

The Humanist Society of the Suncoast

A Sociatic 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

Our Program for May will be postponed in deference
to



The Humanists of Florida Association

in collaboration with

AHA & CFI

announces
the first-ever, **Sold Out!** Inclusive
Humanist & Freethought
Conference

April 30 - May 2, 2010
Sarasota, FL

info@FloridaHumanist.org

Volume 19 No. 5

May, 2010

Coming...

In June, our speaker will be John Keiffer who will speak on the curious connection between ancient Chinese philosophy and modern Scientology.

It can be anticipated that this will create a great deal of interest in this community, where Scientology has been the subject of so much rancorous debate for a very long time.

You'll want to be here!

Please join us
for
a free and open
discussion.

On the first
Saturdays of
every month
but May:
Clearwater East
Library
2251 Drew St.
Clearwater

Following our meet-
ing, many of us will
dine together at the

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

Our annual Election last month produced several new members for our august governing body. We now have a full nine member panel.

Many thanks to :

Bob Byrch, Mark Kligman, and Mark Winterbottom for their willingness to serve. And thanks to those board members who are willing to continue to serve us. The full list can be found on the next page.

But regrets and much gratitude go to former members, **Anita Garcia, Jerry Moore, and Terry Eckstien**, who have now been elevated to the lofty heights of EMERITUS board membership, where their advice and collective wisdom will continue to be highly regarded.

Jim Peterson

Don't Forget...

Tampa Bay Harvest Please...



Bring as many boxed and canned food items as you can to the June 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. **It's the Humanist thing to do!**

Our new **Humanist Face Book** Page

Thanks to the efforts of Board Bob Byrch, we now have a new Face book site that will further enrich the Suncoast online presence. After being up only a week, we have the following statistics:

+19 Fans this week (19 total Fans)
17 Wall Posts, Comments, and Likes this week (0 last week)
263 visits to your page this week (0 visits last week) Befriend us [here](#).

Our Website All newsletters from the past two years are there, as well as pictures of some of us. (We need more!) <http://suncoasthumanist.com>



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 May will be at: **Fish Tail Willy's**

on Sunday May 16th at 5:00PM.

This restaurant is located at 2543 Countryside Blvd - Countryside Centre - in Clearwater, FL. While the menu is mostly seafood with early birds at about \$12; pizza, burgers, soups are also available.

Please make your reservations by Saturday May 15th with Glenn at 727-595-3347 or email reply at kpaul29@tampabay.rr.com Hope to see you there on May 16th.

Laugh Lines

Neologisms !

- Coffee (n.), a person who is coughed upon.
- Flabbergasted (adj.), appalled over how much weight you have gained.
- Abdicate (v.), to give up all hope of ever having a flat stomach.
- Esplanade (v.), to attempt an explanation while drunk.
- Willy-nilly (adj.), impotent
- Negligent (adj.), describes a condition in which you absentmindedly answer the door in your nightie.
- Lymph (v.), to walk with a lisp.
- Gargoyle (n.), an olive-flavored mouthwash.
- Flatulence (n.) the emergency vehicle that picks you up after you are run over by a steamroller.
- Balderdash (n.), a rapidly receding hairline.
- Testicle (n.), a humorous question on an exam.
- Rectitude (n.), the formal, dignified demeanor assumed by a proctologist immediately before he examines you.
- Oyster (n.), a person who sprinkles his conversation with Yiddish expressions.
- Frisbeetarianism (n.), The belief that, when you die, your soul goes up on the roof and gets stuck there.
- Pokemon (n), A Jamaican proctologist.

Thanks to *Lois Fries*

HUMANIST SOCIETY OF THE SUNCOAST

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

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Meets Sept., December, April

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~*~*~*~*~

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

E-Mail us at:
jim@suncoasthumanist.COM

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

~ Join or Renew ~

The Humanist Society of the Suncoast.

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

A National Day of Reason: the secular alternative

A U.S. District Court Judge in Madison, Wis., has ruled that the congressionally mandated National Day of Prayer proclamation is unconstitutional. In a [ruling](#) issued on April 15, 2010, Judge Barbara Crabb wrote that the statute that mandates the presidential proclamation "goes beyond mere 'acknowledgment' of religion because its sole purpose is to encourage all citizens to engage in prayer, an inherently religious exercise that serves no secular function in this context. In this instance, the government has taken sides on a matter that must be left to individual conscience."

