

FIG LEAVES

Volume 19 Issue 8

August 2010

August FIG Picnic:

Sunday, August 29, 2010 - 3:00 PM

Bryan Sellers has graciously agreed to be our host for our FIG Picnic this year. FIG will provide the grillable items such as hamburgers, hot dogs, and vegeburgers, etc. The rest will be potluck. Drinks are - bring your own.

Please RSVP to welte@fuse.net by August 27th at the latest.

The sooner the better so we can plan for the grillable items.

Please indicate in your RSVP what type of dish you would like to bring. Also indicate if you would be willing to come early for set up or stay late to help clean up.

Mapquest Link:

<http://www.mapquest.com/maps?city=Cincinnati&state=OH&address=8895+Wuest+Rd&z-icode=45251-5847&country=US&latitude=39.23386&longitude=-84.60971&geocode=ADDRESS>



September FIG Meeting: Tuesday, Sept. 28 at 7:00 pm

A Night at the Observatory

Meet at the Cincinnati Observatory -
3489 Observatory Place
Cincinnati, OH 45208

In September, FIG will visit the Cincinnati Observatory for a tour of the building and an astronomy lesson. Dean Regas, Outreach Astronomer, will lead the tour and provide the history of the Cincinnati Observatory, which was originally established in 1842. Dean will also answer questions about Is Pluto a planet?, why do people think comets will hit the Earth in 2012, and many other interesting perspectives on astronomy. After the tour, FIG members will be instructed in the constellations most visible and provided an opportunity to look through the telescopes.

Cost: \$3 for FIG Members, \$6 for Non-FIG Members (Regular Adult Price for an Observatory Tour is \$6)

Inside

Page

July Meeting Report.....	2
Things To Do, Things To See.....	3
Science Book Club.....	4
In The News.....	5
Poem:From The Disputation by Heinrich Heine	5
All Religions Equally Wrong, But Not In Same Ways by Tom Flynn	5
Mosque is Insensitive, So Are Pandering Politicians by Herb Silverman.....	6
<i>The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Non-Believer</i> Edited by Christopher Hitchens Book Review by Kerry Walters (on Amazon.com).....	7

Events

FIG Community Dinner

Tuesday, Aug. 10, 2010, 6:30-PM
Bronte Bistro, 2692 Madison Rd.
Cincinnati, OH 45208

**RSVP by Aug. 08, to John Welte at
Welte@fuse.net.**

August Summer Picnic

Sunday, August 29, 2010
3:00 PM

FIG Community Dinner

Tuesday, Sept 14, 2010, 6:30-PM
Bronte Bistro, 2692 Madison Rd.
Cincinnati, OH 45208

**RSVP by Sept. 12, to John Welte at
Welte@fuse.net.**

September Meeting

Tuesday, Sept. 28, 2010, 7:00 PM
Cincinnati Observatory -
3489 Observatory Place
Cincinnati, OH 45208



July Meeting/Outing

A Workshop About Inclusion Issues: Exploring The Roots Of Prejudice

Presented by Shawn Jeffers

For the July meeting, FIG member, Shawn Jeffers, led an interactive workshop looking at inclusion issues and exploring awareness of differences. He started by sharing that these activities come from the work he engages in with *Bridges for a Just Community*, a human relations non-profit in Cincinnati. The activities were adapted to provide FIG members an opportunity to think about the “Three I’s of Awareness”- Internal, Interpersonal, and Institutional.



Shawn also framed the presentation by exploring the differences between “Diversity Training” and “Equity Leadership”. Many individuals have experienced Diversity Training - it is a workshop done to the participants to encourage a culture of compliance. You need to treat people nice, etc. Equity Leadership, is a practice initiated by *Bridges*, that explores how all individuals within an organization have the ability to lead and in turn create a culture of inclusion. An overarching philosophy is that Diversity Happens; Inclusion is a choice. As evidence of this, Edwin Kagin shared an experience when he was invited to attend a graduate-level social work class at the University of Louisville that was exploring issues of diversity. Edwin was invited to talk about Camp Quest, the secular summer camp, and several of the students expressed disdain for the idea and thought it was terrible to raise children without religion. Edwin said he couldn’t believe such a reaction among social workers taking a diversity class, so it was evident they were presenting the students with information but not challenging the students to think about new perspectives or strategies for inclusion.

