

# FIG Leaves

Volume 10 Issue 4 April 2001

## April Meeting

Speaker: Larry Jost, UC Dept of Philosophy  
Aristotle's God: Why Does A Seeming Secular Humanist of The First Order Seem to Lose Heart and Posit a Prime Mover & Intellectual Role Model?

The vast bulk of Aristotle's philosophy does quite nicely without any appeal (such as in Plato) to divine intervention or causation. This is true of his biology - 20% of the corpus - most of the ethics, politics, metaphysics and physics. Nevertheless, he does, importantly, appeal to a notion of a divine being in crucial, familiar and yet baffling texts.

What I would like to do is provide an overview of some of the issues raised by Aristotle's arguments in his Physics, Book VIII for what is called the Unmoved or Prime Mover and the way this appeal also functions in Metaphysics XII. If there is time I would like to briefly consider what he has to say about what he calls the "most divine element in us", our ability to theorize and how God does this as its exclusive activity. There is never any question of a personal God such as that posited by the Sky God religions (Gore Vidal's phrase) - i.e. the Unmoved Mover is unmoved by any consideration for the cosmos and is in no sense an ethical being. Such concerns are left to human beings. The problem is how seriously are we to take those texts that do posit a highest being? Need they always be taken literally? Are they good arguments?

Larry Jost

### March Speaker Review

Our guest speaker for the March 27th FIG meeting was William B. Jensen, Esper Chair in Chemistry at the University of Cincinnati. The title of his fascinating and educational presentation was 'Epicurus and the Origins of Western Humanism'. More than 2,000 years ago Epicurus espoused a surprisingly modern form of atheistic naturalism.

Epicurus was born in 341 BCE in the deme of Gargettus, near Athens. He studied under a Platonic teacher when his family moved to the island of Samos. He later returned to Athens to serve in the military and further his studies. Meanwhile his family was exiled to the city of Colophon. Epicurus rejoined his family there and began to study the writings of Democritus.

At the age of 32 Epicurus began to teach his philosophy on the island of Lesbos, but he was persecuted by the Platonists. He then moved to Lampsacus where he used discretion to avoid persecution. Finally, at age 35, he moved to Athens and sets up a private school.

Although Epicurus produced perhaps 300 scrolls, only three letters and a few other fragments survive. We also have a number of Roman papyri that were excavated from Herculaneum. The philosophy of Epicurus was also described

(Continued on page 2)

## Inside

- Rehashed Easter Myth Page 2
- Rationally Speaking  
Massimo Pigliucci Page 3
- FIG Leaflets Page 5
- The Passing Page 6
- Getting Along with the 10  
Commandments Page 7
- Wilma Mankiller Page 8
- Letter to Board of Health  
Johannah Oldiges Page 9
- Heretics: The Other Side of  
Early Christianity*  
Book Review Page 10
- Icons of Evolution: Science or  
Myth? Why Much of What we  
Teach About Evolution is  
Wrong*  
Book Review Page 10

## Events

**April Meeting**  
**Larry Jost, Aristotle's God**  
Tuesday, April 24th, 7:00 PM  
At the Vernon Manor Hotel,  
the Vernon Room,  
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati

**May Potluck Dinner**  
Tuesday, May 8th, at 6:30 PM,

Last Month's SSA article was written by Deidre Conn.

Many thanks to Wolf, Philip, Joe, Peter, Bob, Charles and Edwin for their many contributions to FIG Leaves. It just couldn't happen without you.

Martha Ferguson

(Continued from page 1)

by Cicero, Seneca, and Plutarch.

The epistemology of Epicurus uses four basic rules to determine knowledge. First, knowledge should be based on qualitative rationalism, not the mystical mathematics of Plato. Second, observational empiricism insists that all knowledge is consistent with observation. Third, naive realism means that the senses can be trusted. And fourth, operational linguistics prevent arguments over the meaning of words.

The physics of Epicurus can be summarized in eight observations. 1) The universe is made of atoms and void. 2) The universe was not created by gods, and does not exist for the benefit of mankind. 3) The universe is self-generated and non-teleological, i.e. not goal-directed. 4) Nature becomes more advanced because of gradual evolution. The earth changes over time. 5) The universe is infinite in duration and extension. 6) The universe contains many other worlds which undergo the same evolution as the earth. 7) Consistent with man's free agency, the universe displays a statistical rather than an absolute determinism. 8) The soul of man is material in nature and does not persist after death.

Dr. Jensen then described how Epicurus dealt with the ancient Greek gods. It seemed that Epicurus was unwilling to deny that people saw gods, ghosts, or monsters, but his 'rational' explanation based on afterimages of real objects was not very satisfactory. Epicurus stated that gods were real beings who had achieved a form of perfection, and who served as cosmic role models. These gods, however, were not responsible for the creation or maintenance of the universe. Some historians feel that Epicurus was serious about gods, while others feel that it was just a ruse to avoid the dangerous 'atheist' label.

The ethics of Epicurus states that the gods set examples, but do not have the power to reward or punish. All ethical guidelines must be rational and naturalistic. Also, man is mortal, and should pursue happiness which is based on tranquility and freedom from pain and anxiety. Prudence is the most important value that an individual can exercise.

Each person should practice the prudent enjoyment of physical tranquility, and enhance that experience through the study of science. One should be careful with interpersonal relationships, neither harming anyone or accepting harm from others. True friendship is the optimal human relationship because it is not close enough to result in jealousy, yet it is not cold and impersonal.

