

FIG LEAVES

Volume 18 Issue 4

April 2009

April FIG Meeting:

Tuesday, 28 April 2009
7:00 PM

New meeting place! ---Hamilton County MRDD

For the April Meeting location we plan to meet at **Hamilton County MRDD** office at the corner of Madison and Victory in Walnut Hills. As they are not consistently staffed in the evening this is not a long-term solution, but for this month it is a free space. Since there will not be any refreshments, please contact Shawn regarding refreshments arrangements if you are interested in helping out.

*DIRECTIONS/PARKING

Hamilton County MRDD - 1520 Madison Rd (Near the intersection of Madison Ave./Martin Luther King Drive(MLK) & Victory Parkway) The front entrance, (facing Victory Parkway), will be closed since it is after hours so please follow the directions and instructions for getting into the rear parking lot/building entrance.

If coming east on MLK or turning from going north on Victory Parkway, continue one block on Madison, Turn Left at Woodburn (Seny Restaurant on Corner)

If coming west on Madison, Turn Right at Woodburn. Turn left at Chapel (First street), Parking lot is on Chapel on Left.

Once parked, please go to the rear entrance of Hamilton County MRDD (the entrance is facing Victory Parkway.).

The Roots of Prejudice

In April, FIG member, **Shawn Jeffers**, will present an interactive workshop and presentation exploring how our values can shape our interactions and our worldview. When not volunteering for FIG, Shawn's day job is with BRIDGES for a Just Community, a human relations non-profit organization in Cincinnati specializing in equity education. Borrowing on these resources, the workshop will begin with two activities to help participants explore three areas: personal awareness, interpersonal awareness, and systemic awareness. After the workshop, a follow up presentation will highlight new advances in science exploring the human tendency to gravitate towards exclusion rather than inclusion. This includes research by psychologist Jonathon Haidt exploring how moral values are able to help explain why people tend to lean conservative, liberal or remain in the center. The goal of the presentation is to provide FIG members with skills to better engage others to promote pluralism, freethought and understanding.

May FIG Meeting, Tuesday, 26 May at 7PM, location is TBD.

Atheism and Free-Thought in 19th-Century Cincinnati: Some Historical Snapshots.

William B. Jensen, Oesper Professor of the History of Chemistry, University of Cincinnati. Atheism and Free-Thought have a surprisingly long history in the City of Cincinnati. The talk will recount various encounters between the free thinkers of 19th-century Cincinnati and assorted famous visitors, ranging from Mrs. Trollope to Mark Twain and Moncure Conway.

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The Vernon Manor has closed it's doors. If you have a suggestion for a new meeting place for FIG, please contact Shawn Jeffers or John Welte.

Events

April Meeting

Tuesday, Apr. 28, 2009
7:00 PM

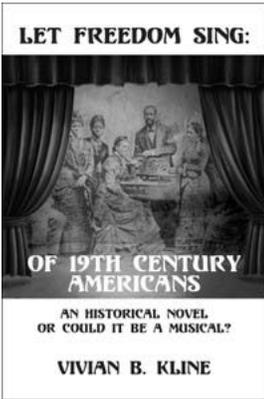
at the Hamilton County MRDD
See * at left for directions.

May Meeting

Tuesday, May. 26, 2009
7:00 PM
Location - TBD



Books Written By Our Members!



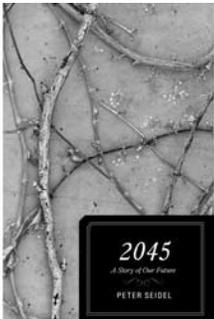
Let Freedom Sing: Of 19th Century Americans by Vivian Kline

A New Novel by Vivian Kline: *Let Freedom Sing: Of 19th Century Americans. An Historical Novel Or Could It Be A Musical?* This is a tale of real people who lived in Cincinnati plus many others, making this story an easy upbeat read for high schoolers on up. \$14.95. More description & excerpts of the novel at www.outskirtspress.com/letfreedomssing. Buy the novel from this site: www.amazon.com or directly from the author viviankline@aol.com

When a class in Cincinnati, Ohio, hopes to make a musical about nineteenth century Americans, they begin by reading autobiographies from the period. They choose a group of young black ex-slave singers, and follow their progress as they move from Tennessee to New York, singing in churches to raise money for their school, destined to become Fisk University. Their white chaperone Susannah becomes the heroine of the journey, as she meets a cast of characters which include Nicholas Longworth, Horace Greeley, P. T. Barnum, Mary Todd Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Robert Duncanson, Susan B. Anthony, Vicky Woodhull and many others. Letters between Susannah and her good friend, Maria Longworth, in Cincinnati, along with entries from the diary of Ella, the black pianist accompanying the singers, provide a great picture of the 1860s and 70s. The Cincinnati students have done a lot of homework. But will it make a musical? ☘

2045: A Story of Our Future

by Peter Seidel



Peter Seidel, a long-time environmental activist, writes:

Over the past four years I put all the time and energy I could into writing a novel and getting it published. Writing a novel is a thing unto itself, and I worked very hard at it. It is now here and available! A press release from the publisher and comments from the back cover, attached, tell what it is about.