The first activity was the Silent Interview. Shawn inquired, “What are the best practices for going to a job interview?” Answers ranged from dressing up to firm handshake and eye contact to researching the company before hand so you would be able to speak intelligently about the organization. In the silent interview, individuals formed groups of three and each member was handed a list of twelve questions. In silence, they were charged with answering the questions exactly how they thought the person sitting next to them would answer the questions. Three minutes were provided for that portion. After recording the answers, members shared their responses. The questions ranged from “What kind of car does this person really want to drive” to “What religion did this person grow up?” to “How many siblings does this person have and what is their position in the birth order”.

In the sharing portion, the “interviewer” would read what he or she wrote and check to see if it was correct. The idea being that we make assumptions every day about countless number of things, but how often do we ever check those assumptions?



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



This was an opportunity to check twelve assumptions and score how well each of us performed. The conversation turned to exploring what information you used in making those assumptions. Participants used clues based on clothing, past interactions, and also, sometimes when they didn't know an answer put down what they themselves



THINGS TO DO....

THINGS TO SEE...



would have wanted for the answer. Shawn shared one of the key messages on this section by distinguishing between the golden rule and the platinum rule. The golden rule is “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” The platinum rule is “treat others how *they* want to be treated.” And in

New Meetup for The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup Group!

What: Skepticon III: Annual Skeptic Meeting

When: Friday, November 19, 2010 9:00 AM

Where: Missouri State University

901 South National Avenue

Springfield, MO 65897

order to live the platinum rule, individuals have to ask questions, rather than rely on assumptions about how people want to be treated.

After silent interview, a Cultural Life Map was presented – it has six sections looking at gender, ability, class, race, sexual orientation and religion. For each section, participants were asked to think of the first time they were aware of the differences within each of those sections. For instance for the gender section, the prompt read

When I became aware of the differences between the genders and messages I received about the roles associated with mine. What age were you? What Messages did you receive? What were your behaviors as a result?

Individuals took turns sharing stories and talking about how much we are influenced by our upbringing and exposure to people with different beliefs and backgrounds from themselves.

In concluding the workshop, Shawn shared that a major takeaway is “Your world view is not *the* worldview, it is just that, *your* world view” and understanding that everybody has a different lens through which they view the world. Also, that understanding helps us see the value in others and the perspectives they bring to the table.



Skepticon is an annual skeptics convention held in Springfield, Missouri and taking place from November 19 to November 21st. This event will be featuring a long list of big names from both the skeptic and atheist movements. Already confirmed speakers include James “The Amazing” Randi, Joe Nickell, PZ Myers, D.J. Grothe, Dan Barker, Rebecca Watson, Victor Stenger, Richard Carrier, John Corvino, J.T. Eberhard, David Fitzgerald, Debbie Goddard, Amanda Marcotte, Brother Sam Singleton. More info on speakers can be found here: <http://skepticon.org/speakers/>

Further information about the conference can be found at: <http://www.skepticon.org/>

It is important to register early for this conference if you plan on attending, registration is FREE and can be done here: <http://www.skepticon.org/register.php>

Special hotel pricing can be found here: <http://skepticon.org/about/hotel.php>

This is a rare opportunity to see many of the biggest names in atheism for free and Travis should be able to arrange transportation to and from the airport for those who would like to fly. Please register on the skepticon page now if you are considering attending and Travis will publish further updates about this conference as it is announced. RSVP to this Meetup: <http://www.meetup.com/cincinnatiatheists/calendar/14162825/>



Quote

The god of the Old Testament is like a computer; lots of rigid rules, no mercy, and never does what you ask it.

Unquote



THINGS TO DO....

THINGS TO SEE...



Invitation to Final Exit Network Reception

Judy Snyderman, the Treasurer of the Final Exit Network, has asked me to pass on the attached invitation. Judy has spoken to FIG in the past.

Dear Friends

On Sunday, August 8, I am having a Light Supper Reception at my house from 4-7 pm. The purpose is to invite greater Cincinnati area members of Final Exit Network to get to know each other and to give others who might be interested a chance to meet us.

I hope you will come and bring any friends that are interested in what is happening in the right-to-die movement and who believe that the having the choice of a death with dignity is the ultimate human right of the 21st century.

There will be no pressure on anyone to join or donate money. This is a purely social get together. I hope you can come. Please let me know whether or not you can make it and how many others you will be bringing with you so I can plan appropriately. You can reach me at 513-573-9787, or mmjudy@cinci.rr.com

-- Judy Snyderman

By way of background, you will recall that four representatives of the Final Exit Network were arrested in February, 2009, for allegedly assisting in the suicide of a cancer patient in Cummings, Georgia. At that time, while she was away on vacation, Judy's home was thoroughly searched and her computer confiscated. Judy will bring us up to date on this situation, as well as other relevant matters.