Within society, an Epicurean respects the law and state religion to the extent that it does not offend their personal beliefs. Epicurus did not think it was wise to participate in politics or public life because it was antithetical to friendship.

After the break there was an lively question and answer session. Several people expressed surprise that such a 'modern' philosopher could be so little known, but Dr. Jensen described the censorship caused by religious opposition to the atheist tendencies of Epicurus. Throughout history many great minds have suffered because of their willingness to oppose orthodoxy with new ideas.

Philip Ferguson

## Rehashed Easter Myth

by Dorothy Thompson

Ah, Easter, when the Christ rose up,  
And left the borrowed grave.  
Friday he drank the bitter cup,  
On Sunday Zion gave.  
But, wait! Was he the first to rise?  
Evacuate the tomb?  
No, many gods, restored likewise  
Knew how to self exhume.  
There were so many savior gods  
Who floated up to heaven.  
The virgin born can beat the odds;  
I'll mention only seven.  
Now, Krishna was a lot like Christ  
Adonis, too, and Baal;  
Their bodies, too, were sacrificed,  
The same old bloody tale!  
Buddha, Osiris, Quetzalcoatl,  
Descended up to god.  
They went to hell first, I must note,  
As every good sungod.  
The final savior I'll discuss,  
Hindu god and Sakia,  
Shed blood, then rose, just like Jesus,  
Old rehashed idea.  
So, drink the blood, and eat the god,  
It's sure not something new,  
The Eucharist is nothing odd,  
Pagans believed it too.

Source: Freethought Perspective, vol. 2 (no. 12, April-May 2001)

FIG Leaves Volume 10, Issue 4, April 2001 - Editors welcome thoughtful articles, letters, reviews, reports, anecdotes, and cartoons. Submit in electronic format via Internet to figeditors@fuse.net or on disk or typewritten via mail to Editor, FIG Leaves, P.O. Box 8128, Cincinnati OH 45208. Contributions received before the first Tuesday of the month will be considered for publication that month. All material printed in FIG Leaves may be reproduced in similar publications of non-profit groups which grant FIG Leaves reciprocal reprinting rights as long as proper credit is clearly attributed to FIG Leaves and the author. Opinions expressed in FIG Leaves are those of their authors and do not necessarily reflect opinions of the editor or the Free Inquiry Group, Inc., its board, or officers. © 2000 The Free Inquiry Group, Inc. FIG Board of Directors: President Bob Riehemann, Vice President Edwin Kagin, Secretary Philip Ferguson, Treasurer Joe Levee, Members: Nurit Bowman, Michele Grinoch, Helen Kagin, Tim Kelly, Inez Klein, Gary Weiss, and FIG Leaves Editor: Martha Ferguson.



## *Rationally Speaking*

A monthly e-column by  
Massimo Pigliucci  
Department of Botany,  
University of Tennessee

### **N. 9, April 2001: "Red or Blue? What kind of life would you choose?"**

**This column can be posted for free on any appropriate web site. If you are interested in receiving the html code, please send an email ([pigliucci@utk.edu](mailto:pigliucci@utk.edu)).**

Is it better to live a harsh reality or a comfortable fantasy? And why? This is one interpretation of a key question faced by Neo, the hero of the movie *The Matrix*. Neo has a conversation with the rather enigmatic Morpheus, who explains that what Neo has always perceived as "reality," including his friends, his job, and his entire existence in 20<sup>th</sup> century America, is actually a simulation caused by a race of computers that has taken over earth long ago and has enslaved human beings. Our brains, according to Morpheus, are simply kept alive in a fantasy world so that we can provide electricity to the machines. But a few individuals are occasionally able to disconnect themselves from this matrix of fantasy and regain control of their body, thereby fighting a desperate battle for supremacy on the planet. Now, Morpheus says, Neo has two choices. If he takes a blue pill that he is being offered, he will forget about the matrix and go back to his illusory but relatively safe and predictable life. Take the red pill, however, and you will see the world as it really is. The trade-off is clear: comfortable fantasy or harsh reality? What would *you* choose, and why?

Some philosophy students, who essentially questioned the assumptions underlying the choice, have proposed a radical way around the dilemma. What makes us think that Morpheus is telling the truth? What if it is the red pill that leads to an imaginary world? This is a valid epistemological point. How do you know what is real and what is not? What kind of evidence do you have that you were dreaming last night of being a butterfly, and are you not in fact a butterfly who is now dreaming of being a human being? There are some reasonable, though by no means foolproof, ways out of this basic dilemma. For example, dreams—unlike what we consider reality—have no temporal continuity and are often characterized by arbitrary rules of engagement (contrary to, say, the laws of physics). But Neo did not have such a luxury, since in his case both situations felt very real.

Furthermore, some people on drugs, or affected by particular brain disorders, really do have a hard time distinguishing between reality and hallucinations.

However, this kind of existential response based on radical skepticism skirts an interesting question. Let us *assume* that we have good reasons to believe Morpheus (as Neo does in the movie, given some recent disturbing experiences that had shaken his conception of reality); what would you *then* do about it?

