

# FIG Leaves

January 2000

## January Meeting

**Religious Hoodwinking: How Two of the Three Branches of Government are Mislead by a Church**  
by Marion and Bill Cooley

The speakers will describe their personal histories as members of and then defectors from the Christian Science Church. The central beliefs of Christian Science seem outwardly benign and salutary. Concealed below the surface of this church's principles is a terrifying neglect of the welfare of children and elders. Since Christian Scientists are expected to avoid medical care, life-threatening diseases of their children are often handled with prayer alone. In most states the



parents cannot be convicted after any resulting deaths and lifetime handicaps, since the church has successfully lobbied for religious exemptions to child-abuse laws. Further, elder Christian Scientists admitted to their church's sanatoria may receive Medicare payments even though the sanatoria provide no medical care and no custodial care that is related to skilled nursing. The legislative and executive branches of government have steadfastly fostered these situations, and only sporadic judicial rulings have begun to correct the

misapplication of laws. The speakers are members of CHILD, Inc., a national organization that strives to remove religious exemptions and the specific Medicare ruling that allows payment for non-medical care.

### Kentucky Law Exempts Churches from Civil Rights

The Northern Kentucky Baptist Association (NKBA) owns the camp ground used by Camp Quest in 1996 and 1997. They were made aware of the Secular Humanist nature of the camp and had Camp Quest sign a contract in which the Association acknowledged that they followed the Public Accommodations Law. The camp staff had a very cordial relation with Camp Quest, but the Associations board of directors began having second thoughts and made it increasingly obvious that Camp Quest was not welcome. Camp Quest voluntarily sought out another campground with improved facilities. The NKBA now says that they rented to Camp Quest only because they were afraid of being sued, and that they want the legal right to deny their camp grounds to any organization that has a fundamental conflict with their religious beliefs. Representative Tom Kerr took up their cause and proposed an ammendment to exempt "religious non-profit worship and recreational activities and facilities" from Kentucky Civil Rights legislation. HB70 (BR232) has left the House Judiciary Committee and moved to the House for a vote. Lexington Representative Kathy Stein opposes the ammendment, stating that it is much too broad and may be used in ways that noone anticipates. Will the YMCA deny her sons use of their facilities because she is Jewish? Please write your congressman! (<http://www.lrc.state.ky.us/home.htm>)

Martha Ferguson

**FIG Members**  
Don't forget to pay your annual dues. A copy of the membership form can be found on page 11. Sign

**Coming in March:**  
**What is Truth?**  
**Part II**  
Stay tuned for details.

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## Events

**January Meeting**  
Marion and Bill Cooley  
Tuesday, January 25 at 7:00 PM  
Geier Center

**Potluck Dinner**  
Tuesday, February 8, 2000  
at 6:30 PM

## November Meeting Speaker Review

Dr. Steven Schafersman presented 'The Intelligent Design Argument: Its Origin, Death, and Resurrection' at the Geier Center on November 17, 1999. He presented the same topic to the Association for Rational Thought on December 11th.

The Intelligent Design (ID) argument for a 'creator' or 'designer' of the universe is not new, but it is experiencing a resurgence. This topic is important to secular humanists because ID is a commonly cited reason for theistic beliefs. The current proponents of ID have couched their argument in scientific terms, thus attempting to gain legitimacy. In return, however, they expose themselves to scientific and philosophical criticism.

The classic argument for ID is typified by the watchmaker analogy put forth by Anglican archdeacon William Paley in the 18th century. By his reckoning, the complexity exhibited by living organisms requires a designer. A human is at least as complex as a watch, yet it is inconceivable that even a watch could be created by a sequence of random natural events. The Scottish empiricist David Hume questioned the validity of the analogy by pointing out that a human and a watch are actually quite different. We cannot suppose that something in nature was created supernaturally, especially when there is no external point of reference for what is natural. Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza previously criticized miracles by arguing that it is only our ignorance of the laws of nature that makes certain things appear to be supernatural.