Should you wish to buy a copy, and I hope you do, you would do the book and me a favor by purchasing it at a book store (you would probably have to have them order it). Interest encourages them to order more and put them on display. It can also be ordered from the publisher or from Amazon.

Prometheus Books New Releases - March 2009 Fiction

2045: A Story of Our Future by Peter Seidel

“Peter Seidel’s novel gives us a sense of what life will be like in the future if we stay with our business-as-usual policies. It is an insightful, revealing read.” - Lester R. Brown, President of the Earth Policy Institute and author of *Plan B 3.0: Mobilizing to Save Civilization*.

Global warming, environmental degradation, the rapid pace of technological innovation, and the economic stresses of globalization give rise to much speculation about the future. How will these dynamic factors affect society in the coming decades? In this dystopian novel, environmental expert Peter Seidel has created a stark and haunting vision of a world on the near horizon.

Carl is a small-town midwestern businessman who is accidentally put into a coma when he receives an inadequately tested vaccine. When he finally regains consciousness, he



FIG Leaves - Thoughtful articles, letters, reviews, reports, anecdotes, and cartoons are very welcome. Submit in Electronic format via the internet to:

[fignotes at \(@\) gofigger.org](mailto:fignotes(at)gofigger.org);
or on disk or typewritten via mail to Editor, FIG Leaves, P.O. Box 53174, Cincinnati, OH 45253. Contributions received before the first Friday of the month will be considered for publication that month.

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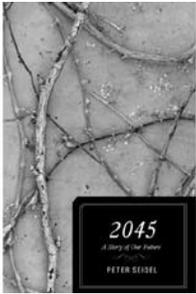
FIG Leaves Editor: Wolf Roder.



Memberships run from:

- 1 January to 31 December.
- One year: \$25
- Family: \$35
- If you join during the year, you receive a \$2 discount for each month that has passed.

We request contributions above membership dues. Contributions are tax deductible.



discovers that it is the year 2045 and his unusual medical story and recovery have turned him into an international celebrity. As he visits family and friends, he finds out that almost everything has gone wrong and the family business he ran thirty-five years ago has disappeared. Carl's fame lands him a job on a seemingly idyllic tropical island with one of the eight giant international corporations that own almost everything.

His job is to help promote a soft drink. He is overwhelmed by the unbounded luxury he finds on the island. But he learns that the ethical standards in this strange place are only a front. During a business trip, he discovers something that horrifies him and turns him in a new direction, one beset with life-threatening dangers.

Seidel skillfully projects a wide range of current trends into a believable and disturbing near-term future scenario.

Peter Seidel (Cincinnati, Ohio) is an environmental architect/planner with wide-ranging interests who studied with world-renowned Bauhaus architect Mies van der Rohe and city planner Ludwig Hilberseimer. He is the author of *Invisible Walls*. 320 pages - ISBN 978-1-59102-705-8 - Paperback: \$19 (6" x 9") - World Rights. To Order Call: 800-421-0351. It can also be purchased in book stores or on Amazon.com. ☘

The Cincinnati Atheist Meetup(s)

When: Saturday, 18 April 2009 at 8:30 am

Where: Winton Woods Park
10245 Winton Road
Greenhills, OH 45231

Meetup Description

Here's an opportunity to make a positive impact in the community. Wear your Atheist pride apparel to let folks know we're the good guys.

From the Hamilton County Park District website:

The Forest Park Environmental Awareness Program and the Hamilton County Park District present the 22nd Annual Winton Woods Cleanup. This award-winning event will take place on Saturday, April 18, from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., rain or shine. All volunteers will meet at Kestrel Point near Winton Centre at 8:30 a.m. to register.

Volunteers of all ages are needed to help remove the accumulated trash and debris that threaten the scenic beauty of Winton Woods and the health of the wildlife that live there. Volunteers will be supplied with bags and a limited number of gloves. After the Cleanup, volunteers are rewarded with raffle prizes contributed by Wildbirds Unlimited and a Kroger/JTM sponsored cookout. Young children must be accompanied by an adult.

Over the last 21 years, the Cleanup has totaled over 6,800 volunteers who collected approximately 126 tons of litter. Last year alone, 300 volunteers removed 6.23 tons of litter in three hours.

For more information, contact the Forest Park Environmental Awareness Program at (513) 595-LAND (5263)

When: Monday, 20 April 2009 at 6:30 PM

Where: Joseph-Beth Booksellers 2692 Madison Road Rookwood Pavilion Cincinnati OH 45208 (513) 396-8960

Please note earlier time The bookstore is now closing at 9 PM, so we've moved the meeting time a bit earlier.

Atheists, Agnostics, Humanists and Freethinkers meet here. Regular monthly gatherings are held on the 3rd Mondays from 6:30 - 9:00 PM. New people join every month, and we all wear name tags (no quizzes). Check the Message Board for current hot topics.

This is a purely social gathering. No agenda, no speaker, no rules of order. If you'd prefer a bit more structure, please check the calendar for lectures, FIG meetings, and other events.

To find us: Go in the front doors of the bookstore and turn left. Enter the Bistro and walk straight back as far as you can go. We're all freethinkers, so we'll look just like you.