In essence, the choice can be seen as one between truth and happiness (albeit the latter may be of a rather limited variety). In this sense, the question becomes of utmost interest and of surprising practical relevance. For example, you are faced by this dilemma when you examine your religious beliefs. Since there is no more evidence for the existence of a god than for the existence of unicorns, but believing in god makes you feel more comfortable and gives eternal meaning to your life, should you believe the unbelievable or attempt to find your way through the tortuous road of secular morality and meaning? Of course, most people don't really *choose* to believe in a god, they rather culturally inherit such belief from their parents and friends; but most of us do arrive at the rejection of god by an often long process of questioning during which we are faced with terrible questions of existential meaning and of good and evil. In this sense, consciously becoming an agnostic or atheist is indeed more difficult than the other path, and it is like taking Neo's red pill.

Less controversial (if you actually believe in god and don't therefore buy the above argument) but equally dramatic is the choice of taking or not taking drugs. The "reality" offered by drugs is more pleasurable (at least temporarily) than the real life out there, especially for poor or psychologically damaged people. Why not avoid the pain and go for the blue option? A minor version of the same question could be framed in terms of choosing entertainment over meaningful activities: why not just spend your life watching TV, or drinking beer, or—when this will be technologically feasible—shut yourself in a holodeck-like virtual reality where you can have all the food, sex partners, and riches you like?

Most people I talked to (but this was by no means an unbiased sample) chose the red pill, yet I found quite a bit of disagreement on the motives. Essentially, however, there are two main reasons that can be advanced for taking red over blue: pragmatic and ethical ones.

The pragmatic motive is that living in an imaginary world can be pretty dangerous. One of the reasons human beings have been so successful during evolution is precisely because our large brains have an uncanny capability of assessing reality, of finding cause-effect connections, and therefore of manipulating the world to our advantage. One could object that plenty of people in

*(Continued on page 4)*

(Continued from page 3)

modern society believe all sorts of weird things, from astrology to gods, and yet seem to function reasonably well, thank you very much. But this is because, in fact, most of the time they do not *act* on their beliefs. For example, while many people would claim to leave their lives in god's hands when they are so questioned, they nevertheless take out insurance policies, look on both sides of the road before crossing, and go regularly to the doctor, if they can afford it. When they *do* behave according to a strict adherence to fantastic beliefs, bad things happen. A recurrent example is offered by Christian Scientists who die (or, worse, let their children die) because they do not believe in getting medical attention when they are sick. Reality does have a way of biting your back side.

The ethical reason represents an even more general answer to Neo's question: regardless of practical consequences or of feelings of pleasure and discomfort, it is simply *right* to choose the red pill. We are social beings, and by nature we have a tendency to relate to other humans and to help them out, especially if they are our kin or friends. This tendency constitutes the basis of most of our ethical systems, and it implies that it is our duty not to shut ourselves out of the world in order to simply seek pleasure or avoid pain. This, however, begs the question of what is right to begin with and of how we determine it, something that I have covered, and will come back to, in this column. Essentially, we are now faced with the radical moral skeptic question: why bother, if it does not affect your own happiness?

The point is, even a science fiction movie can generate profound philosophical questions, and these in turn are not necessarily idle speculations on the sex of angels but give us the opportunity to examine some of our most basic choices and their often far-reaching consequences. And remember, an unexamined life is not worth living. Or is it?

**Next Month: "The many faces of anti-intellectualism"**  
© by Massimo Pigliucci, 2001

#### Further reading:

Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, a short introduction to some of the themes of this essay, including the problem of determining reality.

Jonathan Dancy and Ernest Sosa (eds.), *A Companion to Epistemology*, an A-Z guide to how do we know what we think we know.

#### Web links:

The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy on nihilism, or what happens if you are a radical skeptic about values. (<http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/n/nihilism.htm>)

On hedonism, when you take the blue pill because it is pleasurable. (<http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/h/hedonism.htm>)

A link to *Philosophy Now*, which run a competition for

essays on the blue-red choice and published the two winning essays. (<http://www.philosophynow.demon.co.uk/main.htm>)

### World Wide Web

No Answers in Genesis:

<http://www.onthenet.com.au/~stear/index.htm>

Groups attempt to defund Planned Parenthood:

<http://cw2k.capweb.net/ppohio>

Role of Women Bible Quiz:

<http://www.landoverbaptist.org/>

Faith-Based Discrimination: The Case of Alicia Pedreira (Kentucky Baptist Home for Children):

<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/04/01/magazine/01FAITH.html>

the Last Supper with Christ as a nude woman:

<http://www.nerve.com/Photography/Cox/Shocking/gallery/YoMamasLastSupper.jpg>

Superstition: <http://www.csicop.org/superstition/>

"I consider trial by jury as the only anchor ever yet imagined by man, by which a government can be held to the principle of its Constitution."

Thomas Jefferson, 1789

"Jurors should acquit even against the judge's instructions...if exercising their judgment with discretion and honesty they have a clear conviction that the charge of the court is wrong."

Alexander Hamilton.

"The jury has the right to judge both the law as well as the fact in controversy."

John Jay, the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court

"It is not only [the juror's] right, but his duty...to find the verdict according to his own best understanding, judgment, and conscience, though in direct opposition to the direction of the court."

John Adams, Second President

"There are two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle, The other is as though everything is a miracle."

-----Albert Einstein



# FIG Leaflets

## Logic?

Reporter Helen Thomas: Mr. President, why do you refuse to respect the wall between the church and state? And you know that the mixing of religion and government for centuries has led to slaughter. I mean, the very fact that our country has stood in good stead by having the separation --why do you break it down?

Bush: Helen, I strongly respect the separation of church and state--

Thomas: Well, you wouldn't have a religious office in the White House if you did.

