

Rationalists of East Tennessee Newsletter

March 2015
Edited by Carl Ledendecker

First Sunday Meeting

March 1 Sunday 10:30 - 12:30

Pellissippi State Community College, Goins Building, Cafeteria Annex

Professor Erin Darby of the University of Tennessee will speak on the rise of monotheism in early Israelite society

The RET Skeptic Book Club

March 8 Sunday 2:00 – 4:00 pm

Note: This is a new time AND LOCATION.

Location: Books-A-Million at 8513 Kingston Pike, Knoxville.

**"Hope after Faith: An Ex-Pastor's Journey from Belief to Atheism"
by Jerry DeWitt -**

Atheism's leading lights have long been intellectuals raised in the secular and academic worlds: Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and the late Christopher Hitchens. By contrast, Jerry DeWitt was born and bred into the church and was in fact a Pentecostal preacher before arriving at atheism through an extraordinary dialogue with faith that spanned more than a quarter of a century. Hope After Faith is his account of that journey.

DeWitt was a pastor in the town of DeRidder, Louisiana, and was a fixture of the community. In private, however, he'd begun to question his faith. Late one night in May 2011, a member of his flock called seeking prayer for her brother who had been in a serious accident. As DeWitt searched for the right words to console her, speech failed him, and he found that the faith which once had formed the cornerstone of his life had finally crumbled to dust. When it became public knowledge that DeWitt was now an

atheist, he found himself shunned by much of DeRidder's highly religious community, losing nearly everything he'd known.

DeWitt's struggle for identity and meaning mirrors the one currently facing millions of people around the world. With both agnosticism and atheism entering the mainstream—one in five Americans now claim no religious affiliation, according to a recent study—the moment has arrived for a new atheist voice, one that is respectful of faith and religious traditions yet warmly embraces a life free of religion, finding not skepticism and cold doubt but rather profound meaning and hope. *Hope After Faith* is the story of one man's evolution toward a committed and considered atheism, one driven by humanism, a profound moral dimension, and a happiness and self-confidence obtained through living free of fear. (Amazon review)

RET Third Sunday Meeting

March 15 Sunday 10:30 a.m.

Pellissippi State Community College, Goins Auditorium

Dr. Tessa Burch-Smith of the University of Tennessee's Department of Biochemistry and Cellular and Molecular Biology will present a talk titled "Genetic Engineering in Agriculture".

RET Reflections Meeting

March 22 Sunday 1:00 a.m.

Schera Chadwick & Ted Lollis

9219 George Williams Road, 37922;

Topic: To be announced later

Reflections will be every other month.

March 22 May 24 July 26th Sept. 27th Nov. 22nd

If anyone wants to have a Reflections meeting at their home, on the "off month" please contact Schera Chadwick at 865.690.8742 and Carl Ledendecker at 982-8687.

Book Club List

March	“Hope after Faith” by Jerry DeWitt
April	“A Troublesome Inheritance” by Nicholas Wade
May	“Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead” by Sheryl Sandberg
June	“Stuff Matters: Exploring the Marvelous Materials That Shape Our Man-Made World” by Mark Miodownik
July	“House of Debt: How They (and You) Caused the Great Recession, and How We Can Prevent It from Happening Again” by Atif Mian

RET/ASK Freethought Forum

Tuesdays 5:00 – 6:00 pm

Freethought Forum is looking for people to be on the show. Contact Joe Barnhart or Lee Erickson if you are interested.

In Knoxville: Comcast Channel 12 Charter Channel 6
Surrounding areas: free streaming on ctvknox.org.

Right after the show a co-host of the program holds The Atheist Society of Knoxville Meet-up at Barley’s on Jackson Avenue in Knoxville’s Old Town. Volunteer hosts and suggestions for topics would be welcome for all of these programs. Contact Larry Rhodes at larryr@usit.net or Joe Barnhart at tempolark@hotmail.com

“God is on the ropes” Excerpts from:

SATURDAY, JAN 3, 2015 09:00 AM EST

God is on the ropes: The brilliant new science that has creationists and the Christian right terrified
A young MIT professor is finishing Darwin's task — and threatening to undo everything the wacky right holds dear
PAUL ROSENBERG

“... things could get a whole lot worse for creationists because of Jeremy England, a young MIT professor who's proposed a theory, based in thermodynamics, showing that the emergence of life was not accidental, but necessary. “[U]nder certain conditions, matter inexorably acquires the key physical attribute associated with life,” he was quoted as saying in an article in Quanta magazine early in 2014, that's since been republished by Scientific American and, more recently, by Business Insider. In essence, he's saying, life itself evolved out of simpler non-living systems.”

