

FIG Leaves

December 1999

December Open Forum

If you would like to express an opinion about the speakers that FIG has presented over the last year, or express a preference about future speakers, this is your chance. "Looking Backwards and Forward" will provide members with the opportunity to look at how we began, what we have done, and where we are going. This is your chance to make your voice heard.



The second half of the meeting will be a continuation of the December 1st Discussion Group's topic, "What is Truth?" We will begin with a summary of the original discussion and then continue on from there. Bill Jensen and Gary Weiss will again moderate. The articles that formed a basis of the original discussion were included with the November FIG Leaves.

So come one, come all, to what promises to be a lively meeting!

KAGIN'S COLUMN

Edwin F. Kagin is a lawyer-poet. He believes that, through grace and faith, this will be a regular column and, if events are predestined, that whatever he believes makes no difference whatsoever. He has a Website: www.edwinkagin.com He can be reached in care of this publication, or through e-mail at: edwinkagin@fuse.net

"What you don't know won't hurt you--it will kill you." Sign in U.S. Air Force training facility.

"Then said he unto them...he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one."

Jesus, the Christ. Luke 22:36.

ON ARMING FOR ARMAGEDDON

If, on December 31, 1999, at the very stroke of Midnight that heralds the dawn of the year 2000 C.E., the world ends, the Messiah comes or returns, the Apocalypse happens, the Battle of Armageddon begins, the saved are raptured from moving cars that careen on into busloads of godless, unbelieving, Camp Quest-type little children, believers ascend up into the air to meet Jesus who is on his way down to Earth to establish his Kingdom--if the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised, and if the Revelation to Saint John the Divine prove true and one third of the stars fall to the Earth, and the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse ride, and the sheep be

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December Open Forum

Looking Backwards and Forward
Tuesday, December 28
at 7:00 PM
Geier Center

Potluck Dinner

Tuesday, January 11, 2000
at 6:30 PM

separated from the goats, and the believing good be lifted up unto the highest Heaven to take their reserved seat at the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, whilst the unbelieving bad are dragged to their well

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deserved eternal torment awaiting them in the deepest pits of fiery Hell as Gounod's Faust plays in the background--then, Gentle Reader, you should know that you are now holding your very last ever "Kagin's Column," because your narrator is going to repent, be saved, and be out of here, leaving you condemned remaining sinners with only this final heresy. That should make it quite a collector's item--if anyone there be left around to collect it.

But, bless you, the world should go on as before, and there should be more Kagin's Columns, because none of these dire things will happen. They won't happen because such beliefs are superstitious nonsense. They are primitive myths. The only way they can be harmful is if they are believed. Contemplate, if you will, just what would really happen if one third of the stars "fell" to Earth.

Webster defines superstition thus: any belief, based on fear or ignorance, that is inconsistent with the known laws of science or with what is generally considered in the particular society as true and rational; esp., such a belief in charms, omens, the supernatural, etc. The myths are not the danger. Those who believe in the myths are the danger. A related problem is that there is very poor agreement in our "particular society" regarding what is "true and rational." Some think the world is only ten thousand years old and that animals and people were created from nothing in six days. No evidence to the contrary makes any difference. They want their myth taught in schools. Others want their myths taught instead. For the past two thousand years, we have had a lot of wars over what myths should be taught in school.

The feared "Y2K bug" is somewhat different. For future researchers, reading this in the far future, Y2K (standing for "Year 2000") is a code given for the unpredictable problems inherent in the unfortunate fact that lots of the computers that order our lives have not been taught to understand that time might go past the year 1999. Until the clock strikes 2000, we just won't know how big a problem that little training defect really is.

Anyhow, a seemingly growing population of irrational humans are preparing for the disasters they are certain will flow from their end-of-the-world delusions that mingle the non-existent with the fixable, as they set about to bring upon themselves and us the chaos that is feared. People are hoarding food, water, and weapons to await

the end of civilization, the end of the world, the coming of Jesus, Judgment Day, and Lord knows what else. And they are prepared to waste other believers whose eschatology (look it up) is only slightly different from theirs. Guess what they will do to people like those secular humanists, who they think really caused all the problems of the world in the first place by teaching evolution, and by taking the Ten Commandments out of public courthouses, and by prohibiting prayers in public places like Jesus ordered on his last visit.

Let's say Jesus really did "return" to Earth. How well received do you reckon he would be, considering that the many different Christian denominations appear incapable of agreeing on even the smallest points of theological doctrine? Do you suppose His Holiness the Pope will step aside and let Jesus have his chair? Do you guess the T.V. preachers will leave their bully pulpits and, on bended knee, hand over to their Messiah their microphones and their diamond mines? Does one even wildly imagine that the many religious leaders of the world will be disposed to permit the god they have awaited to resolve for them the disputed points of their several faiths?

To survive the madness that seems certain to befall us, we need to understand that the feared coming millennium is not a real thing. There is no "real" millennium, just as there is no "real" line on the ground between the states of Kentucky and Tennessee such as one might see on service station road maps. A millennium, like all measurements of time, is something humans made up and then forgot that they made up. We can measure time any way we like. It makes no difference, so long as all agree on the rules. But even the rules are unclear. China, the Maya, and lots of other countries and peoples all have very different dates, based on different origin myths, for what we call 1999.