In the 19th century, Darwin's theory of natural selection provided a mechanism to explain how complex life forms evolved. Subsequent discoveries in physics filled in many other gaps in our understanding of the universe. Science appeared ready to eliminate all need for a supernatural designer of the universe. Yet in the last thirty years a new window of opportunity opened for the ID pseudoscientists.

Science is well respected in our society, but it is also widely misunderstood. In 1973, Brandon Carter proposed the Anthropic Cosmological Theory in support of ID. This theory claims that the universe is obviously created for humans to live in because changing any one of many physical properties in the universe would preclude human life. Of course, there is no other

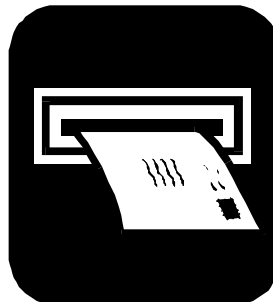
universe in which to test this theory, and it is just as logical to suppose that humans are adapted to the universe rather than vice versa.

More recently the Creationists realized that they could find biological structures that were not readily explained by natural selection. By presupposing the existence of supernatural phenomena, they could then lead their followers to the conclusion that an intelligent designer is the most reasonable explanation for the world we see.

Michael Behe is an ID proponent who claims that biological organisms exhibit irreducible complexity. In its simple form, irreducible complexity argues that organs such as wings or eyes could not have evolved gradually because they would serve no purpose in a more primitive, unevolved form. This argument has been refuted by numerous cases of primitive biological structures that partially function or serve other purposes. In response, Behe searches for new examples from biochemistry that have not been explained yet.

William Dembski is another ID author. He proposes the concept of specified complexity to support ID. Specified complexity is an extension of irreducible complexity that emphasizes the interrelationships between various complex biological systems. It can also be refuted through known and hypothetical natural processes, but this contrary evidence requires a great deal of effort from legitimate scientists who have more pressing concerns. And the Creationists typically move on to other 'evidence' by the time that their previous arguments are discredited.

Dr. Schafersman cited many reasons that Intelligent Design is a pseudoscience. For all of these reasons, ID proponents should be challenged at every opportunity. As long as they cloak



### Letters to the Editor

We have a new e-mail address:  
FIGEditors@aol.com

The mail address remains:  
Editor, FIG Leaves, P.O. Box 8128,  
Cincinnati, OH 45208

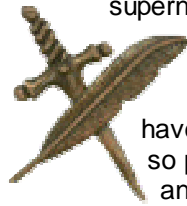
FIG Leaves Volume 9, Issue 1, January 2000 - Editors welcome thoughtful articles, letters, reviews, reports, anecdotes, and cartoons. Submit in electronic format via Internet to FIGEditors@aol.com or on disk or typewritten via mail to Editor, FIG Leaves, P.O. Box 8128, Cincinnati OH 45208. Contributions 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. © 1999 The Free Inquiry Group, Inc. FIG Board of Directors: President George Maurer, Vice President Edwin Kagin, Secretary Helen Kagin, Treasurer Joe Levee, Members: Nurit Bowman, Lyse Hurd, Tim Kelly, Inez Klein, Robert Riehemann, Gary



## 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](http://www.edwinkagin.com)  
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supernatural power will ever visit us again. We are alone for all time, with only ourselves to guide and save us.

How, might one ask, as I asked, can our world have ended, yet seem so solidly to continue and appear so plainly to remain? So asked I in my vision, and the answer as a mystery came. With the mystery of that answer came the charge to publish the truth abroad--to assure the anguish of all of us who are fellow travelers on this orb that was first created and lately then destroyed.

There appeared before me a book, the edges of which were blackened and burned, as in a refiner's fire, and the seals of which book, wherewithal it had been sealed, had been broken asunder. And the book was open unto a page. And the words upon that charred and tattered page could still be plainly seen and clearly read. And these were the words that were thereupon writ:

"Know thou, doomed mortal, that thy world hath ended. It ended in the first moments of the first day of the first month of the year you call 2000. The Rapture hath come. It came as the world ended, and those who were chosen to be saved have been taken away unto a new Heaven and a new Earth. All who are ever to be raptured have been raptured, and all those not then raptured are never to be raptured. Those not raptured are left behind, by Divine Design, to live out their mortal lives in a world that hath now ended, a world in which they, the not saved and the not raptured, must henceforth forever remain."

