planet, all too few actually are involved in making life better for all of us. Especially if you are retired, or have leisure, you should consider expanding the range of your positive involvement in the lives of others.

At the most recent Board meeting, the directors present announced several initiatives to enable members to play more significant roles in the life of our community.

Mark Winterbottom is leading a section that will enable Humanists to be more of a presence in the science program at the St Petersburg Aquarium.

The board also decided to make the [Tampabay Post Carbon Council](#) an adjunct to the Society.

As always, we will continue to participate in social service programs. Be sure to contribute! -- - *Jim P.*

Our best letters: To the Florida Clemency Board

The elections are over and you will all be moving on to other opportunities with your lives. I believe this is your one chance to make some real progress in the field of Rights Restoration for former felons. As you all most probably realize, Florida is regressive in the many ways it treats its released former felons compared to some 90+% of other states in America.

This plea is a chance to make Florida more progressive in the clemency process by giving all released prisoners their right to vote and allowing them to obtain work licenses so they are able to get back into the mainstream of society and become valuable tax paying citizens. You certainly need to update our present archaic and convoluted clemency rules - especially for those released who have committed minor crimes and now have paid their debt to society. Former felons should not have to 'jump through hoops' to get their citizen privileges restored which the present system requires. e.g, Why can't these people who owe restitution, pay it off over time while working low paid jobs after release? Otherwise, they will never be able to pay full restitution in one lump some. Additionally, our present system of clemency still discriminates against minorities and the homeless - many of whom are difficult to contact after their rights have been restored because they are required to move their home addresses frequently.

I understand that the Rights Restoration applications are presently backed up to the Summer of 2007 - and that is unacceptable! This RR issue is of utmost importance because it affects many thousands of people who could become upright, valuable citizens.

Glenn Paul



Astonishing. Senator Jeff Sessions, ranking Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee, took to the Senate floor this week to warn about Obama judicial appointees who have "ACLU DNA."

His rant included the warning that "the administration needs to understand that this is going to be a more contentious matter if we keep seeing the ACLU chromosome as part of this process."

Does he really mean to suggest that affiliation with America's leading civil liberties organization somehow disqualifies a nominee?

There is, obviously, no such thing as ACLU DNA. But, if there were, what would it indicate?

A predisposition to defend the rights enshrined in the Constitution for everyone, regardless of their political beliefs? A tendency to think that indefinite detention, religious bigotry and racial profiling are unprincipled and un-American?

An inclination to protect the Constitution and defend the rule of law without exception?

We've been down this road before. We've seen attacks on "card-carrying members of the ACLU." We can never yield to this kind of intimidation.