The Bistro has a full menu, including vegetarian options. If you like, enjoy dinner, dessert, tea, or a brewski. Restaurant direct line: 513.396.8970 The Bookstore / Bistro is not associated with this meetup group, and will not be able to answer questions. Please use our Message Board to connect with fellow group members.

When: Thursday, 23 April 2009 at 8:30 am

Where: Cincinnati Museum Center at Union Terminal
1301 Western Avenue; Cincinnati, OH 45203
513-287-7043

Meetup Description

Distinguished Historian Lecture

Incarcerating Japanese Americans: 1942-2009

Presenter: Roger Daniels, Ph.D., Chairman emeritus, University of Cincinnati Department of History. Held at the Museum in Reakirt Auditorium. Lectures are free and open to the public and begin at 7:30 p.m. Parking is \$3/vehicle.



THINGS TO DO....

THINGS TO SEE...



Media Events/Programs

The Humanist Perspective

Show times on Time-Warner Cable:

Channel 15: Tuesday 3:30 am and Saturday 7:30 pm

Channel 24: Friday 12:30 pm.

Programs:

- 14-17 April: *Humanist Values*,
with Paul Kurtz.
- 21-24 April: *What is Secular Humanism*,
with Paul Kurtz.
- 28 Apr-1 May: *Campus Freethought Alliance*,
with D. J. Grothe.
- 5-8 May: *Humanist, come out of the closet!*
with D. J. Grothe.
- 12-15 May: *The Pledge of Allegiance*,
with Ed Buckner.

Hear! Hear! *Answers in Atheism* at

<www.answersinatheism.net>

JOIN US! - We are live on the internet Thursday evenings from 7 pm to 8 pm EST. Our shows are also available as archived audio files, so you can listen later at any time. Please tune in at www.answersinatheism.net.

The Answers in Atheism crew

Michael Shermer Interview

On our website: www.freeinquirygroup.org

An interview by Michael Shermer of Georgia Purdom, PhD; Research Scientist at Answers in Genesis Creationist Museum in Petersburg, KY. Michael Shermer has a long background in fundamentalist religion, he is the publisher of *The Skeptic* magazine and founder of the Sceptic Society, he holds a doctorate in psychology. His website is www.sceptic.com.

Georgia Purdom has earned a doctorate in molecular genetics from The Ohio State University. She has taught at Nazarene College for six years, and now is a full time researcher at AiG. Their website is www.answersingenesis.org. Dr Purdom comments about her studies: ". . . Darwinism, evolution, it never entered the picture. It wasn't even a major part of the class I took . . ."

The interview ranges over several topics, from evolution to Jesus Christ. It provides considerable insight into the thinking of a highly trained creation scientist. Because it is about seven pages long, it is too large for *FigLeaves*. It will be found in the news section of our website, www.freeinquirygroup.org as a pdf.



2009 SCIENCE BOOK CLUB Schedule - All meetings will be on the 3rd Sunday every month at the downtown Cincinnati Public Library except June 21 (Father's Day). **Room 3A** at 2:30 pm. unless otherwise stated.

April 19 - in Room 3B *Alex & Me: How a Scientist and a Parrot Discovered a Hidden World of Animal Intelligence--and Formed a Deep Bond in the Process* by Irene Pepperberg

May 17 -in Room 3B *The Unnatural History of the Sea* by Callum Roberts

June 14 -in Room 3B or 28 - *Commonsense Rebellion: Taking Back Your Life from Drugs, Shrinks, Corporations, and a World Gone Crazy* by Bruce E. Levine

July 19 - *Why Science* by James S. Trefil

Aug 16 - *Death by Black Hole : and Other Cosmic Quandaries* by Neil deGrasse Tyson

Sept 20 - one of a number of books on complexity theory and applications

Oct. 18 - *Are Universes Thicker Than Blackberries?: Discourses on Godel, Magic Hexagrams, Little Red Riding Hood, and Other Mathematical and Pseudoscientific Topics* by Martin Gardner

Nov 15 - book not yet selected

Dec 20 - one of a number of books on the relation/conflict between science and religion





Dear Freethinkers, I think you need to know about this issue whether or not you read the *Florida Times-Union*. Yesterday's T-U had an article titled, "St. Johns [County] parents file suit over school song." From--Carrie Renwick, First Coast Freethought Society, Inc. http://jacksonville.com/news/metro/2009-03-24/story/st_johns_parents_file_suit_over_school_song

Here are the words to the song:

You place you hand on His Bible
When you swear to tell the truth
His name is on our greatest monuments
And all our money, too.
And when we pledge allegiance
There's no doubt where we stand
There's no separation
We're one nation under him.

In God we still trust
Here in America
He's the one we turn to
When the going gets rough
He is the source of all our strength
The one who watches over us
Here in America
In God we still trust.

Now there are those among us
Who want to push Him out
And erase His name from everything
This country's all about.
From the schoolhouse to the court house
They're silencing His word
Now it's time for all believers
To make our voices heard.

St. John's County parents file suit over school song.

By Paul Pinkham - Wednesday, 25 March 2009

The parents of two third-graders have sued the St. Johns County School Board over a religious-themed song their teacher planned to have their class sing at an end-of-year program. Teaching the song, "In God We Still Trust," amounts to religious indoctrination and interferes with the parents' right to raise their children according to their own beliefs, the lawsuit says.