Implemented in 1952 by an act of Congress, the National Day of Prayer statute requires the president to designate the first Thursday of the month of May as the National Day of Prayer, during which, according to the [statute](#), "the people of the United States may turn to God in prayer and meditation at church groups, and as individuals." This year, the National Day of Prayer will fall on May 6.

The ruling is on a lawsuit originally filed by the [Freedom From Religion Foundation](#) on October 3, 2008. The defendant named at that time was President George W. Bush, but it shifted to President Barack Obama upon his inauguration. FFRF co-president Annie Laurie Gaylor hailed the ruling, stating "We are so gratified and delighted that Judge Crabb in her solid decision rejected revisionist history and decided this case on the merits."

In her ruling, Judge Barbara Crabb also noted that even though prayer is an important part of the lives of millions of Americans, nevertheless it is highly personal and should not be subject to any degree of government involvement. She wrote, "In fact, it is because the nature of prayer is so personal and can have such a powerful effect on a community that the government may not use its authority to try to influence an individual's decision whether and when to pray."

While Judge Crabb did enjoin President Obama from issuing the National Day of Prayer proclamation, the injunction will be stayed until all appeals are completed. Therefore, shortly after the ruling, the White House stated via Twitter that the president will still issue the National Day of Prayer proclamation for 2010.

David Niose, president of the American Humanist Association, called upon President Obama to recognize the [National Day of Reason](#), also scheduled for May 6, instead of the National Day of Prayer. He noted, "**The National Day of Reason** includes all Americans and calls attention to a value that's essential to effective democracy."

The stated purpose of the National Day of Reason is "to celebrate reason--a concept all Americans can support--and to raise public awareness about the persistent threat to religious liberty posed by government intrusion into the private sphere of worship."

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 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, see Jim Peterson at: jamestp@suncoasthumanist.com

Share your favorite restaurant.

Glenn Paul wants to improve the selection of restaurants in which we have our monthly social dinners. Our main criteria for selection is:

1. Location—center county preferred
2. Cost—low to moderate accommodates everybody.
3. Room—to accommodate up to 25
4. Ambience—not too noisy at 5PM.
5. Food—good.

Contact Glenn at:

kpaul29@tampabay.rr.com
or call 727-595-3347



Read Humanist Periodicals:

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

Humanist Quotes



"The meaning of life is not to be discovered only after death in some hidden, mysterious realm; on the contrary, it can be found by eating the succulent fruit of the Tree of Life and by living in the here and now as fully and creatively as we can"

Paul Kurtz

See [Steve Brown's column](#) on [page 6](#)

Good without God

“Are you good without God? Millions of Americans are,” has recently appeared on Boston’s MBTA, the New York City subway, and on billboards across the country, stirring up passionate discussion about atheism and Humanism in America.

This week, Harvard's Humanist Chaplain Greg Epstein, the person perhaps most responsible for catalyzing this conversation, will be discussing his work and his new best selling book *Good Without God* at Harvard.

Good Without God, released in tandem with the launch of new branches of the United Coalition of Reason, a national organization that works to raise the visibility of local atheist and non-theist groups, recently appeared on the New York Times Best Sellers list, and has been the recipient of nationwide media coverage, including ABC World News with Diane Sawyer, Good Morning America and Fresh Air with Terry Gross, since its release in October.

“*Good Without God* is not just a brilliant book title but an indispensable and humane ideal,” said Harvard Professor Steven Pinker, author of *The Language Instinct* and *How the Mind Works*. “Greg Epstein’s wise and warm explanation of the Humanist worldview goes beyond the recent atheist bestsellers and speaks to the moral and spiritual impulses that have traditionally attracted people to religion.”

Epstein’s book, now in its fourth printing, has been a resource for the vibrant and growing Humanist community at Harvard, but it has also begun a nationwide conversation about Humanism, cultivating what Boston University professor Stephen Prothero calls “religious literacy” about the nonreligious. *Good Without God* stresses interfaith dialogue and pluralism as important to Humanism.

“In *Good Without God*, Greg Epstein shows us what it means to cross boundaries, build bridges, and work toward a society where people from all backgrounds live in equal dignity and mutual loyalty,” said White House advisor on religion Eboo Patel. Patel, who was recently named by US News & World Report as one of America’s top leaders, serves as the founder and director of the Interfaith Youth Core.