Bush: I didn't get to finish my answer, in all due respect. I believe that so long as there's a secular alternative available, we ought to allow individuals who are helping to be able to choose a program that may be run by a faith-based program--or will be run by a faith-based program. I understand full well that some of the most compassionate missions of help and aid come out of faith-based programs. And I strongly support the faith-based initiative that we're proposing, because I don't believe it violates the line between the separation of church and state, and I believe it's going to make America a better place.

Thomas: Well, you are a secular official.

Bush: I agree, I am a secular official.

Thomas: And not a missionary.

(At this point, another reporter interrupted and asked questions about the air strikes in Iraq.)

(This exchange took place at President's Bush's official press conference on 22 February 2001 in The James S. Brady Press Briefing Room in the White House. Questioning Mr. Bush was veteran reporter Helen Thomas. The exchange took place about half way through the period, following questions put to the president concerning budget matters and foreign policy.) From *Humanist Quest of Milwaukee Newsletter* for March 2001, who reference it to *AAnews #889*, 28 February 2001.

President George W. Bush has proposed a tax cut plan that would give some 43 percent of its tax cuts to the best-off one percent of all taxpayers. Recently, Bush cheerfully characterized himself as a member of that elite group. That's certainly true. In fact, based on the non-wage income the Bushes reported on their 1999 tax returns plus the \$400,000 presidential salary, the Bushes are likely to report total adjusted gross income in each of the next several years in excess of \$2 million annually.

So how would the Bush tax cut plan affect the President and his wife?... The figures show that by the time the tax cuts are fully in place, the Bushes can expect a reduction in their federal income tax bill of almost \$100,000 a year.

Citizens for Tax Justice  
<http://www.ctj.org/html/bushcut.htm>

## The Humanist Family

I hate labels. It seems that we are sometimes forced to identify ourselves and the choices are daunting: secular humanist, humanist, agnostic, atheist, etc. Which one do I chose, if there can be only one choice? And why do I have to choose any of them if they don't seem to describe the complexity of my viewpoint. What seems to be an even more important question lately, is a matter of style. It is all the more vital because I want to serve as a good example to my children. Suppose I choose to call myself an atheist. Will I present myself as an outspoken atheist who severely doubts the intelligence of anyone who happens to believe differently? Is this the kind of role model I wish to hold up to my children? Certainly not.

The first 18 years of my life were spent deeply immersed in the Southern Baptist religion. I experienced first-hand the self-righteous indignation of a group of people who seriously doubted that anyone who disagreed with them could possibly be morally responsible. I was an obnoxious person trying to pass myself off as a dedicated Christian. The sad thing was that I did not even like myself. Encouraged by many adults, I used religion to form a cocoon around myself to protect me from what I feared was an evil world.

Leaving my religious views and prejudices behind has made me an over-all better and happier person. I try to use reason and understanding where once there was a leap to judgement. I once wore my religion on my sleeve, and now I struggle with how open to be about my lack of religion. For my children's sake I want to demonstrate that there is no reason to be embarrassed by a lack of religious faith. I have never lied about our beliefs, but I have not made a habit of volunteering the information, either.

But being more open about my views does not mean that I will be attempting to impose them upon others. I don't even impose my views on our children, so why would I possibly impose them on anyone else? I see my role as a parent to be one who asks questions and presents opportunities to learn. It is better to lead by example. It seems to me that a life of reason is one that uniquely offers the best chance of personal satisfaction and happiness. But I have many friends who are equally satisfied with a life guided by religion. We all have to wade through a sea of information and draw our own conclusions. We can in no way determine what best suits another person when we have not lived their life or faced their struggles.

I have no difficulty with any individual's personal religious beliefs, or lack thereof. What does concern me is when religionists try to force their beliefs on others. We seem to be faced with this problem a lot lately, especially with the rise of conservatism in this country. How should we best handle such situations? Secular Humanists/ Humanist/Atheists/Agnostics represent a very small percentage of people in this country. We stand no chance fighting this battle on our own. We have to have the backing and cooperation of liberal and mainstream Christians if we expect to elect politicians who protect our

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

rights rather than impose their religious beliefs upon us.

My favorite part of being a member of a Secular Humanist organization is the freedom we have as a group to express our dissatisfaction with living in a society dominated by Christianity. I enjoy the humor and caustic comments made with total disregard for anyone's religious sensibilities. But the joy in such situations is the very fact that there is no one there to offend. The same remarks that I make with abandon at a FIG potluck would never pass my lips at a PTA meeting or any public forum.

I have every intention of defending my rights as best I can against those who encroach upon them. But I will not publicly insult anyone's beliefs, because it does not seem morally right for me to do so. I would be insulting my friends who deserve no such poor treatment. I would be insulting the many people of faith who are our allies in this so called religious war. I believe that we can defend ourselves much more effectively with diplomacy, dignity, humor, and tolerance. After all, tolerance is the part of my character that has developed the most in the last 20 years. It would seem a shame not to use it.

Some may think that I am less than an ideal Secular Humanist. But my own personal peace of mind is more important than the opinions of others. And I'm not sure that the label Secular Humanist is the best one for me anyway.

Martha Ferguson

### CHANGING A CHURCH LIGHT BULB

How many church people does it take to change a light bulb?

CHARISMATICS: Only one. Hands already in the air.

ROMAN CATHOLICS: None. They use candles.

PENTACOSTALS: Ten. One to change the bulb, and nine to pray against the spirit of darkness.