The year 2000 is not the beginning of a new third millennium. It is the last year of the second millennium. 2001 is the first year of the third millennium. Here's why. When a baby is less than one year old, her age is cooed out something like, "five days old," "nine weeks old," "three months old," that sort of thing. She is not said to be "zero" years old. When said child has lived a full year, she is then said to be "one year old," and has her "first birthday," surrounded by adoring relations. At one year old, the child starts her second year of life. For all of that second year she is said to be one year old. The second

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year of life, when finished, is celebrated as the child's "second birthday." And so it goes throughout life. One is always one day, to three-hundred-sixty-four days, older than one's stated age.

If our numbering of years worked like birthdays, then 2000 would indeed be the first year of the third millennium. Like the aging baby, the 2000th birthday would mark the completion of the 2000th year of living and the start of the 2001st year of living, and 2001 would come at the end of the 2001st year of living. But it doesn't work like that with dates. There is no dating of "three days," "seven months" or such, during the first year of this imaginary calendar, as there is in the dating of the lives of babies. The first year of the calendar would

have been the year "one" the entire year, from New Year's Day on, not the year "zero" or some fraction of time less than one year. At the end of that first year, the year "one" was finished, and the year "two" began on New Year's Day. The tenth year of the calendar means that nine previous years have been completed, and that one is living in a true tenth year, not working toward the end of the eleventh year, as would be the case if we were talking about birthdays rather than calendars.

For birthdays, the start of year 2000 would mean you have actually started the 2001st year of living. For calendars, the start of year 2000 means you are starting the final year of that millennium. 1000 was the last year of the first millennium, just as 100 is the 100th year of a 100 year period of time. 101 is the first year of the second set of 100. 2000 is the last year of this millennium. 2001 is the first year of the next millennium. Most people don't understand this and think a new thousand year period starts at midnight on December 31, 1999. This is particularly true of the crazies who ascribe cosmic meaning to that event, as did their predecessors in religious madness in the year 1000. The world didn't end then. The world won't end now.

The whole idea of the importance of the coming millennium is that it is believed to be two thousand years after the birth of Jesus. But this is incorrect. If the Bible is to be believed, Jesus was born during the reign of Herod the Great of Judea. It is a well known fact of history that Herod died in the year 4 B.C.E. Therefore, Jesus could not have been born later than that date. Therefore, sadly, the real millennium occurred on or before 1996, and we missed it.

Chances are that, if you are reading this, you are a naively innocent liberal who thinks people are inherently good and well intentioned, and that religiously, or otherwise demented, fanatics won't really shoot you in the face for no sane reason if, with tolerance and caring, you simply understand and accept them. People who hold this view are frequently identified only as "victims." It has been said that a conservative is a liberal who has been mugged. Please accept, for your own safety's sake, the truth that there really are dangerous people

about who will kill you for the fun of watching you die, and please further accept that millennium madness will bring these types out around New Year 2000 like earthworms after a summer rain. There are Christian militia groups, often commanded by ministers, trained in the use of military firearms, committed to "regaining" America for Christ. They have trained home invasion units to deal with the enemies of God--you know, those who practice the "religion of evolution", promote the "murder of the unborn", want "special rights" for homosexuals, want God out of the classrooms, and so forth. Do you know the type? You better, because they know you. Your narrator has been denounced by them in churches, as have other identified individuals who disagree with them. Well, they are making straight the way for the return of Christ to lead them against the Antichrist, believed by some to be already among us, and revealed by the "mark of the beast" in such things as the bar codes used in food stores. Yeah, no kidding! They really are that nuts, and they are armed and extremely dangerous.

If you don't have enough respect for the value and importance of your own life, and the lives of those you love, to acquire and learn the safe and disciplined use of appropriate tools for self protection and home defense, then at least try to acquire a working knowledge of the belief systems of those committed to harming you. Defending one's life is a moral obligation. Knowledge is indeed power, and you may learn enough to avoid a deadly confrontation. Jews in Germany tried to avoid confrontation. Ask someone in Israel today how they feel about the liberal's dream of making their family safer by not having a gun in the house.

Here's a crash course in just what, in broad overview, those looking for something supernatural to happen around New Year's Eve or Day believe:

Chapter One. God, for uncertain reasons, decided to make everything from nothing, including our universe, our planet, and ourselves. God made people, and they disobeyed God by gaining knowledge of good and evil. Although they could not have fairly been held to know it was wrong to disobey God before gaining knowledge of good and evil, God punished them for not being the kind of created beings God wanted them to be.

Chapter Two. The numerous descendents of the two created people that had disappointed God also disappointed God, so God killed all of them in a flood.

In the Third Century:

The truth of the matter is that the Church wiped out almost everything of value in paganism so as to establish its unique point of view, and in doing so systematically eradicated critical thought, progress in medicine and the arts, areas of creative exploration which had already reached a high level of development.