Then asked I, through terror and tears, unto the unknown darkness about me, how our wrecked and ruined and wretched world could still so sentient seem.

And a voice, likened unto a voice of doom, sounding as the taste of wormwood and gall, answered from out a whirlwind unto me, with directions to tell the answer unto you, my fellow mortals, who along with me alike to death are damned:

"Hear, Oh fool, thou who would not see the supernatural or on faith believe that which was unseen. Know thee, in this final answer--for no further answer shall ever come--that thy world has been transubstantiated, with all of its substance forever changed, with only the accidents of its appearance as land, sea and sky remaining, that cause it to seem, in each of its particulars, to those of undiscerning hearts, immutable and unchanged. As it was in the days of Noah, so has it now been finally fulfilled as it had been formerly forever of old foretold."

As it was in the time of Noah! The flood, the ark, the animals, the drowned children. Only eight adult humans spared. Only four breeding pairs of humans left alive when finally dried the heavenly waters that had choked the life from all other adults and from all children, both in and out of the womb, from those who, in person or by the hands of their doomed mothers, scratched and screamed, as their lives slowly ended, against the splintery sides of the ark of salvation, as it floated above their weakened forms that finally sunk beneath the righteous waves. Seven pairs of every clean animal were mercifully spared. Those not

*(Continued on page 4)*

### ON THE TRANSUBSTANTIATION OF THE WORLD:

#### THE REVELATION TO EDWIN

This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
Not with a bang but a whimper.

T.S. Eliot

Edwin, unto those who yet remain for the eternity to come, to all those left behind who, though damned, yet know it not, Greetings. Little of comfort can be said or given unto you, save the assurance that truth, however dire, should be valued of more worth than the vanity of false belief and the futile imagining of a vain thing.

I erred when last I wrote, in false strayed prophesy, that the world would not end and that the rapture would not come. On the midnight stroke that called in the 2000th year of our Lord, this, our world, ended. The saved saints, living and dead, were raptured into Heaven. We, and all of us who remain--who you must now know are the eternally damned--were left behind. Left behind, forever, without hope, in a world that has been utterly destroyed. Left in a world beyond repair. Left in a world that is, with no hope of redemption, ruined.

That which had been prophesied, this horror foretold, was not at once known to have been so fully and so finally fulfilled. There were only small things to be seen as signs. The weather was too warm, and cats seemed less opaque than usual. Cats, we note too late, are not mentioned in the Bible. Dogs are mentioned eight and thirty times. Now know we why. Cats know why too. Cats have always known.

The truth, the horror, of what had happened was made known to me, for reasons I neither know nor understand, in a mighty vision. Whether in the body or out of it, whether asleep or not, I can in no wise truly say. I only know it was revealed unto me that our world is now past and forever gone. And that I am charged to tell you.

Hope of supernatural salvation for any who remain is likewise gone, for the blessed of the almighty power, all of the chosen elect, have been raptured away. We who are left are left unto eternity, denied forever and forever the beatific vision, denied the fulfillment of the blessed hope. There will never be offered another chance to gain that heavenly world beyond the natural world. We are all alone, with our fallible human reasoning, in our world that lack of faith destroyed. The only world we have ever had. No



## December's Open Forum Meeting

President George Maurer opened December's meeting with a brief summary of the history of FIG. Joe Levee and Dr. Carl Bundy founded FIG in 1991. They mailed invitations to all Free Inquiry Magazine subscribers. Only 4 people were present at the first organizational meeting, but that number swelled to 30 who attended the first dinner meeting. They soon chose a board of directors and officially incorporated. FIG is a member of the Alliance of Secular Humanist Societies established by the Council for Secular Humanism.