PRESBYTERIANS: None. God has predestined when the lights will be on and off.

EPISCOPALIANS: Eight. One to call the electrician, and seven to say how much they liked the old one better.

MORMONS: Five. One man to change the bulb, and four wives to tell him how.

UNITARIANS: We choose not to make a statement either in favor of or against the need for a light bulb. However, if in your own journey you have found that light bulbs work for you, that is fine. You are invited to write a poem or compose a modern dance about your personal relationship with your light bulb, and present it next month at our annual light bulb Sunday service, in which we will explore a number of light bulb traditions, including incandescent, fluorescent, three-way, long-life and tinted, all of which are equally valid paths to luminescence.

BAPTISTS: Change! Why are we considering change, we've never changed! Oh, all right then.....At least 15. One to change the light bulb, and two or three committees to approve the change, Oh, and also provide a casserole.

LUTHERANS: None. Lutherans don't believe in change.

"I would rather be ashes than dust! I would rather that my spark should burn out in a brilliant blaze than it should be stifled by dry rot. I would rather be a superb meteor, every atom of me in magnificent glow, than a sleepy and permanent planet. The purpose of man is to live, not to exist. I shall not waste my days in trying to prolong them. I shall use my time." --Jack London

### The Passing

A slow procession of mourners,  
Sadness outlined by the rain,  
Marching to uncertain futures,  
Trying not to show the pain.

Who or what has gone beyond?  
What could cause such grief?  
The worst, I fear, has come to pass:  
They stand in disbelief.

They no longer trust the prophets  
Who told them what to think.  
They draw instead from their own reason  
And dare the rest to drink.

The font is deep and filled with truths  
That overwhelm the meek.  
The wonders of nature are open to all  
Who care enough to seek.

Freedom has a certain taste  
Unmatched by any religion.  
It liberates your truest essence  
But it must be your decision.

Philip Ferguson

And now what cause has spread over great nations the worship of ... the gods? ... People would see the different seasons of the years come round in regular succession and could not find out what causes this to be done; therefore they would seek a refuge in handing over all things to be guided by their god. And they placed in heaven the abodes and realms of the gods, because night and moon are seen to roll through heaven and because ... it is the source of rain and thunder and lightning.

Titus Lucretius Carus (~98-55 BCE) *De Rerum Natura*

Department of Energy is slow to warn of computer virus.

Recently the *Naked Wife* virus was already wreaking havoc, but when DOE headquarters set out to warn the troops, the politically correct DOE software balked at the word "naked." *What's New* (16 Mar.'01) has been told that it took several hours before the warning could be passed on.

Birds are also giving *Net-Nanny* and other censorship software fits. The tit is a little songbird related to the chickadee. Bird watchers distinguish willow tit, great tit, and blue tit all of the genus *Parus*.

Now, for a time, you find glory in your strength, yet soon sickness or sword shall diminish it, or fire's fangs, or flood's surge, or sword's swing or spear's flight, or appalling age; brightness of eyes will fail and grow dark; then death shall overcome you, warrior.

*Beowulf* (8th Century) trans.from Old English

## Getting Along with the Ten Commandments

It has been proposed that The Ten Commandments be posted in all school rooms. When young, I memorized, and for many years, without giving them much thought, did my best to follow them. Today we take sides, to post or not to post, but think little about what they actually say. Recently I have given them some thought. I follow the commandments listed below with some comments. My reactions are based on an English translation which come from what I believe is an "approved" source .

From: New Jerusalem News Magazine! on the internet, Knoxville, TN

1. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."
2. "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain"
3. "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them"
4. "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy"
5. "Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long"
6. "Thou shalt not kill"
7. "Thou shalt not commit adultery"
8. "Thou shalt not steal"
9. "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor"
10. "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's"

God's main concern (assuming order reflects priority) in forty percent of the commandments is how we relate to and treat him/her. Exodus 35:2 goes further, telling us that anyone who works on the Sabbath should be "put to death." This does not sound like an all loving, all powerful, secure, unvain God. And, how are non-Judaic-Christian children to respond to this, or for that matter those Christians who rest on Sunday instead of Saturday?

No. 6 forbids killing. But in the Bible, God orders killing many times, and at times does it herself, as with the flood. He ordered Abraham to kill his son Isaac. God later rescinded this order, but only after She felt sure that Abraham was willing to do so--which for God was obviously the right choice. He later ordered Joshua to kill every living creature in Jericho, except a harlot, who betrayed her own people, and her family. God does not express any restrictions on killing animals, in fact she demands it for sacrifices.

In no. 7 God forbids adultery. Although he says nothing about sex between unmarrieds, or

homosexuals, Christian fundamentalists read these prohibitions into this commandment. This commandment is very nice for inquisitive minds on third grade walls.

No 9 says, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." Lying about everything else must be OK.

No. 10 deals with coveting. Coveting is a basic human instinct (stronger in some than in others) that comes from deep within. What gives a person nobility is not being born without such natural drives, but rather their ability to manage them.

What is interesting is what is left out. There is nothing here against slavery. Instead, Exodus 21 details how slaves should be treated, implying that slavery is OK. Here there is even a rule on how to sell one's daughter into servitude. Also, nothing is mentioned about racism, apartheid, brutality, torturing, helping the unfortunate, sharing with the poor, or protecting the environment.