The district's superintendent pulled the song after receiving a complaint from a parent hours before the lawsuit was

filed last week in federal court, a school district spokeswoman said. But the parents' lawyer said they are still entitled to damages because their children were required to learn the song. They are seeking to bar the school district from the "religious instruction" the song represents.

The song, recorded by country group Diamond Rio, speaks of God's place in American history and urges followers to stand against attempts to secularize society.

"It's a song that preaches a particular religious point of view," said attorney Gray Thomas. Thomas filed the lawsuit March 17, about a month after the students' third-grade class at the Webster School in St. Augustine began practicing "In God We Still Trust" and other songs for a year-end assembly. The students' teacher told them March 11 that anyone who objected to the song would no longer be required to practice it but would be excluded from the entire performance.

The students and parents are identified by initials. In an affidavit filed in response to the lawsuit Friday, school Principal George Leidigh said rehearsals for the show were canceled March 12 until further notice, and the song was formally removed from the program the morning of March 17. "We did that before there had even been a lawsuit filed," said school district spokeswoman Margie Davidson. Additionally, Leidigh said, the song was only practiced once and a recording played three times in the classroom.

School Board attorney David Marsey said in his response to the lawsuit that the issue differs from the battle over school-sponsored prayer because public school choirs historically have been permitted to sing religious songs. Courts have held that a choral curriculum can be expected to include religious songs because a significant percentage of choral music is based on religious themes or texts, Marsey said. "Simply, a public school ... does not endorse religion because its choir sings a Christian song."

Americans Are Not The Only Fundamentalist Idiots.

Stephen Harper, newly elected Conservative-Party Prime Minister of Canada, named Gary Goodyear, an obscure Member of Parliament, to be Minister of Science and Technology. Already this year Goodyear oversaw a series of massive science funding cuts, including zeroing out the Genome program. A chiropractor and acupuncturist with no science background, he is known for opposing same-sex marriage and favoring full legal rights for fertilized eggs. Asked in an interview if he believed in evolution, he objected to being questioned about religion. Later that day he said he believed in evolution. He should have stopped there, but expanded with an example from chiropractic about women's shoes and the spine. He clearly confused genetic inheritance with adaptation of an individual, or perhaps he believes in Lamarckian evolution.

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 20 March 2009



Center For Inquiry Condemns United Nations Resolution On “Defamation Of Religions” UN Human Rights Council Statement Prepares The Way For International Criminalization Of Religiously Offensive Speech

March 26, 2009 (New York)—The United Nations Human Rights Council

has handed another victory to Islamic states in their decade-long push to limit freedom of expression out of “respect” for religious beliefs.

A new Council resolution decries a “campaign of defamation of religions” in which “the media” and “extremist organizations” are “perpetuating stereotypes about certain religions and sacred persons,” and urges UN member states to provide redress “within their respective legal and constitutional systems.” Capitalizing on concerns about racial profiling and discrimination in the era of the war on terror, the language conflates criticism of Islam with anti-Muslim bigotry and seeks to stifle peaceful speech in the name of “dialogue” and “diversity.” Similar resolutions have been passed at the Council since 1999 and by the General Assembly since 2005. The resolution passed with 23 in favor, 11 against, and 13 abstentions, gaining one additional no vote since the last time it was adopted by the Council.

“The concept of ‘defamation of religions’ is both absurd and dangerous.” said Ronald A. Lindsay, CFI’s president and chief executive officer. “Legally speaking, it’s gibberish, and any ban on so-called ‘defamation’ would effectively prevent any critique of religious beliefs or practices.” In the opinion of a broad range of civil society organizations, these pronouncements do nothing but lend legitimacy to the repression of political and religious dissent around the world, particularly in Islamic countries. Pakistan’s blasphemy laws, for example, which carry mandatory sentences of death or life imprisonment, are frequently used against members of the Ahmaddiya community, a peaceful minority Muslim sect.

Through its UN representative, Dr. Austin Dacey, CFI participated in the negotiations over the resolution during the March session of the Council in Geneva, and delivered an oral statement before the plenary meeting on March 24. Most worrisome, according to CFI, is that the present language equates religiously insulting speech with “advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility, or violence,” a category of speech that is prohibited by existing treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which have the force of law.

“Now the argument becomes very awkward for Europe,” said Dacey, “since many European states have laws against

hate speech, Holocaust denial, and even blasphemy (for example, in Austria) that have been upheld by their regional human rights courts. The Islamic states will say they simply want to extend the same protection to all beliefs.”

The Center for Inquiry has submitted a written briefing to the Tenth Session of the Human Rights Council detailing a reading of the case law that separates criticism, satire, and insult from incitement.

The Center for Inquiry/Transnational is a nonprofit, educational, advocacy, and scientific-research think tank based in Amherst, New York. Their research and educational projects focus on three broad areas: religion, ethics, and society; paranormal and fringe-science claims; and medicine and health. The Center’s Web site is www.centerforinquiry.net

Lately, the news has been flooded with reports of citizens arming themselves to the teeth, egged on by right-wing media personalities prophesying doom, the rise of socialism, and that a Marxist dictator now sits in the Oval Office. This frenzy has been spilling from talk radio and television out into the streets for weeks now, and has recently metastasized into acts of outrageous violence. It smells like a new beginning of something this nation has not been forced to endure for nearly a decade.