FIG has sponsored and supported a variety of activities over the year:

- ?? One of the most notable is Camp Quest, the first Secular Humanist camp for children. It began in 1996 with 20 campers, and grew to 40 campers in 1999.
- ?? FIG is a member of the Mainstream Network, an organization that opposes the religious right .
- ?? FIG cosponsored speakers for the Women's Club in 1999 and will do so again this year when Terry Gross speaks on March 6, 2000. See Helen Kagin for details.
- ?? FIG helped construct a Wall of Separation of Church and State on Fountain Square for two years over Christmas and during Free Thought Week. It is safely preserved in Bob Riehemann's garage.
- ?? In 1996, FIG picketed a Human Life International meeting. They are a pro-life group.
- ?? Two of FIG's members taught a course at the Institute of Learning at the University of Cincinnati.
- ?? FIG participated in the 1996 Humanism and Arts Conference.
- ?? FIG members participated in the movement against

Answers in Genesis' proposed museum site near Big Bone State Park.

The second half of the December meeting consisted of a discussion about what FIG should do in the future.

- ?? Can we encourage the formation of a Campus Free-thought Alliance (CFA) organization on Northern Kentucky University's campus? A faculty member will have to be located as a possible sponsor for the group, if there is student interest.
- ?? Do local libraries have a good selection of Humanist Literature? Should we consider donating materials to the local libraries, and if we do, will they be used?
- ?? Should we have a downloadable pamphlet about FIG and Secular Humanism in general, so that members could pass them out to interested persons? Could we create some interesting posters to display in the community to better reach those who might be interested in our organization?
- ?? How do we go about advertising? (We found out that there is no specific advertising budget.) Could we investigate establishing a regular show on the local cable T.V. stations? How can we make more people aware of FIG?
- ?? Should we have a joint meeting with the Cincinnati Sceptic's organization (ART)? What topic might be of interest to both organizations?
- ?? We like the phrase "Atheists Anonymous". What can we do with it?

The general consensus was that we like what FIG has done in the past, but wonder if we can reach more people in the area who are not aware of our existence. We want to have a greater presence in the area and increase our membership, but we do not want to lose the sense of community that we feel. If we are too large, will

*(Continued from page 3)*

saved then died. Their fate was to be preferred to that of those not saved this time, to the fate of those condemned to live where faith has failed.

I then understood this vision granted me. Those awaiting the rapture of the blessed were as foolish virgins awaiting their bridegrooms while despising their coming. Few were chosen, and few were taken. It was not written how many would be saved, only that it would be as in the time of Noah, and surely it was so. The religiously pious, the self-righteous, those assured unto themselves of their goodness and of their salvation, all are as fully denied as are those who, through the use of reason, reject untestable faith as folly.

Heed not the much speaking yet to come from false preachers, for such fools are as sure to die as you. Laugh at pretenders who claim knowledge, at those who dare presume upon eternal truth, for they are here with all of us, un-raptured and alone in a transubstantiated world, in a world wherein their faith has failed.

My charge is now completed, and my revelation has

been revealed. It remains but to remind you that only our human minds, with their naturally evolved abilities to create and learn and reason, yet abide. Nothing supernatural will ever exist for us, or be available unto us. What can be done by humankind in our new world, where mortals live for this life alone and can look neither to hopes of immortality nor to any power or powers beyond the bounty and boundaries of our natural world, cannot now be known, because such a thing has never yet been fully attempted or truly tried.

We have no choice, it seems, but to live in our world without faith in anything beyond ourselves. For that is all we have. Perhaps it is all that we have ever had. But it is enough.

May the years yet to come unto you bring you peace and joy. And do take heart, for you have this day seen the prophesy fulfilled that there will be Kagin's Columns yet to come.

Edwin Kagin



## What is Truth? Special Interest Group Meeting, December 1, at Ethiopian Restaurant

The purpose of this meeting was to inaugurate a discussion group within the membership of Free Inquiry Group where members and guests could come together and discuss a pre-assigned book or articles about a specific subject. There were two articles under consideration for this meeting, *The Belief Engine* by James E. Alcock and *Some Systematic Biases of Everyday Judgment* by Thomas Gilovich both articles were published in the *Skeptical Inquirer* in 1995 and 1997, respectively.