I am puzzled why some people see moral greatness in these commandments, and why they do not recognize them as being offensive to non-Judaic-Christian children. If we are to post a moral code on class room walls, which may not be a bad idea, it should be broader in scope, and not offend those who do not share the beliefs of fundamentalist Christians.

Peter Seidel

The Bishop runs into to the Pope's quarters and says "Your Holiness, I have good news and I have bad news!"

Pope: "What's the good news?"

Bishop: "Jesus has returned to earth! He's on the phone and wants to speak with you!"

Pope: "and the Bad News?"

Bishop "He's calling from Salt Lake City!"

Mathematics, rightly viewed, possesses not only truth, but supreme beauty – a beauty cold and austere, like that of sculpture, without appeal to any part of our weaker nature, without the gorgeous trappings of paintings or music, yet sublimely pure and capable of a stern perfection such as only the greatest art can show. -

## Wilma Mankiller

When Wilma Mankiller looks around at the Cincinnati landscape, she doesn't see the buildings and bridges. She focuses instead upon the land and imagines what it must have been like when only native people lived here. She looks at all areas of her life through the eyes of a Native American. This unique perspective gave her the courage to become the first female leader of the Cherokee Nation.

Ms. Mankiller began her address of the Cincinnati Women's Guild with a brief history of the native people in this country. She told of the extensive system of tribal governments that predated the arrival of European settlers. How many of us see wampum belts as merely decorative items, when in fact that may contain a constitution, list of values, or commemoration of some important event? Throughout the years of forced relocations, the Cherokees struggled to reestablish their tribal government, judicial systems, schools and other social systems.

Ms. Mankiller began her life as one of 11 children living on 160 acres that her grandfather received from the federal government in Oklahoma. The very fact that the government gave out the land to member of the Cherokee tribe in 160 acre allotments demonstrated that they did not understand their communal way of living. Despite the extreme poverty, the community pulled together with a positive attitude. Discovery of oil in the territory led to yet another relocation of Ms. Mankiller's family to San Francisco with promises of a better existence.

Life in a rough housing project did not deliver those promised improvements, but Ms. Mankiller found herself in the middle of an exciting cultural revolution. Women's rights, free speech, and Red Power were just some of the topics about which people were speaking loudly and passionately. She was motivated to make a difference in society. She married out of high school and had two young daughters, but saw no limitations upon what she could accomplish. She moved back to Oklahoma with her daughters and her strong convictions.

"Poor people have greater capacity for leadership and solving their own problems than most people give them credit for." Ms. Mankiller worked for the Cherokee Nation encouraging the idea of "self-help." She encouraged people to build their own houses and develop their own communities. She wasn't really interested in becoming a politician, but she had so many ideas and goals, and saw politics as the only way to accomplish them. She was asked to run as Deputy Chief of the tribe and did so in spite of the many attacks she received in public and in the newspapers. The answer came to her from the back of a cereal box, "Don't ever argue with a fool, because someone walking by won't be able to tell who is the fool." She ignored the attacks, stuck to her issues, and was elected.

At the first tribal council meeting, she was frequently interrupted by a disgruntled member of the council. She simply had the microphones rewired so that the on/off switch was in front of her, and calmly silenced his interruptions. Her 'can do' attitude came from a family who encouraged her to be strong and do whatever her heart told

her. She was especially puzzled by some of the opposition to her leadership, because her people's history is one of strong women. A Native American saying is that "No nation is defeated until the hearts of the women are on the ground." Ms. Mankiller was just the woman to encourage the native Americans to reject society's stereotypes of women as second class citizens.

Passionate beliefs in a variety of issues is what pushed Ms. Mankiller over the line and into the role of leader. She has advice for all leaders:

1. Care deeply about what you're doing. And don't count on someone else to have better ideas and solutions. When you hope that "they" will solve all of your problems, who exactly are you depending upon? Fully engage in life and don't live in moderation. Ms. Mankiller is retired, but still devotes all of her energy to helping her people. She travels and lectures and tries to help eliminate stereotypes.
2. Be positive, optimistic. It's easy to point out problems when what people need is solutions. Ms. Mankiller has had cancer twice, two kidney transplants, and a bad wreck. But her positive outlook enables her to look at each of these experiences as something that made her a better person.
3. See barriers as challenges instead of roadblocks. Don't give up and stay focused on the goal.
4. Have a set of values or ethics. Some leaders compartmentalize their lives and behave differently in private and in public. Consistent values and ethics are what we respect in our leaders. She expects our leaders to live their values and be above reproach. She believes in a separation between the secular and the religious.
5. Respect all people from the top to the bottom. We are all important, no matter what our status in life.

Ms. Mankiller answered a variety of questions by the audience members. She expressed alarm at the issues facing all of Americans today regarding the environment. She encouraged us to be activists and join the Green Party to protect our natural resources. She sees education as the way to improve the Native American condition and has great hope for the future.

Martha Ferguson

**FIG Leaves Annual Subscription: \$10**

### **Annual Membership**

*Includes a year of FIG Leaves*  
*Regular \$25      Family \$35*  
*Patron \$50      Sustaining \$100*

*Donations are tax-deductible.*

**Please send all contributions to:**

*Free Inquiry Group, Inc.*  
*P.O. Box 8128*  
*Cincinnati, OH 45208*

Northern KY Independent District Health Department  
Dist. Office, Health Education and Environmental Center  
610 Medical Village Drive  
Edgewood, KY 41073

Members of the Board:

It has come to my attention that the NKIDHD Human Sexuality Education committee has developed a set of guidelines for teaching Character Based Abstinence Education in Northern Kentucky schools. I have read over information about this program. Some of the ideas sound very reasonable, such as teaching about the risks involved with premature sexual activity and affirming that abstinence is the only sure way to prevent pregnancy and STDs, as well as the emotional trauma that results from having sex before one is ready. However, I feel that it is not sufficient to teach that abstinence is the only moral option. This attitude has been shown to actually discourage people from seeking information about and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases because they view STDs as symbols of sinful behavior.