– William Rivers Pitt in *truthout* (10 April 2009)

Just In Case You Didn’t Know.

... socialists know that Barack Obama is not one of us. Not only is he not a socialist, he may in fact not even be a liberal. Socialists understand him more as a hedge-fund Democrat— one of a generation of neoliberal politicians firmly committed to free-market policies.

The first clear indication that Obama is not, in fact a socialist, is the way his administration is avoiding structural changes to the financial system. Nationalization is simply not in the playbook of Treasury Secretary Timothy Gaithner and his team. They favor costly, temporary measures that can easily be dismantled should the economy stabilize. Socialists support nationalization and see it as a means of creating a banking system that acts like a highly regulated public utility. The banks would then cease to be sinkholes for public funds or financial versions of casinos and would become essential to reenergizing productive sectors of the economy.

– Billy Wharton, editor *Socialist magazine* writing in *Wash. Post Nat’l Weekly* (23-29 March 2009) p. 25

Quote

It was, of course, a lie what you read about my religious convictions, a lie which is being systematically repeated. I do not believe in a personal God.

– Albert Einstein

Unquote

www.gofigger.org



Is The Universe Designed For Life?

In 2000 Sir John Templeton had an epiphany; instead of “spiritual progress,” the Templeton Prize would henceforth be given for “spiritual discoveries.” The next six winners were all physicists who justified their spirituality by the anthropic principle and the moral law. The moral law states that people know right from wrong. Darwinians would not disagree; knowledge of right and wrong has an obvious survival value for social animals. It’s an instinct wired into our brains by natural selection. Catholic theologians would say the knowledge of right and wrong is planted in our hearts by the Holy Ghost.

The anthropic principle, is another matter, it contends that the universe is designed for life. If so, it’s a shockingly inefficient design; vast regions of the universe are clearly unsuited to life as we know it. Stated another way, the anthropic principle merely says that “if things were different, things would not be the way things are.” Everything we have learned tells us that there is no plan. We have some control over our life, but no clear instructions on what to do with it.

- *What’s New* by Robert L. Park, 6 March 2009

Pope Benedict Says: “Abstinence Works For Him.”

An editorial in today’s *Lancet* points out that, “When any influential person, be it a religious or political figure, makes a statement that could devastate the health of millions of people they should retract it.” It was, of course, a reference to the Pop’s claim, made during his trip to Africa, that condoms may exacerbate the spread of AIDS. It was an egregious example of what Paul Tillich labeled “sacred dishonesty,” in which the facts are revised to support a supposedly worthy conclusion. In fact, this was “sacred-dishonesty squared” the Pope’s real concern was not the spread of AIDS, but the spread off birth control. As terrible as AIDS is, the population explosion in Africa causes far more suffering, and it will only grow worse. The Pope preaches abstinence to prevent the spread of AIDS. But our sex drive was shaped by Darwinian evolution to ensure procreation. It works extraordinarily well, and manifests itself even within the Church. Against it, the gods themselves contend in vain.

- *What’s New* by Robert L. Park, 27 March 2009

Georgia Senate Prohibits Stem Cell Reseach.

In a strict party-line vote, all 34 Republican Senators voted to ban embryonic stem cell research and therapeutic cloning in Georgia, and all 22 Democrats voted against the ban. An initial version of the bill defining an in vitro fertilized egg as a person was dropped along with criminal penalties. The final bill states that embryos can’t be created in vitro for the purpose of generating new stem cell lines.

- *What’s New* by Robert L. Park, 13 March 2009



A Federal Judge Gives The FDA a Push On Plan B:

Before the new FDA Commissioner, Margaret Hamburg, had a chance to change the 18-or-older policy on over-the-counter access to the morning-after contraceptive, a federal judge in NY laid out the overwhelming evidence that the policy dictated by FDA Commissioner Andrew von Eschenbach, a Bush family friend, was not based on science.

Time is of the essence in taking Plan B, and the last thing we need is young women becoming mothers at an age when they should be getting an education and exploring their potential. We should also recognize the contribution of former Assistant FDA Commissioner Susan Wood who resigned to call attention to the case.

- *What’s New* by Robert L. Park, 27 March 2009

Texas Creation:

“Somebody’s gotta stand up to experts.” Thus spake Don McLeroy, the dentist who chairs The Texas Board of Education which met this week to set new science standards. The issue that dominated the meeting was creationism. The experts lost. The tactic was to insert ambiguities that could be construed as calling for creationism to be taught. Creationists will use that to lobby textbook publishers. The publishers just want to sell books and Texas is a big market. McLeroy says he believes the sudden appearance of fossils supports the creationist view. What fossils? Texas used to float on a fossil ocean of oil. It has disappeared a lot faster than it formed.

- *What’s New* by Robert L. Park, 3 April 2009

Consider The Stem Cell Issue.

The decision by President Obama to lift restrictions on federal funding of human embryonic stem cell research will be announced on Monday. Extracting a stem cell kills the day-old embryo from which it’s taken, but these are embryos that are already slated to die. They’re left over from in vitro fertilization, raising the question of when we become a person. After eight years of frustration, Obama’s executive order could put America back in the lead in the treatment of many cruel diseases, particularly when combined with stimulus funding.