Douglas Lockhart, *The Dark Side of God: A Quest for the Lost Heart of Christianity* (Shaftesbury, UK: Element Books, 1999) p. 52



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Only eight adult people survived, by living for a year in a large floating box that was 450 feet long, by 75 feet wide, by 45 feet high, that also contained samples of every kind of animal, bird, and bug of the inundated planet. Every living child on earth was killed by God's flood, as was every pregnant woman and every fetus. God's views on the murder of children could not have been made more clear. God promised not to do it again.

Chapter Three. The Earth is repopulated by the eight people and the animals that survived the flood in the box. God was still disappointed by the behavior of the descendents of the people he had saved from drowning. God then supernaturally produced a son from the body of an unwed teenage girl, so that the boy could grow up and be killed as a sacrifice to God for the sins of everyone else. After the son was killed, God brought him back to life and took him to Heaven. All people have to do to go to Heaven when they are dead is to believe that God let his son be killed, as a child sacrifice for their sins, and then brought him back to life. Before he went back to Heaven, the reanimated dead son said that he would return shortly to Earth to take believers back with him to be with him and God.

Chapter Four. For nearly two thousand years, the faithful have waited for the son God made, permitted to be killed, and then brought back to life, to come to Earth and get them as he promised he would do. For some reason, this is thought more likely to occur on thousand year round numbered years. So, despite the Bible's assertion that no one can know the day or the hour it will occur, the crazies prepare for the return of the son of the god, with wildly differing versions of what will happen upon his return. Some, but far from all, of the possible events and outcomes predicted are set forth in the opening paragraph of this blasphemy. As in most matters of faith, you can take your choice.

Naturally, nothing supernatural will happen, because there is no supernatural to happen. That is not the concern. What is of concern is the possible actions of those who believe something end-of-the-world like will happen and who are committed to helping it along. Some such have already emerged, and they have worked much mischief. We can be certain more wait the fast closing end of the year 1999. It is these living persons set upon harming others and achieving self-fulfilling prophecies that we should fear and guard against, not the fears and fairy tales that drive them. They are the darkness we need fear.

Here are some of your narrator's prophecies for the future, drawn far more specifically than any of those of the Bible or of any of the 900 telephone line psychics. The year 2000, the last year of this millennium, will come. The Messiah will not come. The world will not end. Neither Jesus nor Satan will appear. Nor will the Antichrist. There will be no Rapture. There will be no apocalypse. There will be no battle of Armageddon. The failure of these events to occur will strengthen the faith of some, as the people continue to imagine a vain thing. There will be more

Kagin's Columns.

The final year of this millennium, that will so quickly come, should be for us a time of reflection. The dating of our years, the structure of our centuries, and the very idea of a millennium, are, to be sure, artificial. But so are most of the many signposts that mark our roads and measure our days. Symbols are powerful. They are of great importance and value, so long as we don't mistake the symbol for what it is meant to symbolize. We can find meaning in the final year of this arbitrary thousand year period that is a slice of how we measure time. The past one thousand years has been filled with war and with superstition, the latter often giving birth to the former. The next thousand years can see our kind populate the stars, or it can see us regress to the worst of the past darkness from which our evolved human minds have delivered us.

Consider, as a benediction for our age, the words of Thaddaeus, said to have been from the first century of the first millennium (see Kagin's Column, "On the Gospel of Thaddaeus"):

"May that measure of peace, justice, harmony and understanding denied religion and its deities be attained by mortals through the use of their minds, and may reason, science, curiosity, and discovery replace the fear, the guilt, the pain, and the ignorance of trembling in terror before capricious gods. Ecce homo."

Happy New Year!



From the www: METHODS OF CLEANING

According to a radio report, a middle school in Oregon was faced with a unique problem. A number of girls were beginning to use lipstick and would put it on in the bathroom. That was fine, but after they put on their lipstick they would press their lips to the mirror leaving dozens of little lip prints.

Finally the principal decided that something had to be done. She called all the girls to the bathroom and met them there with the maintenanceman. She explained that all these lip prints were causing a major problem for the custodian who had to clean the mirrors every night. To demonstrate how difficult it was to clean the mirrors, she asked the maintenance guy to clean one of the mirrors.

He took out a long-handled squeegee, dipped it into the toilet and then cleaned the mirror. Since then there have been no lip prints on the mirror. There are teachers and then there are TEACHERS.



Horror at Columbine: Does It Justify Banning Guns?

A Response to Theologian Franz Bibfeldt, Jr.
by Steven Schafersman
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Writing using his characteristic poetic and prolix prose, Edwin Kagin drew personal conclusions about the Columbine High School shooting tragedy (Kagin's Column: "On what we learned at school on April 20, 1999," FIG Leaves, May 1999). Kagin recognized the horror of the event in Littleton, Colorado, and made the point that many individuals would be quick to grasp for any easy explanation for what may turn out to be an inexplicable and singular occurrence. Furthermore, according to Kagin, after grasping simplistic explanations, the same individuals would just as quickly offer easy solutions to prevent future tragedies of this type. Although many explanations were mentioned (violent video games and television programming, uncaring or absent parents, alienated and disaffected youth, gang activity in schools, the lack of religious instruction in public education, a lack of spirituality among our young people caused by the modern secular world, the easy availability of information about bomb building and terrorist tactics on the Internet, etc.), Kagin concentrated on one in particular: the ready availability of guns to anyone in society, even underage high school students, and the typical easy solution to this alleged problem: banning guns.