Also, it is unrealistic to assume that no teenager has engaged in sexual activity prior to taking a sexual education class, and the Character Based Abstinence Education program does not address the needs of the teen who is already sexually active. While one goal of a sexual education class is to inform adolescents that abstinence until marriage is the safest choice for them to make, this is not the only objective. I believe that teaching about birth control and safer sex is essential to ensure that the diverse needs of all students are met. This program is not beneficial to all teenagers if it does not teach those who are engaging in sexual activity how to protect themselves. And while your curriculum criteria states that any discussion of contraceptives is sending a mixed message, there is no research to support this charge.

The way I see it, sexual education classes are not adequate if they do not address the issues of safer sex or if they condemn students for sexual activity. While abstinence until marriage is indeed the safer choice, premarital sex should not cause adolescents to feel so ashamed that they fail to seek help for medical problems. Perhaps such sexual education programs as RTR, which has been successful in the past, should not be disregarded. Why fix something that isn't broken? Remember, the lives of our young people are at stake here--realize that Character Based Abstinence Education is a bad idea and do not pass this program.

Thank you,  
Johannah Oldiges, Age 15

### Excerpts from *Beliefs*

Yes, there are organizations and journals and publishers that do not shy from declaring their rejection of religion and that operate at a much higher intellectual level than Ms. O'Hair did. Many prefer the label secular humanist to atheist, which among other things reflects a sound impulse to emphasize what they are for rather than what they are against.

Yet even the best of them, like the journal *Free Inquiry*, are preoccupied far more with religion than their religious counterparts are with nonbelief. They have an air, simultaneously defensive and triumphal, that comes with feeling beleaguered and, come to think of it, is not unknown in religious circles either.

If organized atheism has its problem, what might be called unorganized atheism is actually one of the fastest-growing currents of (non) belief in the country. But the unorganized atheists also appear to feel marginalized. Even when they are not being embarrassed by the rough edges of a Ms. O'Hair, they feel themselves excluded, even attacked, by the new religion-based rhetoric of last year's presidential campaign and this year's presidency.

So where does that leave atheism? Well, pretty much where it leaves religious belief — not nearly as thoroughly marginalized as its adherents contend. Indeed, believers and doubters may have an important stake in confronting, and correcting, one another's complacencies.

In fact, believers impatient with what they find to be shopworn or stereotypical reactions to the recent expressions of public religion might look to their own house. They might reflect on the quip of Monsignor Ronald Knox, the British convert to Roman Catholicism whose books ranged from detective stories to a translation of the Bible.

"If you have a sloppy religion," Knox said, "you get a sloppy atheism."

Peter Steinfels, *Beliefs*,  
*The New York Times*, March 24, 2001

---

Ventura Star, Feb. 19, 2001

Mexico Children Give Up on Poke'mon Pachuca, Mexico -- Scores of children clutching plastic sacks of Poke'mon images marched into a church here Sunday and surrendered the souvenirs they had been told were demonic.

Father Ramon Hernandez Bautista earlier had announced plans to burn the Japanese cartoon characters. But Sunday he canceled plans for a fire, saying he feared it might "provoke more violence". "They want to make us think they are more powerful than God," one boy, who gave his name as Jose Ivan, told AP Television News. Several children described the images as "diabolic".

Hernandez said the images would be symbolically destroyed by Christ during mass.

Charlotte's Web

# BOOK REVIEWS

## ***Heretics: The Other Side of Early Christianity***

by Gerd Lüdemann, trans. John Bowden  
(London: SCM Press, 1996)

Lüdemann introduces us to the "abysmal ignorance" about the history of their own religion among laity and theologians, leading to "a splitting apart of piety and scholarship which amounts to schizophrenia," (p. xiii). The Christian faith and the Christian church existed before there was a New Testament. These writings are a work of the Church, and the idea that they are binding on the believer is a dogma of the Church. The author goes on to make his point forcefully: (p. xiv)

... holy scripture is the word of man (and not the word of God), collected by people at a time when Christianity had already left its beginnings behind it. It is the collection of the victorious party, which, following a well-trying recipe, excluded and suppressed the documents of the groups that it had overcome, and finally exterminated their defenders.

This is a book about the defenders of that different understanding of Jesus and of Christianity, i.e. the heretics of the first two centuries of the Christian era. Astonishing, to me, is that the Apostle St. Paul is discussed as the first and chief heretic. Forty percent of the text is devoted to him and his extant writings.

Lüdemann sees Paul's interpretation of Jesus as heretical, because Jesus was and remained a Jewish sage, who upheld the law which distinguished Jews from Gentiles. The New Testament clearly reflects, but papers over, the conflict between Paul and the leaders of the Jerusalem community, which scholars call "Jewish Christians." While Paul thought of himself as holding on to Jewish tradition, he converted Gentiles without requiring circumcision or observance of the dietary laws. In the New Testament much is made of who is allowed to eat with whom. Paul interpreted the martyrdom of Jesus to have freed converts from the obligations of the Mosaic laws. In his thought the rite of baptism became a substitute.