- *What’s New* by Robert L. Park, 6 March 2009

All We Need Now Are Liars That Stink.

Homeland Security is soliciting sources to look (or sniff) into human odor as an indicator of deception. It’s not totally crazy. Sweat due to nervousness comes from different glands than sweat due to exertion, and has a stronger odor. But this has the same flaw as the polygraph. It’s not clear whether liars or innocents will be more nervous.

- *What’s New* by Robert L. Park, 13 March 2009



A Faith From Francophone Switzerland.

Barack Obama est en train de réaliser quelque chose de rare, stupéfiant même, . . . voilà un politicien qui, une fois élu, applique la politique qu'il avait promise! Au milieu des banques qui tanguent et de l'industrie qui déprime, il investit dans les écoles et le système de santé pour améliorer l'égalité des chances aux Etats-Unis.

Barack Obama is in the process of accomplishing something rare - even stupefying, . . . Here's a politician who, once elected, effects the policies he had promised! In the midst of tottering banks and depressed industry, he is investing in the school and the health care system to improve equality of opportunity in the United States.

- Jean-Claude Péclet in *Le Temps* (Geneva) 19 March 2009



A True Australian Ghost Story.

John Bradford, a Sydney University student, was on the side of the road hitch hiking on a very dark night and in the midst of a storm. The night was rolling on and no car went by. The storm was so strong he could hardly see a few feet ahead of him. Suddenly he saw a car slowly coming towards him and it stopped. John, desperate for shelter and without thinking about it, got in the car and closed the door, then realized there was nobody behind

the wheel and the engine wasn't on! The car started moving slowly. John looked at the road and saw a curve approaching. Scared, he started to pray, begging for his life.

Then, just before the car hit the curve, a hand appeared through the window and turned the wheel. John, paralyzed with terror, watched how the hand appeared out of the darkness every time they came to a curve. Soon, John saw the lights of a pub down the road so, gathering his courage, he jumped out of the car and ran toward it. Wet and out of breath, he rushed inside and asked for two shots of tequila. He then started telling everybody about the horrible experience he went through

A silence enveloped everyone when they realized he was crying and ... he wasn't drunk. About 15 minutes later, two guys walked into the same pub. They were also wet and out of breath. Looking around and seeing John Bradford sobbing at the bar, one said to the other, "Look, Bruce ... there's the bloody idiot that got in the car while we were pushing it."

Quote

The "atheism is a faith position too" competition

Yes, it's the old mantra, "atheism is a faith position too".

In "On a Mission," *Education Guardian*, May 8th, Joanna Moorhead quotes head teacher Terry Boatwright (head of a religious school) as saying "Even people who don't believe in God have a faith - they have faith that God doesn't exist. People say: How dare you push your faith at young people? But a head who doesn't believe is still a head with faith."

So that's why it's ok for Boatwright to "push" his faith at kids.

Jeez, "atheism is a faith position too" has really entered the zeitgeist. It seems to crop up almost weekly in the press now. Where's it coming from? The idea that science is also based on "faith" seems to be behind a lot of it. Who can find the most irritating, sinister or downright funny use of this ever-popular myth? I'll send the winner a signed (if desired) paperback copy of *The War For Children's Minds* (published July).

Posted by Stephen Law

If atheism is a faith, not collecting stamps is a hobby.

Unquote

Where Is This Place?

Dubbed the Personhood bill, SF 1572 would grant every fertilized egg in the state full rights, and any intentional death of that fertilized egg would constitute murder. It's already passed the North Dakota House and will be considered by an anti-abortion Senate.

The bill reads, "The state shall naturalize all preborn persons and shall afford to them all the privileges and immunities of state citizenship guaranteed in ... the Constitution of North Dakota."

The one privilege that North Dakota plans to deny fertilized eggs? "The state is not required to include preborn children in state and local censuses," the bill reads. But while the bill clarifies how to count fertilized eggs and fetuses for the census, it leaves many more questions open.

"It's possible that this bill would could result in criminal prosecution for women who have a miscarriage," said Tim Stanley, a representative of Planned Parenthood. "Under this language a miscarriage could be investigated for manslaughter or reckless abandonment." Stanley also pointed to North Dakota law that makes it illegal for two people to ride a bike built for one. If the Personhood bill passed, a pregnant woman could not legally ride a bike.

President Obama Voids Anti-Abortion Policy And The "Conscience Rule"

It must go through a 30-day period of public comment, but the Obama administration quietly rescinded job protection for health workers who refuse to provide care they find objectionable. The rule was an IED planted by Bush after Obama won the election. Aimed at abortion, the rule allowed health workers to refuse to participate in care that violates their personal beliefs.

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 6 March 2009



Barna Survey, What Americans Believe

Barna Survey examines what Americans believe, and who has a “biblical worldview” according to their definition. Only a minority of Americans accept the primitive tenets of the fundamentalists. In fact some of these tenets are contrary to the teachings of Catholic and liberal protestant churches. In contrast other claims may be acceptable to Muslim and Jewish believers.

