

Rationalists of East Tennessee Newsletter
February, 2010 – written by Dave Buck

ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING

Thanks for all those who attended and discussed the future RET endeavors. Here's the new slate of elected officers:

President: Carl Ledendecker

Vice President: Donna Maxwell

Secretary: Aleta Ledendecker

Treasurer: Phil King

Directors: Schera Chadwick, Jonas Holdeman, Ralph Isler, Elliot Specht, Andree Miller, Dave Buck, Margaret Klein

NEW MONTHLY EVENT

An overwhelming number of members wished to start a potluck dinner discussion where people can meet and talk more informally about past RET roundtables or book club topics. The new event will be called Reflections and will hold its first meeting this month.

WELCOME NEWEST MEMBERS

Four more folks have joined RET! Jessi Ogle, Allison Allen, and Donald & Jo Ann Parsley.

SKEPTIC BOOK CLUB SCHEDULE

March 14--- What Intelligence Tests Miss: The Psychology of Rational Thought by Keith E. Stanovich

April 11---The New Atheism; Taking a Stand for Science and Reason by Victor J. Stenger

May 9---The Brain that Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science by Norman Doidge

June 13---Whither Socialism? Joseph Stiglitz

July 11---SuperSense: Why We Believe in the Unbelievable by Bruce M. Hood

August 8---Nazi Nexus: America's Corporate Connection to Hitler's Holocaust by Edwin Black

September 12---Idiot America: How Stupidity Became a Virtue in the Land of the Free by Charles P. Pierce

RET FEBRUARY CALENDAR:

Sunday, February 7th - Roundtable

Topic: Freedom of Information and Inquiry in K-12 Education.

Time/location: 10:30 - 12:30, Pellissippi State, Goins Bldg., Cafeteria Annex

Discussant: Karyn Storts-Brinks

The School system of Knox County, like all other public schools who wish to be eligible for federal E-rate funding, has an Internet filtering system in place. In August of 2007, in my role as School Media Specialist at Fulton High School, I began a process of inquiry in an attempt to resolve what seemed to be erroneous over-filtering of certain websites. The sites on which I initially focused in this inquiry were those of the Human Rights Campaign (www.hrc.org) and the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (www.glsen.org). The blocking of these sites by our filtering contract--along with all others that referenced LGBT issues in an informative, remotely positive way--was my catalyst for a frustrating journey through a hierarchy of contacts in the process of seeking satisfactory access to information for my students. This access was finally achieved through an ACLU lawsuit, "Franks v. Metropolitan Board of Public Education," in August of 2009.

Sunday, February 14th - Skeptic Book Club

Book: Who is Mark Twain? By Mark Twain

Time and location: 4:00 to 6:00pm, Barnes and Noble Booksellers, 8029 Kingston Pike.

Here, for the first time in book form, are twenty-four remarkable pieces by the American master—pieces that have been handpicked by Robert Hirst, general editor of the Mark Twain Project at the University of California, Berkeley. In "Jane Austen," Twain wonders if Austen's goal is to "make the reader detest her people up to the middle of the book and like them in the rest of the chapters." "The Privilege of the Grave" offers a powerful statement about the freedom of speech while "Happy Memories of the Dental Chair" will make you appreciate modern dentistry. Wickedly funny and disarmingly relevant, Who Is Mark Twain? shines a new light on one of America's most beloved literary icons—a man who was well ahead of his time.

Sunday, February 21st - Roundtable

Topic: Is Evolution Progressive?

Time/location: 10:30 - 12:30, Pellissippi State, Goins Bldg., Cafeteria Annex

Discussant: Michael Lance

The late Steven Jay Gould posed a thought experiment in his most popular book *A Wonderful Life*: if we could rewind the tape of life 4 billion years and then rerun it, would higher intelligence evolve again? Gould's verdict was an adamant "No!", however, the view that evolution is destined to produce higher intelligence is widely accepted by most people and even some scientists. Recently, some religious believers have started claiming that the supposed progressive nature of evolution implies the existence of some higher power. This view is distinct from previous intelligent design claims as it states that the theory of evolution properly understood implies the existence of God as opposed to the God of the gaps who exists only because evolution can't explain all the facts. Is this the evolution of intelligent design? Arguments from both sides in this debate will be presented and discussed.

Sunday, February 28 – Reflections Group (potluck dinner)

Topic: Continuation of Rousseau's concept of The Social Contract [started by Florence Wilden].

Location: Chadwick/Lollis residence. 9219 George Williams Rd. Knoxville, TN 37922-4206

Time: 4pm – 6pm. Bring a dish and let's continue consideration of social relationships.