Needless to say, Kagin's characterization of this explanation and solution was not charitable. He claimed that if we attempt to blame the horror of Littleton on mindless things like music, computers, networks, television, religiosity, and weapons (he called them "tools," but we all know what he meant), we "invite terrible repetition," because the fault and blame belong to the actor--the person who perpetrated the violence--not to inanimate objects or unctuous displays of religiosity. Now a person could have been influenced by violent television programming and computer games, or could have been corrupted by evil or misguided peers, but this remains to be seen. And even if the actors were so influenced and corrupted, does this really absolve them of complicity and guilt? Of course not. A primary attribute of critical thinking is understanding that actions have consequences, so actors must be aware of the consequences of their acts and take responsibility for them. The true problem is our cultures readiness to apply blame to others and to inanimate objects, rather than to apply blame where it belongs: the person who acts. Therefore, to blame the tragic Columbine murders on the ready availability of guns, and attempting to correct this perceived problem by banning the use of guns by everyone, is a misapplication of blame, a misperception of the true

problem, and a mistaken solution to a non-problem.

Now this analysis seems to be clear and straightforward. Who could object to such reasoned eloquence? (I admit that, while the reason is apparent, the eloquence of a typical Kagin's Column may be an acquired taste for some.) Yet, Theologian Franz Bibfeldt, Jr., did object ("Throwing out the baby with the bath water," FIG Leaves, June 1999). In his essay, Theologian Bibfeldt described the above as "Kagin's rant," not exactly a reasoned characterization, and claimed that, "To argue, as Kagin does, that the events 'happened because those two dead killers killed them,' or that 'they were evil,' whatever that means, begs the question." Unfortunately for Theologian Bibfeldt, this grossly mischaracterizes Kagin's argument. First, Bibfeldt misses the irony in Kagin's prose: Kagin's quotes selected by Bibfeldt do not represent Kagin's arguments, but are rather the speculative explanations of other people rhetorically presented by Kagin for ironic effect. Second, whatever their reasons, rational or irrational, the two dead murderers undoubtedly had reasons--certainly Bibfeldt cannot think that Kagin denies that! The entire point of Kagin's argument is that the reasons of the killers (which Kagin properly does not identify) must be examined and, if they can be posthumously understood, actions could be taken to help future students and prevent future tragedies. However, if their reasons cannot be understood (which may be more likely), we will have to live with the sad ambiguity of not knowing. But in either case, blame for the tragic murders must still fall upon the killers and not upon their weapons.

Now we come to the crux of the matter: Theologian Bibfeldt says that, "regardless of fault, what is the nature of the event, and how can we prevent similar occurrences in the future?" Perceiving that the event involved the killing of innocent people using guns, Bibfeldt focuses in on the--to him--obvious explanation: "What is different today, is that young men and children have easy access to guns." Then he criticizes Kagin for opposing gun control and bans, for Bibfeldt wants to license, register, restrict, and ultimately ban guns. Again, unfortunately for Bibfeldt, his argument is wrong. Let's examine why. First, his historical explanation--that claims that, because violent impulses among humans have been common throughout history (a valid premise), the easy availability of guns today by young people is what leads to greater violence--is incorrect. This argument requires that young people had less access to guns in the past, and this is flatly false. I don't want to belabor this point (because I want to concentrate on the next one), but young people in the United States have had easy access to guns throughout our country's history. Guns today are certainly more lethal than in the past, but young people aren't murdering with them more

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because they are more readily available--guns have always been easily available.

Theologian Bibfeldt further reasons--or merely implies--that the two young male killers murdered the innocent students because they had acquired a collection of lethal guns. I hope I didn't mischaracterize the good theologian's argument, but it is so obviously illogical that Wolf Roder would quickly recognize that fact. Certainly the possession of lethal guns was necessary to carry out the large number of killings in this case, but Bibfeldt is omitting one important additional and necessary factor: the reason and will to use them in the killings. Kagin wanted to focus on the reasons and wills of individuals who committed the crime, placing the complicity or blame there, but Bibfeldt wants to focus on the availability of the lethal weapons as the primary cause of the tragedy. Which viewpoint is right? As every reader well knows, this debate has been continuing in our society for decades, and in the brief survey that follows, I want to unreservedly support Kagin over Bibfeldt.

Lethal firearms are a sufficient but not necessary means of killing large numbers of people. Many other means are possible: ammonia-fuel oil bombs, propane tank bombs, arson, poison, and automobiles. Theologian Bibfeldt actually thought he had bested Kagin here: he used the frequently-heard gun control argument that we should indeed treat guns just like we treat automobiles. Automobiles, he says, are rarely used to deliberately kill someone. We should have drivers meet a minimum age and show proficiency to get a license, have gun and trigger locks, and have guns registered, licensed, and insured. Despite the fact that most of these are actually required today (with no objection from us), Bibfeldt's argument fails on two major points: first, unlike guns, automobiles are also rarely used to prevent crimes and personal injury, and second, the right to own and operate automobiles is not protected in the Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution.