The immediate and true inheritor of Paul's teaching was not the Church, but Marcion of Sinope in Pontus (ca. 100-160). Not much is known about Marcion, and what is comes from his adversaries in the developing Roman Church. Marcion grew up a Christian, his father is reported to have been a bishop, but parted ways to create his own interpretation. He was the first to assemble a sacred literature. He rejected the

Hebrew Scriptures as irrelevant, the history of a people who were not the Christians. Further, the angry, violent god of the Old Testament is not compatible with Jesus' teaching of love. He accepted the seven earliest letters of Paul, and the Gospel of Luke with various falsifications omitted. For a time Marcion had a large following, which the Church eventually suppressed. But his influence preserved the letters of Paul, and forced the Church to think seriously about what was to be accepted as sacred scripture. Lüdemann suggests that without Marcion there would not be a New Testament.

The developing Church accepted the Hebrew Scriptures as sacred, but not as a simple history of Israel. Rather, their interpretation of the Old Testament is as a foreshadowing, a prophetic advance mystery telling of the coming of the Christ. An interpretation which Lüdemann characterizes as so much nonsense.

Bringing Paul and other heresies into the developing NT required twisting their writings like so many pretzels. I would think Lüdemann would have lost his faith after this exercise of unweaving the fabric of the NT. On the contrary he reaffirms his belief in the unknown God and Jesus' tradition of love, his wisdom and ethics, which he finds in the Bible under all the tendentious human writings.

Wolf Roder

## ***Icons of Evolution: Science or Myth? Why Much of What we Teach About Evolution is Wrong***

by Jonathan Wells

(Washington, DC: Regnery Pub. 2000)

This book is literally about icons, images or examples which have been considered important evidence for Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Wells discusses ten such icons, explaining each as myth rather than fact. He earned a doctorate in theology from Yale in 1986 with an anti-Darwinian dissertation, he also earned a Ph.D. in biology from California-Berkeley in 1994 with a dissertation in embryology.

Wells devotes a chapter to each icon. The successive chapters are otherwise unconnected, so that I can scarcely do better than go through them one by one.

# BOOK REVIEWS

(Continued from page 10)

- (1) In 1953, Stanley Miller at the University of Chicago synthesized simple proteins by shooting sparks through a mixture of methane, hydrogen, ammonia and water. This told us something about how easy it is to synthesize organic molecules used as building blocks of life. Wells comments that our understanding of the earliest earth atmosphere has changed considerably since then, and that we should no longer use this experiment as an icon of evolution. Since it has nothing to do with evolution anyway, he is probably right.
- (2) Darwin's neat linear depiction of the "tree of life" branching from simple roots is false. All ten animal phyla appeared simultaneously in biology's "big bang" at the very beginning of the Cambrian era. This has not yet been explained to any biologist's satisfaction.
- (3) The remarkable homology of vertebrate limbs: the bones and structure of very diverse animals, bat, human, horse, cat are very similar. Since these are not always controlled by the same genes in the different families, Wells thinks we ought not to cite them as an icon. It is a complex issue which Wells does not elucidate fully.
- (4) The German biologist Ernst Haeckel illustrated the similar development of vertebrate embryos in 1892. They are not as similar as Haeckel fudged them. Take these old drawings out of the modern textbooks!
- (5) The bird like dinosaur, or dinosaur like bird fossil, *Archaeopteryx*, leaves many questions open. Most fossils do.
- (6) The famous "peppered moths" study of the fifties, which showed black moths increasing in number in response to industrial pollution was in part mistaken, with some of the famous pictures staged. These images probably have no longer any business in a modern text.
- (7) Darwin's finches did not shape Darwin's thinking. He did not know all of the species, nor their exact feed or habitat. This is a later interpretation of Darwin's thought by his biographers. Yet, the evidence drawn by modern biology from the Galapagos Islands does not depend on what Darwin himself did or did not think.
- (8) Geneticists have not succeeded in creating beneficial morphological mutations in any animal. The famous four winged fruit flies, do not have

useful appendages but are non viable freaks.

- (9) The evolutionary history of fossil horses is not a simple linear progression, but a complex multi-branched bush. Yes, scientists do change their views based on new evidence.
- (10) What we know about human evolution is essentially untrue, it is not the simple progression from ape to human, which is illustrated on the cover of *Icons of Evolution*. There are many theories, paleo-anthropologists themselves cannot agree on what exactly occurred. What is more, with every new fossil the story changes. Such is science.

Wells has some truth on his side, many of these frequently reused textbook images are old, out of date, and some are not longer considered valid. Wells uses his considerable erudition and knowledge to shoot down their use in ten textbooks. These icons he tells us are the essential underpinning of much of what is taught as evolution, which is left without evidence. A mere materialist philosophy.

Nowhere does Wells tell us what we should think instead, or what evidence he has for what he accepts. No place in the book is there any mention of creation, of the Bible, or of intelligent design. Only from the back of the title page do we know he is associated with the Discovery Institute. Wells is in fact merely doing what every simple minded bible thumper does, i.e. he pokes holes into arguments for evolution, mostly by picking on ancient, long out dated ideas, which still find their way into text books. He does not seem to understand that the scientific understanding of evolution is part and parcel of a wide seamless web involving all of the earth and historical sciences. Just what alternative does he intend to substitute?

Wolf Roder