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



Humanists of Florida
Association
Reason and Compassion in Action

Want to 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.

Glenn Paul has been a stalwart of social/political activism in behalf a great many causes. He could sure use some help in his capacity as Social planning director, and all around doer of good deeds. If you have the time, interest, and a small amount of energy to devote to any of the forgoing, please contact Glenn and offer your help. He wants to continue as treasurer, but even here he could use a little help.

Contact Glenn at:

kpaul29@tampabay.rr.com or by phone at 727-595-3347.

HFA member Arthur Jackson from Silicon Valley wrote: “If you have an hour for a Humanist Sermon regarding Darwin, here is an opportunity brought to you from the Humanist Community in Silicon Valley’s weekly Humanist Forum. Dr. John van Wyhe discusses the topic, Why did Darwin Really Give up Christianity.” <http://vimeo.com/9289445>



Maxwell: Evolution as problem-solver

By [BILL MAXWELL, St. Petersburg Times](#)



When many Americans think of the theory of evolution, images of apes, fossils and dinosaurs come to mind. Others think of the abuses associated with the concept of social Darwinism and the term "survival of the fittest."

The Evolution Institute, co-founded by the Humanists of Florida Association, intends to change that kind of simple thinking. It wants to be known as the first think tank to use evolutionary science to solve real-world problems. Leaders want reasonable people to see evolution in a positive light and understand its importance in our lives. Further, they want us to put the theory to work when we deal with issues such as governance, education, health, peace and all other public policy issues relevant to human welfare.

Many people, including those who accept the theory of evolution, will be surprised to learn that the institute uses evolutionary scholarship to answer questions in areas as familiar as early childhood development and learning, risky adolescent behavior and bullying.

Scholars with the Evolution Institute, known as EI, go beyond typical in-school disciplinary actions and judicial practices to get to the root of why, for example, middle school students are disruptive, why adolescent boys fight, sometimes to the death, over girls, and why so many kids experiment with drugs and alcohol.

In an essay for the current issue of the Florida Humanist Journal, Meredith Small, a trained primate behaviorist and a professor of anthropology at Cornell University, writes that the evolutionary view of teens' behavior is more than theory. It involves "understanding ancient human history, genetics, and biology along with the influence of upbringing, environment, and culture on the thought processes, decisions, and behaviors of our adolescents." Currently focused on how biology and culture influence parenting styles, Small said that what our culture sees as adolescent "risky behavior" might be behavior that is in synch with the evolutionary needs and goals for humans in this age group.

"Parents and society think of the teen years as an aberration along the way to adulthood, but this stage actually serves many evolutionary purposes," Small said. "Given the long human life history, adolescence is the necessary staging ground from which little humans begin to navigate their own relationships. It also is the time during the life cycle in which the human animal matures sexually. Humans are designed to pass on genes -- as all organisms are -- and they begin to do that during the adolescent years as the brain is reorganizing, the body is becoming reproductively active, and young adults are building social networks for themselves."

EI scholars produce research showing that the adolescent brain is unique and undergoes profound changes. "The adolescent brain is not a child's brain, and it's not an adult brain, either," she said. "That's how evolution has designed the system." The results of such research can be seen in how enlightened judges and legislators are beginning to view adolescents who commit violent crimes or who are present when violent crimes are committed. Science shows that as adolescents grow older, they change, many maturing into different people altogether.

Florida lawmakers are considering a bill, the Second Chance for Children in Prison Act, which would be less punitive. The U.S. Supreme Court is examining whether life in prison for juveniles is cruel and unusual punishment. The court already banned the death penalty for juveniles.

"From where we stand in adulthood, teens also seem short-sighted -- oblivious of the long-term consequences of their behavior," Small writes. "They take recreational drugs, abuse alcohol, and act in impulsive ways that land them in trouble, jail, or dead. They are inordinately victims of accident, violent acts, unplanned pregnancy, socially transmitted sexual diseases, and homicide. "But it's not mindless or risky behavior. From the teen's point of view, risky behavior often makes sense in terms of status, attention from the opposite sex, or belonging. And it appears that teens are not as fearless as they appear. Evolutionarily based research shows that teens are just more motivated than adults to take risks in spite of their growing fears of the world. They apparently focus more on the benefits of their behavior rather than the risks."