Judy's address is 3823 Sandtrap Circle, Mason, OH 45040. -- Joe Levee

Announcing a new Meetup for The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup Group!

What: *ScopeOut Telescope Fair*

When: Saturday, **September 11, 2010, 1:00 PM**

Where: Cincinnati Observatory, 3489 Observatory Place, Cincinnati, OH

Meetup Description:

Come out and celebrate Science at the annual "Scope-Out" event at the Cincinnati Observatory. This is a telescope and astronomy education fair and the year's biggest held event at the Observatory Center.

This event lasts from 1pm to 10pm officially though many stay late into the night to look through the many telescopes set up here. During the day there is Solar viewing, astronomy related displays and vendors, there are also historical tours of the Observatory campus. In the evening there will be a dinner and a keynote lecture (Yet to be announced.) Once night falls they open the telescopes for nighttime viewing.

There is a charge of \$6 for adults and \$4 for kids for this event that goes to help keep the The Cincinnati Observatory Center open as a valuable resource for our city.

Learn more here: <http://www.meetup.com/cincinnati-atheists/calendar/13791141>

Science Book Club 2010 schedule

All meetings on 3rd Sunday of each month at 2:30 in room 3A of downtown Main Public Library unless otherwise noted.

**** Note September change!**

Aug 15 - *Unscientific America* ; Chris Mooney

****Sept 19 - *Darwin's Armada: Four Voyages and the Battle for the Theory of Evolution*; Iain McCalman.**

We will NOT be discussing Robert Ornstein's *The Evolution of Consciousness*

Oct 17 - *The Roving Mind*; Isaac Asimov

Nov 21- *The Little Green Book of Awakening*; James George

Dec 19 - *Physics For Future Presidents: The Science Behind The Headlines*; Richard A. Muller





The Relics of Saint Galileo are now on display.



We expect to find macabre relics of saints in centuries-old cathedrals, but some of Galileo's parts, chopped off his remains a century after his death, now reside in a new Galileo Museum in Florence. The relics will no doubt draw an audience that would not normally be interested in

Galileo's sort of truth. The Galileo Museum made the front page of the *New York Times* this morning in an article by Rachel Donadio. Galileo was devout, but in the 16th century, who was not? In his early years Galileo's family had its own pew in the cathedral in Pisa. To occupy his mind on Sunday mornings, young Galileo timed the slow swings of the bronze chandelier that hung from the cathedral Dome, set in motion by the movement of air. Using his pulse as a clock, he found the period to be almost independent of the amplitude. Countless students have since been called on to explain his observation in their first physics exam. Galileo's observations would someday shake the foundations of the Church.

– *What's New* by Robert Park, 23 July 2010

All Religions Equally Wrong, But Not In Same Ways

by Tom Flynn; 6 July 2010

executive director of the Council for Secular Humanism and editor of its magazine *Free Inquiry*

Q: Are all religions the same? The Dalai Lama, who just celebrated his 75th birthday, often refers to the 'oneness' of all religions, the idea that all religions preach the same message of love, tolerance and compassion. Historians Karen Armstrong and Huston Smith agree that major faiths are more alike than not. But in his new book "God is not One," religion scholar and On Faith panelist Steve Prothero says views by the Dalai Lama, Armstrong and Smith that all religions "are different paths to the same God" is untrue, disrespectful and dangerous. Who's right? Why?

I've always found the idea that all faiths are one transparently fatuous. Christianity with its personal God is obviously unlike Eastern traditions in which a nameless impersonal force ensures that each soul is reincarnated in accord with its desert in past lives. Traditional Christian doctrine is no less different from the historic Mormon teaching that God is not a transcendental being, but was once a man who by moral excellence ascended to the role of deity over this universe (of which there are implicitly companions without number -- hmm, maybe Joseph Smith received a revelation about quantum mechanics). Even within Christian tradition we see strands of multiple, fundamentally incompatible religions: Christians who accept predestination, Christians who stress salvation by works, and Christians who stress salvation by right belief are plainly adherents to a single creed by linguistic convention alone. And this is only scratching the surface.