Gun banning or extreme gun control in our society would be a tragic mistake, because guns are necessary for self-protection. Guns save more lives than they take. Guns prevent more injuries than they inflict. Guns prevent more crimes than they cause. Police cannot protect, and are not legally required to protect, every individual (they are only sworn to protect society in general). Therefore, the responsibility for self-protection falls upon the individual. Guns are the only means that a weaker individual (a single person confronted by a group of people, a woman confronted by a man, a family confronted by a gunman, a minority confronted by a majority, etc.) can protect himself, herself, his or her family, or itself, against a stronger force. Handguns are defensive weapons, primarily used in self-protection, not in offense against others. Handguns are equalizers in the struggle against crime, allowing good, law-abiding citizens to protect themselves against armed, aggressive

criminals. Firearms among an armed citizenry protect many nations today from armed, possibly aggressive majorities that surround them; one example is the state of Israel.

Gun control advocates may chuckle at the gun rights bumper sticker slogan: "When guns are outlawed, only outlaws will have guns." But this will be the case. It is the case now. The cities and states with the most restrictive gun control laws have the greatest amount of violent crime (for example, Washington, DC). On the other hand, cities and states with liberal gun laws, and especially those with concealed carry laws, have seen dramatic reductions in violent crime (for example, Florida, Kentucky, and Kennesaw, GA). Why? Because criminals avoid armed citizens--they are rational to at least that extent. Another example: rapes are averted when women carry or use firearms for protection; burglaries when the homeowner is home are reduced when criminals know that homeowners have firearms in the house. All of these statements are well-documented by research studies.

To be strictly accurate, when guns are outlawed, only the police and outlaws will have guns. So let's look at another bumper sticker slogan, one that I invented myself: "A state in which only the police have guns is a police state." (You may not see this one on many bumpers.) The Second Amendment of our Constitution was written to enshrine the right of self-protection, not from criminals, but from a tyrannical state. A free people possesses the means for self-protection: this ultimately means the possession of firearms. A government that prevents its citizens from possessing guns is one that does not trust its own citizens. Police know, or should know, that they cannot protect every citizen. Honest police, therefore, support the right of every individual to own handguns to protect oneself and one's family. Police who support gun control and gun banning are hypocrites: they are thinking only of their own safety, not the safety of the citizens they are sworn to protect. In fact, the lives and freedoms of decent, law-abiding citizens in our country, especially in urban areas, are constantly threatened by criminal predators. The poor people living here have the greatest need for self-protection, but the cheap guns they can afford, Saturday-night specials, are the first ones banned by the anti-gun zealots. Apparently, they believe that only the wealthy should be able to obtain the means of self-protection.

The central premise of the gun control movement is that society becomes more civilized when the citizen surrenders the means of self-defense, leaving the state a monopoly of force. In this century, we have repeatedly witnessed the consequences of unchecked state monopolies of force against their citizens: nearly 170 million people have been murdered by their own governments (this is known as democide). Americans have been spared rule by tyrannical, murderous

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dictators, but state tyranny can come in other forms, such as when our government fails or even refuses to protect unpopular groups of people, disfavored because of their political or religious beliefs, their ethnic ancestry, or the color of their skin. History has shown that citizens who fail to protect, lose, or never had the right to bear arms for self-protection from their government, typically become helpless dependents of their state. On the other hand, the idea of right to arms suggests a very different relationship, one in which the citizen is not a helpless bystander in the task of self-protection, but rather an active participant--an equal partner with the state in preserving one's personal safety, the safety of the community, and ultimately the safety of civilization.

Two further points: First, IF all firearms were confiscated by the state, including all those of criminals, police, military, and private citizens, would we then be safer than before from violent assault or death? No! Because then the brute physical force of organized criminals or any tyrannical state police or militia would prevail over weaker--but decent, law-abiding, productive, and therefore more deserving--ordinary citizens. It is a fact, for example, that more people are assaulted and killed by knives in the United States than by guns. Are we going to confiscate all knives, too? Second, Edwin Kagin and I do not oppose all gun control efforts, only

immoderate, unconstitutional, irrational, and dangerous gun control efforts. We support, for example, such reasonable laws as background checks, laws preventing young people from purchasing or owning handguns, laws restricting gun ownership by felons and the criminally insane, mandatory sentencing laws for crimes committed using a firearm, etc. These laws exist now, with no objection from us. We do, however, oppose gun confiscation, registration, bans, concealed carry prohibitions, etc., for reasons that I won't discuss here.