I think the time has come to earnestly consider evolutionary science to solve real-world problems. Too many of the old methods and conventional ways of thinking have been inadequate, often just plain wrong-headed. The institute has co-sponsored successful workshops with the University of Miami, the University of Arizona and Duke University. Evolutionary approaches to various issues, such as adolescent behavior and middle school students, will be discussed at the Humanists conference, April 30 through May 2, Holiday Inn Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport. For more information, contact info@FloridaHumanist.org.



On the Way to Gammar's House . . . with Steve Brown

Where do we find our identities? Not our social roles, but how we think of ourselves. There is an exercise in tantric yoga explorations that can seem like torture. An interrogator fires the question, "Who are you?," again and again, rapidly, relentlessly, and ruthlessly -- not pausing after an answer and leaving only a blink of a moment for the answer before repeating the question. It's like an endless jack hammering into the brain, a "New Age" cop's "third degree." It assumes that under many layers of assumptions about ourselves (if we have any), we will be driven up against the realization, painful or joyful, of just who or what we really are. Or maybe that we're not "together," but only a collage of disparate sub-selves.

I've never really enjoyed that game.

I found out who I am (whatever that may mean) in another way.

I'm 34. It's August. My wife had just left with three of our five children to live separately 400 miles away. I still had my own household, but I was a stranger somewhere between what was and what would be. In "The Freep," the alternative "Los Angeles Free Press," an ad for a "Modern Dance" class at "The New Left School" somehow rings my bell -- with loud and double chimes -- and off I went, to my own surprise. (I hadn't danced since senior prom, when dancing meant merely to stand upright and shuffle one's feet).

The class, which was mislabeled, turned out to be an African dance class, led by a grad student whose mother had been a member of the Katherine Dunham troupe. As my body gradually became more limber, one thing led to another and I adventured elsewhere into "dance therapy" classes that brought a lot of committed dancers together who sought to be freed of the strictly patterned movements they'd learned in ballet or other more or less fixed styles (even "modern" had become fairly narrowly stylized).

Which led some nine months after "my bell rang" to the most exhilarating place I've ever known, Esalen at Big Sur, hanging high over the Pacific off the edge of the mid-California coast. Peculiarly, it could also soothe and comfort as well as excite.. Eventually, in my mind's eye I came to see it as a nest perched on the edge of the entire world.

But I digress.

I came there to spend a bright May weekend in a workshop led by Anna Halprin, a modern dancer with a fluid, changing, experimental attitude (I later went through several of those changes with her) and an elegant sense of theatre and the "theatre of life." I danced non-stop from Friday night until Sunday noon but for sleeping, eating and a little lollygagging in the hot sulphur baths. I danced so much that my right leg went partially numb (precursor to a serious injury two years later). I danced in class, both in wild and free expression, and in various scenarios. Out of class, there was furious dancing on a starlit deck and inside the lodge, to conga and bongo drums (played by Esalen guests and staff and hippie drop-ins). Anna's own drummer of that time, like no other drummer I've ever experienced, could not only set the beat but get out of his own head and into the collective head of his dancers for a flowing exchange of leadership that could build like a fervent symphony.

Now it's Sunday afternoon. My weekend of dance has come to a close. I huddle alone, after lunch, on a lush green lawn leaning back against dining lodge supports, somewhat concealed by bushes on either side. The weekend's experience passes through me. The previous evening a woman I'd met that weekend made a remark that was now sending a chill (however trite it may be) up and down my back. We had been dancing alone on the lawn, to the music of the waves hitting the rocks below and the music in our heads, while everyone else was inside enrapt in a lecture from a Tibetan Buddhist monk (a German!). I confessed to her that I had had a man-crush on Gene Kelly, and my realization over the last nine months that all the joy I'd had in endless youthful baseball practice and tennis volleys didn't as much reveal a love for those games, as it did my body's demand to move and create patterns in space, to experience explosions, releases, velocity and its alterations, transitions in space (turns, leaps, falls, rebounds) and in energy (slow, fast, weak, strong). My own slow-cooked Eureka "moment."!

Then, in response, in complete earnestness, she said something like "Gene Kelly can't hold a candle to you. He can only wish to have what you have." Perhaps needless to say, I was startled. I found her remarks hard to believe. I wanted to argue with her. But I knew what she meant. That I danced from the inside out. Kelly danced by design.