As a secular humanist, I hold that all religions are human creations. Though I view them therefore as all equally wrong, they are anything but equal in the abundant diversity of concepts each has developed. After all, if groups of people are going to make up fanciful accounts of how the next world works, and do so without the pesky requirement to adhere to evidence -- and usually (historically at least) without much knowledge of how other groups have guessed differently -- then a madcap cornucopia of mutually incompatible concep-



From: *The Disputation*

by Heinrich Heine (1797-1856)

He explains that in the Godhead
There are three persons – three –
Who, however, when convenient
Turn into a Unity.



This is your Trinity mystery
We'll discuss some other season,
When the moon's in its first quarter
And I'm less disposed to reason

Than in daytime's sober brightness
Where the sunlight's plain to see,
When the Rule of Three holds sway
In its dry reality.

It's a mystery that only
Can be grasped if you dispense
With the reasons mental shackles
And the prison house of sense.



tions is just what we should expect. Unless there actually is an underlying transcendental order which all faiths strive to see, however darkly. what else should anyone hope for?

On my view, it disrespects human imagination to suppose that every time a human community sits down to guess the answers to the "big questions," it must end at the same place where every other community of guessers did. Let's give credit where credit is due: human creativity is capable of spinning an infinite variety of answers to the questions for which, sad to say, there seem to be no answers -- and that, in turn, seems to be just what human beings have spent the past several millennia doing. ☚



Mosque Is Insensitive; So Are Pandering Politicians

By Herb Silverman; 19 July 2010
Silverman is Founder and President of the Secular Coalition for America, and Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at the College of Charleston

The New York City community board endorsed the Cordoba House, a community center and mosque planned for construction near Ground Zero. Significant opposition has emerged against the project. Sarah Palin even weighed in this weekend, tweeting, "Peace-seeking Muslims, pls understand, Ground Zero mosque is UNNECESSARY provocation; it stabs hearts. Pls reject it in interest of healing."

Should there be a mosque near Ground Zero?

The first featured article I saw on Monday, July 19 was about Alvin Greene, Democratic candidate for senator in my home state of South Carolina. He filled his first major campaign speech with traditional clichés, and closed with a comment that Republican Sarah Palin would likely support: "Let's reclaim our country from the terrorists and the communists." The second featured article I saw on that same day was about Sarah Palin, who tweeted that Muslims shouldn't be so provocative as to push their religious beliefs in a place that would upset many Americans.

A more interesting question to me than placement of a mosque near Ground Zero is why an inordinate amount of publicity is given to a candidate who's certain to lose and to a governor who quit, both of whom spew

platitudes along with provocative remarks. What's next, a bipartisan celebrity ticket featuring Palin-Greene or Greene-Palin?

Nonetheless, a stopped watch and Sarah Palin are occasionally right, but only for a brief period of time. I agree with Palin that the idea of building a mosque at Ground Zero is insensitive, just as was the Carmelite nuns erection of a cross and convent on the edge of the former Nazi death camp at Auschwitz. (Subsequently, in an effort to improve relations between Roman Catholics and Jews, the convent was moved.)

Still, I support the right of American Muslims to build a mosque near Ground Zero. Americans have the right to worship or not worship wherever they please. That's what helps keep our secular democracy from becoming a theocracy. The extent to which religious leaders wish to show sensitivity to others with different beliefs is up to those leaders. Muslims are exercising their Constitutional rights when they build mosques on private property, which is better than some pandering politicians who threaten religious liberty for all when they promote placing overtly religious symbols on government buildings.

I'm thrilled to live in a country that has both freedom of religion and freedom of the press. I'm also happy that I have the free speech right to criticize both religion and the press. I've certainly done my share of criticizing religion, and plan to continue doing it when appropriate. And today I am most perturbed about a press that often ignores important issues addressed by knowledgeable people and instead zeroes in on celebrities like Alvin Greene and Sarah Palin.

It's my right to be bothered by this, it's the right of others to be bothered by the potential mosque at Ground Zero, and it's absolutely the right of American Muslims to build it. Observing Constitutional principles may be bothersome, but that's a small price to pay for the liberties our Constitution guarantees. ☚



.....
Quote

 It is a curious thing that every creed promises a
 paradise which will be absolutely uninhabitable for
 anyone of civilized taste.