I am aware that Theologian Bibfeldt likes to support his arguments with facts and statistics, an attribute I admire and emulate; therefore, I refer him and other readers to <http://www.edwinkagin.com/documents/>, a webpage that contains the documentation for many of the statements in this response. In conclusion, the right of self-protection from both criminals and the state is too important to be left to rabid, right-wing extremists, who have heretofore monopolized the topic. Too often, through their ignorance and zealotry, they have muddled and misrepresented the proper arguments for the right of individuals to bear arms, and given reasonable people a good excuse to ignore the issue. The right to bear arms for self-protection is a proper liberal right, one that political, social, and economic liberals like myself and Edwin Kagin want to support along with other liberal

* * * * *
* Seen on a bumper sticker at the Lilith Fair concert: "Sorry I missed church. I've been too busy studying witchcraft and becoming a lesbian."
* * * * *

Big News!
Our old friends Answers in Genesis (AIG) have denounced FIG and FIG members Dr. Steve Schafersman and Edwin Kagin in an 18 minute Internet radio interview with Dr. Russ Humphreys of AIG. In this radio broadcast, we learn how evolutionist Dr. Schafersman was rendered silently helpless by the unanswerable truths of creationism, and we hear actual lines from the evil poetry of Edwin read, as in a song he mocks Ken Ham, the god sent head of AIG.
It is wonderfully entertaining. If you can't figure out how to listen to it on your computer, ask an eight year old for help.
It can be heard at:
<http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs/4163.asp>
Looks like we have made the big time. Look around the AIG web site for other goodies. We are also informed how tonight shooting star show is proof of a young universe.
Edwin Kagin

Viagra OK with god, now Kosher.

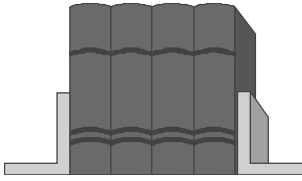
Miami Beach, rejoice! Rabbi Abraham Blumenkrantz of Far Rockaway, Queens, this week announced that Orthodox Judaism gives a hearty thumbs-up to the anti-impotency drug. That endorsement wasn't a foregone conclusion, given that the drug contains an ingredient made from animal derivatives which would normally make it unkosher for consumption by devout Jews. But as Blumenkrantz says, a healthy marriage (and yes, this only counts for married couples) takes precedence over the laws of kashrut; thus, the little blue pill with the big results is, in fact, kosher. "To keep a good marital relationship plays a very important role in Jewish law," Blumenkrantz said. "A couple married properly under Jewish law and experiencing an intimate dysfunction may use

Viagra." Mazel tov!

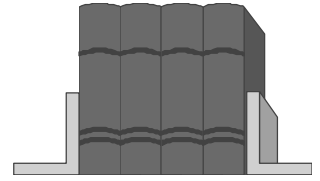
Father Marcelo Rossi a Roman Catholic priest in Rio de Janeiro has worshipers dancing in the aisles. His new CD of sacred music is at the top of Brazilian charts thanks to the Jesus Twist(Vira de Jesus). In a nation where 83 percent of the people call themselves Catholic, but only 15 percent go to Mass regularly this is a true miracle. Father Marcelo holds the Masses in soccer stadiums to accommodate the mobs of young people who come to attend. (Reuters)

"Advertising may be described as the science of arresting the human intelligence long enough to get money from





Book Reviews



A Freethought Eight Pack

by A. J. Mattill

(Gordo, Alabama: Flatwoods Free Press)

The subject of this review is a collection of eight publications by well known freethought author and publicist A. J. Mattill. These long pamphlets are essentially a series of attacks on the Bible, on biblical literalism, on irrational and contradictory aspects of Christian and Jewish faiths, and provide a rational voice for humanism. Here is a list of the publications in order of length:

1. *Displaying the Decalogue*, 12 pages, a careful explication of the various versions of the ten commandments, and all that is contradictory between "Deuteronomy" and "Exodus."
2. *A Cosmic Creed for the Coming Century*, 16 pages; as the title implies, the author lays out his set of principles for rational secular humanists to guide our thought and action.
3. *The Seven Mighty Blows to Traditional Beliefs*, 40 pages. This is an abridged version of Mattill's full length book by the same title (below).
4. *The Art of Reading the Bible*, 40 pages. The books which comprise the Jewish and Christian scriptures can be approached in many different ways, Mattill explicates fifteen approaches, from abject believer to doubtful critic.
5. *Freethought Focus*, 42 pages, looks at a number of arguments and conundrums in the professional literature of theology. The author evidently knows his way around those proliferating growths.
6. *Ingersoll Attacks the Bible*, 45 pages. A brief guide to the words and thought of the great infidel.
7. *Polluted Texts and Traditional Beliefs*, 72 pages. This is a highly technical description, list really, of variant readings of the Bible. Under abbreviations and terms (pp. 68-70) Mattill lists some two score different MSS sources not counting the sub-variations of some of these.
8. *The Seven Mighty Blows to Traditional Belief*, 262 pages. This is a major work of scholarship, an assessment and refutation of religious belief and dogma.

In the middle of the 19th century ill informed clerics could still honestly claim the Bible to be without contradiction. Modern scholarship has entirely destroyed that dogma. Mattill examines the astronomical, biological, archaeological and geological findings which contradict the Bible. These are his first four, the hard science, blows against the scriptures. He goes on to look at the soft science arguments of historical and literary

scholarship. Rational biblical criticism has found many contradictions within the words of the Bible itself. Additional blows against credibility of the scriptures can be found in Jesus failed prediction of the Apocalypse, and in the many parallels to other religions of the world. Mattill's scholarship seems detailed, meticulous, and precise to this reader. It certainly is far beyond my capability of judging its quality.