Defining Terms

For the purposes of the survey, a “biblical worldview” was defined as, (with percent accepting):

1. believing that absolute moral truth exists; (34 %)
2. the Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches; (50 %)
3. Satan is considered to be a real being or force, not merely symbolic; (27 %)
4. a person cannot earn their way into Heaven by trying to be good or do good works; (28 %)
5. Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth; (40 %) and
6. God is the all-knowing, all-powerful creator of the world who still rules the universe today.(70 %)

In the research, anyone who held all of those beliefs was said to have a biblical worldview.

National Results

Overall, the current research revealed that only 9% of all American adults have a biblical worldview. The same questions were asked of respondents in national surveys by Barna in 1995, 2000 and 2005. The results indicate that the percentage of adults with a biblical worldview, as defined above, has remained unchanged for more than a decade.

Differences among Demographic Segments

The research data showed that one pattern emerged loud and clear: young adults rarely possess a biblical worldview. The current study found that less than one-half of one percent of adults in the 18 to 23 age group B have a biblical worldview, compared to about one out of every nine older adults.

Other groups that possess a below average likelihood of having a biblical worldview included people who describe themselves as liberal on social and political matters (also less than one-half of one percent); Catholics (2%); Democrats (4%) and residents of the Northeast (4%).

Among the subgroups of respondents that the survey explored was one defined by those who said “they have made a personal to commitment to Jesus Christ that is important in their life today and that they are certain that they will go to Heaven after they die only because they confessed their sins and accepted Christ as their savior.” Labeled “born again Christians,” the study discovered that they were twice as likely

as the average adult to possess a biblical worldview. However, that meant that even among born again Christians, less than one out of every five (19%) had such an outlook on life.

Notice that the Barna definition of “born again” differs from ARIS (American Religious Identification Survey) who simply ask respondents wether they consider themselves born again or Evangelical. ARIS finds 34 percent accept this label. ¶

The Respectable Burgher On *The Higher Criticism*

by Thomas Hardy

Since Reverend Doctors now declare
 That clerks and people must prepare
 To doubt if Adam ever were;
 To hold the flood a local scare;
 To argue, though with stolid stare,
 That everything had happened ere,
 The prophets to its happening sware;
 That David was no giant-slayer,
 Nor one to call a God-obeyer
 In certain details we would spare,
 But rather was a debonair
 Shrewd bandit, skilled as banjo-player:
 That Solomon sang the fleshly Fair,
 And gave the Church no thought whate'er,
 That Esther with her royal wear,
 And Mordecai, the son of Jair,
 And Joshua's triumphs, Job's despair,
 And Balaam's ass's bitter blare;
 Nebuchadnezzar's furnace-flare,
 And Daniel and the den affair,
 And other stories rich and rare,
 Were writ to make old doctrine wear
 Something of a romantic air:
 That the Nain widow's only heir,
 And Lazarus with cadaverous glare
 (As done in oils by Piombo's care)
 Did not return from Sheol's lair:
 That Jael set a findish snare,
 That Pontius Pilate acted square,
 That never a sword cut Malchus' ear;
 And (but for shame I must forbear)
 That — — did not reappear!...
 — Since thus they hint, nor turn a hair,
 All churchgoing will I forswear,
 And sit on Sundays in my chair,
 And read that moderate man Voltaire.



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Quote

You always wanted to know,
just what is a *Quantum Jump*.

...an electron in the atomic solar system would remain stable only in certain specific orbits, namely those for which its angular momentum is an integral multiple of Planck's constant h . Moreover, when an electron makes a jump from an orbit of energy E_1 down to one of lower energy E_2 it emits electromagnetic radiation whose frequency f is connected to the energy loss $E = E_1 - E_2$ of the atom by Planck's relation $E = hf$. (Conversely, an atom of energy E_2 on which radiation of that same frequency shines will absorb it and jump to the energy E_1 .) In the orbit of lowest energy, called its ground state, the atom remains stable forever.

– Roger G. Newton, *From Clockwork to Crapshoot: a history of physics* (2007) p. 224

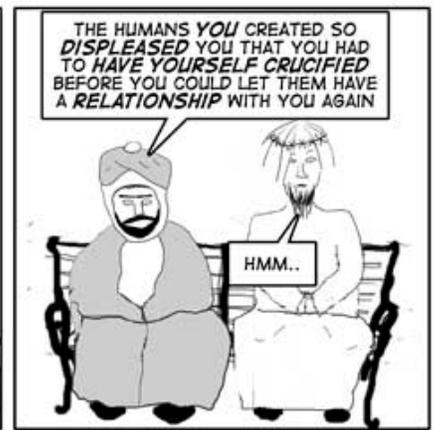
Unquote

Quote

The nub of the problem, I suppose, is that atheists make poor proselytizers; there are, after all, no Brownie points in heaven to be earned for bringing a soul away from Jesus. All one has to offer a potential convert is a sharpened sense of his own intellectual self-sufficiency and a glimpse of his own courage in coming to terms with the fact that the universe owes him no favors. It may well be that on a statistical basis, evolution has made us far too willing to place our trust in illusions and to take comfort in self-deceit. Sincere atheism might never be more than a minority taste, and a tiny minority at that. That wouldn't vitiate the arguments Dawkins and countless others have offered scorning the cosmic Big Brother, but it would drastically curtail their wholehearted acceptance.