 - Evelyn Waugh

Unquote



BOOK REVIEW

The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever
edited by Christopher Hitchens
(Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2007)
review by Kerry Walters (on Amazon.com)

It's difficult to figure out what Christopher Hitchens means when he subtitles this collection "Essential" Readings for the Nonbeliever. If by "essential" he means the most rigorous but still accessible defenses of atheism available, the book is mistitled. There's actually very little here that's intellectually meaty, although much of it is tasty finger food. Some of the pieces are more rhetorical broadsides than anything else (for example, Emma Goldman's "Philosophy of Atheism," Mencken's "Memorial Service," Dawkins' "Gerin Oil" and "Atheists for Jesus," and Penn Jillette's "There Is No God"). Moreover, even when Hitchens does include selections from especially rigorous thinkers, they tend to focus on religion rather than theism (the selections from Hobbes and Sagan especially illustrate this, as does the flip and interminable one from Bertrand Russell). But to give Hitchens his due, other selections are strong (Carl van Doren's "Why I Am an Unbeliever," Dawkins' "Why There Almost Certainly Is No God," Dennett's "A Working Definition of Religion," and Steven Weinberg's "What About God?").

If, however, by "essential" Hitchens means some of the best known polemics against God-belief, then the title is a bit more accurate (although one wonders why influential polemical defenders of atheism such as Baron d'Holbach, Robert Ingersoll, Mikhail Bakunin, Vladimir Lenin, or Mao Tse Tung didn't make the cut). Most of the essays don't argue so much as insist, usually in stark binary terms, that atheism is right and theism is perniciously wrong. Many of them, as I've already mentioned, tend to conflate religion with God-belief, going after the former and neglecting the latter. And almost all of them, while guaranteed to tickle the atheist and infuriate an insecure theist, fail to provide good arguments for their positions. But then this isn't surprising, given that the editor of the collection extraordinarily compares August-

tine, Luther, Calvin, and Aquinas to Osama bin Laden in his entertaining but injudicious introduction (p. xxiv). When it comes to religious belief, Hitchens is an angry bulldog, and bulldogs rarely possess subtlety.

Readers who wish to move beyond essential polemics to serious arguments might consider The Cambridge Companion to Atheism, The Impossibility of God, and The Improbability of God, all edited by Michael Martin. S. T. Joshi is the editor of Atheism, a collection of essays (many of which Hitchens seems to have lifted wholecloth for The Portable essays) are also worth examining. Louise Antony's Philosophers Without God is a well-written and insightful collection. George Smith's Atheism: The Case Against God is a rigorous defense of atheism. Like Joshi's anthology, though, Smith's book focuses exclusively on philosophical arguments for atheism and neglects more recently crafted scientific ones. Finally, Michel Onfray's recent Atheist Manifesto offers a good introduction to atheism Continental-style.

The Cowboy Way. A cowboy, who just moved to Wyoming from Texas, walks into a bar and orders three mugs of beer. He sits in the back of the room, drinking a sip out of each one in turn. When he finishes them, he goes back to the bar and orders three more. The bartender approaches and tells the cowboy, "You know, a mug goes flat after I draw it. It would taste better if you bought one at a time." The cowboy replies, "Well, you see, I have two brothers. One is in Arizona, the other is in Colorado. When we all left our home in Texas, we promised we'd drink this way to remember the days when we drank together. So I'm drinking one beer for each of my brothers and one for myself." The bartender admits that this is a nice custom, and leaves it there. The cowboy becomes a regular in the bar, and always drinks the same way. He orders three mugs and drinks them in turn. One day, he comes in and only orders two mugs. All the regulars take notice and fall silent. When he comes back to the bar for the second round, the bartender says, "I don't want to intrude on your grief, but I wanted to offer my condolences on your loss." The cowboy looks quite puzzled for a moment, then a light dawns in his eyes and he laughs. "Oh, no, everybody's just fine," he says. "It's just that my wife and I have joined the Baptist Church and I've had to quit drinking ... "Hasn't affected my brothers though."



FIG Community Dinners
 Tuesday Aug. 10, 2010 6:30 PM
 Tuesday Sept. 14, 2010 6:30 PM



Aug. Picnic
 Sunday, August 29, 2010 3:00 PM
Sept. Meeting
 Tuesday, Sept 28, 2010, 7:00 PM



FIG Is On Facebook
 If you have a Facebook account, become a Fan of FIG. To join you can type in this long weblink: <http://www.facebook.com#!/pages/Cincinnati-OH/FIG-Free-Inquiry-Group-of-Cincinnati-and-Northern-Kentucky/306015475868> or it is much easier to search for "Free Inquiry Group" and find it the first option on the search page.
 By being a Fan you can receive FIG updates and meeting notices and RSVP for events such as the monthly FIG Community Dinners.

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 - [figmessage at gofigger dot org](mailto:figmessage@gofigger.org), or visit our web site at gofigger.org or freeinquirygroup.org.