Among the various arts of reading the Bible, there is one Mattill does not mention, namely reading it for the story like any other book. This, admittedly, is not easy. In my own attempts at reading the OT, long stretches seem to have nothing much to do with god. The kings Saul, David and Solomon go through their power plays like any other secular ruler, with nary a nod towards god. It seem strange how this mundane history of some middle eastern tribes can claim to be the basis of a world religion.

The package of Mattill's books can be obtained for \$ 20 from Flatwoods Free Press, Route 2, Box 49, Gordo, Alabama, 35466-9516.

Wolf Roder

Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple ***Revised and Expanded Edition***

edited by Hershel Shanks

(Washington: Biblical Archaeological Society, 1999)

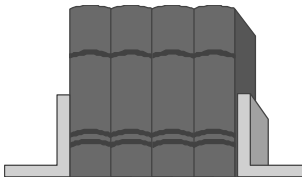
This excellent paperback is a history of Israel, not of the Bible or Biblical Israel, but of the Jewish nations and peoples of antiquity. It is of course impossible to write this history without detailed use of the Bible, since the Hebrew Scriptures are a major source of classical history. At the same time the authors use all other sources available to scholars to create the best understanding possible of events of the time.

The various chapters are written by an international collection of historians and revised by yet other scholars in the light of the latest archaeological and scholarly perspectives and insights. The editor, Hershel Shanks is the highly regarded founder and editor of the *Biblical Archaeology Review*. The book thus does not cater to the faithful and the miracle mongers, but rather to the skeptical and realistic.

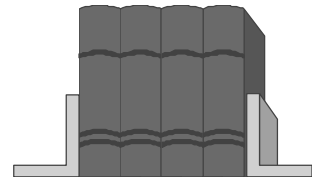
As in the history of many other places, the earliest periods are shrouded in mythical legends of the King Arthur kind. Archaeological evidence can explicate

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Book Reviews



(Continued from page 9)

French and other European peasants survived on similar sized plots. The lack of agricultural knowledge and tools seems to have been the underlying cause.

Then Russia entered World War I and suffered heavy losses. This further alienated the people. Nicholas became directly involved in the War effort and left the Empress, Alexandra, to run the empire. She was under the sway of an ignorant magician, Rasputin, who generated so much trouble among the state leaders that they eventually assassinated him. By this time, it was too late to solve the deep social problems; food shortages and riots occurred. In March of 1917 the February Revolution occurred and arms were stolen from the police and distributed to the peasants. By March 14 a manifesto for a new government, drawn from the Duma, was enacted. It provided for free speech, amnesty for the revolutionaries, and democratic elections. It did not solve the land problem which continued because there was no improvement in agricultural methods. Consequently, the peasants wanted still more land to improve their crop yields and avoid starvation. They began marching against the landowners and considered the provisional government inept.

Inflation was rampant, conditions for the factory workers had not improved and food riots occurred in the cities. The factory workers revolted in October. A widely disseminated remark of an industrialist, Riabushinsky, was, "Perhaps...we need the bony hand of hunger, the poverty of the people, which would seize by the throat all these false friends of the people, all those democratic Soviets and committees." It is unclear if this was ever said, but it was widely believed and it infuriated the workers. Lenin's people, he was in exile in Finland, gained control of the factory committees and called for revolution. On 4 November 1917, Trotsky spoke to a crowd of thousands as leader of the Petersburg Soviet. He incited the people. As reported in *Izvestia*: "The Soviet Power will hand over everything that there is in the country to the poor and to the men in the trenches. You, bourgeois, have two coats---give one to the soldier, who is cold in the trenches. You have warm boots? Stay at home. Your boots are needed by the worker...." And the face of history changed.

The intellectual fuel for these events was provided by Marx and Engels in the Manifesto of the Communist Party. This was drafted by Engels and revised by Marx. It opens by extolling Capitalism and

the great changes it has produced. But it goes on to claim that the owners of the factories, the bourgeoisie, have reduced all important relations to economic relations. It has exploited the workers and turned them into a new kind of serf. This dehumanization required opposition, by revolutionary methods if necessary. The implication of revolution was a direct result of Marx's earlier attempt to defend wine-growing peasants against wood-theft laws. Marx tried to publish an article in the *Rheinische Zeitung* which was suppressed. He decided that, "physical force must be overthrown with physical force, and theory will be a physical force as soon as the masses understand it."

So there is much evidence that the Russian's were oppressed and that the communist manifesto addressed the issues which faced them. It is completely intelligible to me that intellectuals throughout the world were attracted to this example of people rising up to defend themselves against the tyranny of the rich and to become sympathetic to their philosophic inspiration.

Such a one was Arthur Koestler, who always described himself as a typical middle class European intellectual. Born in 1905 to non-observant Jewish parents, Koestler grew up completely assimilated into Budapest culture. He grew up under a series of governesses and learned guilt, fear, and loneliness. His boyhood heroes were Darwin, Spencer, Kepler, Newton, and Mach and he attended a *Realschule* (scientific/engineering) rather than a *Gymnasium*. Having attended boarding schools, and been an unpopular fellow with his classmates, his only worldly knowledge came from a generous maid who introduced him to the delights of sex.