Unlike “earlier precursors, England has a specific, unifying, testable evolutionary mechanism in mind.

Quanta fleshed things out a bit more like this:

From the standpoint of physics, there is one essential difference between living things and inanimate clumps of carbon atoms: The former tend to be much better at capturing energy from their environment and dissipating that energy as heat. Jeremy England, a 31-year-old assistant professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has derived a mathematical formula that he believes explains this capacity. The formula, based on established physics, indicates that when a group of atoms is driven by an external source of energy (like the sun or chemical fuel) and surrounded by a heat bath (like the ocean or atmosphere), it will often gradually restructure itself in order to dissipate increasingly more energy. This could mean that under certain conditions, matter inexorably acquires the key physical attribute associated with life.”

“It doesn't mean we should expect life everywhere in the universe — lack of a decent atmosphere or being too far from the sun still makes most of our solar system inhospitable for life with or without England's perspective. But it does mean that “under certain conditions” where life is possible — as it is here on Earth, obviously — it is also quite probable, if not, ultimately, inevitable.”

(Y)ou might enjoy this hour-long presentation of his work (with splashes of local Swedish color) — especially (but not only) if you're a science nerd.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e91D5UAz-f4>

“Whether or not England's theory proves out in the end, he's already doing quite a lot to build that bridge between worldviews and inspire others to make similar efforts. Science is not just about making new discoveries, but about seeing the world in new ways — which then makes new discoveries almost inevitable. And England has already succeeded in that. As the Quanta article explained:

England's theoretical results are generally considered valid. It is his interpretation — that his formula represents the driving force behind a class of phenomena in nature that includes life — that remains unproven. But already, there are ideas about how to test that interpretation in the lab.”

“He’s trying something radically different,” said Mara Prentiss, a professor of physics at Harvard who is contemplating such an experiment after learning about England’s work. “As an organizing lens, I think he has a fabulous idea. Right or wrong, it’s going to be very much worth the investigation.”

http://www.salon.com/2015/01/03/god_is_on_the_ropes_the_brilliant_new_science_that_has_creationists_and_the_christian_right_terrified/?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=socialflow

Quote 1

Stanislaw Jerzy Lec

“At the begging was the Word - at the end just the Cliché.”

Quote 2

H. L. Mencken

“THEOLOGY - An effort to explain the unknowable by putting it into terms of the not worth knowing.”

Quote 3

Christopher Marlowe

“I count religion but a childish toy, and hold there is no sin but ignorance.”

Quote 4

George Bernard Shaw

“Martyrdom ... is the only way which a man can become famous without ability.”

Quote 5

Mignon McLaughlin

“In church, sacred music would make believers of us all - but preachers can be counted on to restore the balance.”

Dues

Dues are \$35 for most individuals but students & low-income persons may join at a reduced rate of \$15.

Dues and donations can be sent to “RET, P.O. Box 51634, Knoxville, TN 37950”, or via Pay Pal through the link at www.rationalists.org. Direct payment can also be made to RET treasurer, Eliot Specht

Other Events of Note

Sunday Assembly Knoxville, Mar. 22 - This month’s theme is “Wellness” Charles Towne Landing HOA Club House 11:00 am.

American Atheists National convention in Memphis, TN at the Peabody Hotel, April 2-5

American Humanist Association Annual Conference, May 7-10, Denver, CO at Grand Hyatt Hotel

Center for Inquiry Conference, June 11-15, Amherst, NY at the Marriott Hotel Buffalo Niagara

Richard Dawkins, Rebeca Goldstein and Susan Jacoby will be speakers.

Reimbursement

Remember that you can ask for reimbursement for food, supplies, etc. that you provide for RET.

FEEL FREE to Send me information or articles by you.

Anyone who has something to submit for publication in the RET Newsletter please e-mail it to ledendecker@att.net. The decision to include the submission is at the discretion of the current editor (me), but I am not all that picky.