– Norman Levitt in a review of *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins in *eSkeptic* (31 January 2007)

Unquote



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Superstition: Belief in the Age of Science
 by Robert L. Park
 (Princeton University Press, 2008)

The author of *Voodoo Science* has done it again. In a dozen short chapters he takes just about every major modern superstition apart. A very clear and succinct writer, Bob Park's individual chapters read very much like his weekly *What's New* column, and much of the material has appeared in that place.

Up front he takes apart religion by considering how any scientist can remain religious. He describes several famous scientists, including Stephen Jay Gould and his "non-overlapping magisteria" proposition. It comes down to compartmentalizing the mind into a reality side and religion. Park goes on to look at prayer and placebos, giving us at the same time a precis of the recent research on the "science" of prayer and other efforts to confirm the soul, a life or existence after death, as well as attempts to make a beneficent god compatible with the Indian Ocean Tsunami, the Katarina Hurricane, and other natural events and disasters. Park spends a chapter on evolution, creation, "intelligent design," and a place named Dover. He concludes, (p. 42)

The point of all this is that science has moved far beyond any question of the reality of evolution. To argue against Darwinism now would be like claiming the New World does not exist because it doesn't show up on maps drawn before the voyage of Columbus. It's past time for the world to move on, but of course it hasn't.

In another chapter, we do not get the moral law from the Ten Commandments in the Hebrew Bible. Research seems to show that evolution developed our ethic of reciprocity, as well as the idea of doing unto others. Even the great apes show a simple ethic of this kind.

In the chapter on "The New Age" we are informed about how to become a millionaire by channeling a great spirit or a whole wagon load of them. Park also explains how the *amygdalae* work, that part of the brain which almost from the moment of birth allows us to process input from the senses, and generates interpretations which

will form beliefs. Many of the beliefs thus formed are false, that is mere superstitions. Charlatans like Deepak Chopra and innocents like Oprah spread these superstitions about, yet Norman Vincent Peale had the similar ideas in a best-seller back in 1952.

There is something hilarious about Park, a physicist, who really knows what a "quantum jump" is, explaining to us that quantum mysticism isn't. And yes, Heisenberg was certain, Schrödinger's cat never existed, and collapsing reality is very real but trivial. Just for the record, quantum jumps are very, very small; they refer to electrons moving about within the atom.

Park spends a number of chapters on medicine. Homeopathy, which is quackery protected under American law, comes in for an explanation. Why and how was it invented and became legal in this country. We learn that snake oil is, or was, raw petroleum used by the Snake Indian tribe as a medicine. "The belief that primitive or ancient societies possessed magical cures unknown to modern science" is a "persistent and irrational medical superstition." (p. 151) The facts are, the federal Office of Alternative Medicine spends millions and it does slowly test traditional herbal medicines. And, you can guess it, they don't work, ephedra, St. John's wort, ginkgo and many of these nostrums do not effect what is claimed for them.

In the last chapter Park takes on the future. Between global warming, population growth to seven billion, the end of cheap energy, and development of all peoples to modern levels of resource use we will face the Malthusian final problem. Science is our only means of continuing to build a viable world. But as long as superstition rules most of mankind, and women remain in bondage to religious oppression, basic social reforms to restrain population growth will not be made. ". . . knowledge did not come from sacred texts, or the revelations of prophets. Science is the only way of knowing everything else is just superstition."(p. 215). - Wolf Roder ☼

Quote
 "You have scruples? About the Anglican Prayer Book?"
 "Well, I could manage few if necessary. When I was in the Army I used to be converted rather frequently, to take advantage of the religious holidays. Jew for Yom Kippur, Catholic for the Assumption, and when we were in North Africa, Muslim for Ramadan. You can easily triple your leave that way. But with advancing years a certain scepticism overtakes one."
 - Laurence Lafore, *The Pride of the Parthenon*, NY (1962)

Unquote



May 2009 Potluck
Tuesday May 12, 2009



April Meeting
Tuesday Apr. 28 2009, 7:00 PM



FIG Leaves
P.O. Box 53174
Cincinnati, OH 45253

FIG

Our Purpose

The Free Inquiry Group, Inc. (FIG) is a non-profit organization founded in 1991. FIG is allied with the Council for Secular Humanism as well as an affiliate of the American Humanist Association and of the American Atheists.

Though most of our members are secular humanists, we welcome to our meetings anyone interested in learning about or furthering our purpose.



To foster a community of secular humanists dedicated to improving the human condition through rational inquiry and creative thinking unfettered by superstition, religion, or any form of dogma.

In accordance with our purpose, we have established the following goals:

- To provide a forum for intelligent exchange of ideas for those seeking fulfillment in an ethical secular life.
- To develop through open discussion the moral basis of a secular society and encourage ethical practices within our own membership and the community at large.
- To inform the public regarding secular alternatives to supernatural interpretations of the human condition.
- To support and defend the principles of democracy, free speech, and separation of church and state as expressed in the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights.

For more information, write the Free Inquiry Group at the address above, e-mail fignotes at (@) gofigger.org, or visit our web site at gofigger.org or freeinquirygroup.org.