In college he learned of Zionism, having never heard of it at home even though the movement was headquartered in Budapest, and he began to have political interests. After prolonged philosophical discussions with friends in college, he started his lifelong pattern of burning bridges. He stopped attending school and began sending prevaricating letters home stating otherwise. His dissembling ways became a permanent feature of his personality.

He became a newspaper correspondent and saw much of the world. He experienced the problems of Palestine and the Spanish Civil War and the rise of the

The Science Book Club will not meet in December. It will meet in January to discuss EO Wilson's *Consilience*.



(Continued from page 10)

Nazis. This provided many opportunities to practice deception. He was a member of the communist party and once visited the Soviet Union. At train stops, when crowds of peasants starving under Stalin's forced collectivization would hold up their emaciated children before the passengers, he began to deceive himself and believe the statements that these people had brought their hardship on themselves through inattention to the dictates of the soviet. He was arrested and jailed and released through efforts by his former wife. He had come to believe that sometimes a lie could be noble if it led people to behave in a desired way---strictly in line with the materialist version of history associated with Stalin and espoused by his dictatorship.

But eventually Koestler's writing assignments brought him face to face with enough duplicity that he began speaking out even when explicitly forbidden by the comintern. He was denounced and began to reel at the confessions in Stalin's show trials of the old Bolshevik guard. This inspired the book, *Darkness at Noon*. Koestler was trying to get out of Europe at this time, 1938-1941, but could not because of his communist background. His renunciation of communism did not help; he was arrested and imprisoned and the book was finally published while he was jailed.

The book's main character, Rubashov, is a lifelong party member. He is arrested for political deviations and suffers three hearings. Much of the action takes place through internal dialog and his reflections reveal his shifting attitude. Eventually he confesses to the charges, even though he has reviewed in detail with the reader precisely why they are false. Yet it is the higher good of the party which convinces him to confess; he believes completely in the party line and historical materialism. His ego, his self, the grammatical fiction, is ultimately subdued by the larger concern of the collective.

The destruction of the person and the terror and constant lying required to do this are what make this work interesting for me. The book is tremendously influential. It's publication in 1941 may have been one of the important factors in the US change of attitude toward the USSR in World War II. It made accessible the inconsistency and horror of the Stalinist regime. Up to that time, the Moscow trials were received as strange but valid in the West. Koestler changed that with his book.

The book continues its influence to this day. On Amazon.com there is a review of the book which says, "I read this book because Edward Teller did." Teller is the father of the Hydrogen Bomb and the largest proponent of Star Wars defense strategies. Teller's anti-communism is legendary and he is considered the person responsible for the "limited" in the Limited Test Ban Treaty from the 60s and there is indirect evidence that he was important in the failure to support the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty on 13 October, 1999.

In a series of lectures entitled "The Reluctant Revolutionary," given in April, 1963, Teller tells us:

"There is in the world today an expanding and frightening power---the Communist party...They know that a united world will be established in the coming decades, and they have a clear and definite plan to establish a strict world-order. They want to establish it according to the principles of their society, which they consider scientific. Indeed, I see ominous signs that the Communists will probably succeed in establishing their world-empire. They have an aim. They are ruthless in following that aim. They are willing to employ, in the interest of what they consider the ultimate good of mankind, every available method, including that of force and deception. In pursuing their goal, they are using the old dreadful tools of conquest, dictation, and terror."

It was Koestler's book which changed the way in which the USSR was viewed. That change has had, and continues to have, dramatic consequences.

Bob Riehemann

Terry Gross to speak at Woman's City Club

FIG is pleased to announce that they will co-sponsor Terry Gross' appearance at the Woman's City Club. Ms. Gross will speak at the Plum Street Temple, at Eighth and Plum Streets, on Monday, March 6, 2000, at 7:30 PM.

"Cool, confident, always insightful, Terry Gross is host of NPR's daily afternoon program, *Fresh Air*. As a thought-provoking interviewer, Ms. Gross engages in conversations with prominent figures and those unknown people who change the world without our knowing it, always managing to push her guests in unlikely directions. Her interviews are grounded with intelligence and integrity, and she displays an unusual mixture of confidence, genuine interest, and just a touch of vulnerability.

In 1973, Terry Gross began hosting and producing *Fresh Air* at WHYY in Philadelphia; it has since become a daily, one-hour program distributed nationally to 160 stations which reach more than two million listeners. Over the years, *Fresh Air* has received numerous awards, including the prestigious *Peabody Award* and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting Award for "Best Live Radio Program." "

Fresh Air can be heard locally on WVXU Monday through Friday from 4:00 until 5:00 PM.

Tickets will be \$20 at the door, or \$15 if purchased beforehand through FIG. Tickets will not be available until January. For information about purchasing tickets, contact Helen Kagin at HelenKagin@aol.com or speak to her

December 1999



11 FIG Leaves