Now, the next afternoon, at least a dozen hours had passed

A shudder went through me, and then suddenly I broke out weeping. I couldn't stop. I don't know exactly how long I wept. My guess: something like two hours. Heaving sobs would gradually quiet down. I'd stop crying and think it was time to go home. A few seconds later the weeping cycle would return and off I'd go again. Again. And again. What was going on?

Answer: I'd finally experienced who or what I'd wanted to be, without knowing it, since age 12. I'd been a dancer, at least for a weekend. And a beautiful, wonderful-to-watch-move, wonderful-to-dance-with woman told me flatly that I was not only what I'd wanted to be. I was more, better, than a "Gene Kelly!" How could this be? How could I weather such unbearably good news, such



Senate Bill (SB) 290 and House Bill (HB) 141 – **that would treat fetuses, at any stage of development, as independent victims of criminal acts** – are moving closer to passage in the final days of the 2010 legislative session. We need your help to ensure that these bad bills don't become law.

Please EMAIL your senators and representatives and ask them to vote NO on this legislation – a veiled attempt to undermine women's rights. It is also important that you call your legislators and tell them to oppose this overreaching legislation. (*See below for instructions to make calls.*)

It is urgent that we stop SB 290/HB 141, and here's why:
Florida already has a fetal homicide law.

The current law criminalizes the killing of a viable fetus. SB 290/HB 141 would amend that law to include a fetus at any stage of development, giving even a fertilized egg the status of an independent victim of a criminal act. The current law requires that there be intent to kill. SB 290/HB 141 removes intent by specifically stating that knowledge of the pregnancy and intent are not required for the killing to be criminal act. For example, the death of the fetus resulting from an attack on a woman who is obviously pregnant is treated the same as an attack on a woman who is one week pregnant and may not even know it. It goes against the basic values of fairness and due process to state that an alleged perpetrator need not have any intent to cause the death or bodily injury of the fetus, or even to know of the pregnancy.

This legislation could allow a person to be charged and convicted of capital murder, which by definition requires a specific intent to kill, even in cases where the perpetrator neither knew of, nor intended to harm the pregnancy. Thus, a fetus would receive greater protection under the law than a fully developed human being.

The purpose of this legislation is not to protect women from violence. The leading cause of death for pregnant women is murder. To protect women from abuse and violence, lawmakers must increase support for domestic violence prevention programs. **Fetal homicide legislation attempts to separate the woman from her fetus. It will not stop violence against pregnant women.** It will, however, threaten to erode women's rights by creating tension with the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade*, where the Court ruled that "the word 'person,' as used in the Fourteenth Amendment, does not include the unborn." Protect women's rights. [Urge your Senators and Representatives to vote NO on SB 290/HB 141.](#)

People who commit these heinous crimes can and should be punished. Penalty enhancements properly punish injuries to a pregnant woman without undermining reproductive freedom. We fully support the proper punishment of violence against pregnant women that harms or causes the loss of their fetuses. Instead of creating a separate offense, the law should increase the penalty when a criminal act results in harm not only to a pregnant woman, but to her pregnancy. Such penalty enhancements punish the additional injury that these acts cause without conferring on the fetus the status of a legal entity. Such penalty enhancements focus the criminal law where it should be: on the additional, often devastating injury suffered by the woman when a crime harms or kills her fetus.



(Continued from page 6)

Brown

piercing confirmation, such a destruction of how I'd been before: a self-contained, highly verbal, apparently cerebral but secretly emotional "man in a gray suit." Well, it seems, by breaking down, apparently giving up, letting go all those previous ideas or feelings about myself and letting me be what was really "there." The weeping amounted simply to a joyful release of that old "self."

It was a weird way to have a "peak" experience. But then again, I'd learned "who I am." And recognize today, more than 40 years later. Still a dancer, dancing not only with my body, but dancing inside my mind, dancing with words, dancing when I tease, dancing when I debate, dancing when I write, dancing when I drive, dancing with the string of events in my life. Mind and body dancing together or dancing as one, wherever the truth in that relationship lies.

Maybe some readers will think my "identity" is incomplete or partial, that I haven't really answered the question, "Who are you?," but only have found a starting point or a center, and that I should keep inquiring.

Who are you? Are you a verb? Are you a noun? Have you found out.? How ? When?

Steve

Responses would be appreciated. Make them anonymous. It would be interesting to see ""who" we all are.