The discussion that took place before, during and after dinner was lively and a general consensus was reached that the first article presented less evidence for the author's thesis than the second. However the moderator pointed out that the article was not written for publication in a scholarly journal where citations would have been appropriate but for a general circulation publication for the general public.

Professor Alcock's main thesis is that "Our brains and nervous systems constitute a belief generating machine, a system that evolved to assure not truth, logic and reason but survival ..." He starts off by enumerating a list of beliefs that are strongly held by some and just as strongly rejected by others:

e.g. "spiritual healing sometimes succeeds where conventional medicine fails ."

"a widespread, transgenerational, Satanic conspiracy is afoot in our society."

"certain gifted people have been able to use their psychic powers to help police solve crimes."

"Elvis lives."

In order to conceptualize, Professor Alcock postulates 7 components of the "belief engine." The learning unit is tied to the physical architecture of the brain and nervous system and by its very nature we are condemned to magical thinking which he defines as the "interpreting of two occurring events as though one caused the other, without any concern for the causal link." This is known in logic as the fallacy of "post hoc, ergo propter hoc" (literally "after this, because of this.")

**The critical thinking unit.** Since we have the predisposition to magical thinking, we have to labor diligently to overcome this tendency. Although we never do so completely, through experience and direct teaching, we come to learn the limits of our intuitive thinking. So when we reach adulthood we understand the limits of our intuitive interpretations.

**The yearning unit.** We are not passive receivers of information. We actively seek out information to satisfy our many needs. We yearn for many things e.g. to find meaning in life, a sense of identity, recovery from disease. Beliefs whether true or false can serve to ease these yearnings. When yearning most we are in greatest need and most susceptible to fallacious beliefs.

**The input unit.** We receive information from sensory experience but also organized information from books, films and word of mouth. From these sources our perceptual processes construct an image of what is happening from the sensory world. This image is modified by our existing deeply held beliefs.

**The emotional response unit.** Experiences accompanied by strong emotion may leave an unshakable belief in whatever explanation appealed to the individual at the time. And in turn emotion may directly influence both perception and learning.

**The environmental feedback unit.** Feedback from the external world can alter our beliefs by strengthening or weakening them. But, since the beliefs themselves can influence how the feedback is perceived, they can become very resistant to change because of contrary information.

This article concludes that the "belief engine" produces beliefs without any automatic concern for truth. Concern for truth is acquired upon becoming aware that there is objective reality that is not always perceived by our senses.

The second article does not contradict the first one but looks at beliefs from a slightly different perspective. In looking at dubious beliefs, Gilovich separates those that have motivational causes (i.e. the beliefs are comforting thus persuading people that they are true) and cognitive causes (i.e. faulty processes of reasoning and judgment that lead people to misevaluate the evidence).

One result of the latter is a failure to relate statistical data to a relevant baseline (i.e. "compared to what?"). Another is the "seek and ye shall find" problem. A search motivated by a particular bias might (usually does) produce a result showing more support for an hypothesis than the data justifies. The way a survey question is worded can skew the results positively or negatively.

The third bias studied in this article is the "selective memory" process (i.e. people are more inclined to remember information that fits their expectations than those that differ). The author cites evidence from a study that shows that this assumption may not be accurate and that the contrary is true, i. e. that people in a cited study had an easier time recalling information that was contrary to their expectations.

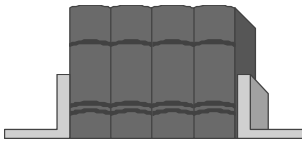
This author concludes that much more research on the quality of everyday judgment is warranted but research thus far supports the notion that everyday judgment is not to be trusted completely.

People participating in this discussion tended to favor the second author (Gilovich) over the first because of his citations of studies, graphs, and ample bibliography appended to this rather short article.

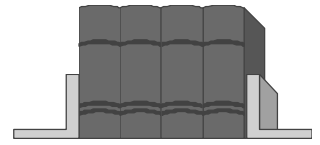
The participation in this first initial discussion group was lively and participatory. There seemed to be enough interest to warrant having future discussions like this. It would be instructive to hear what others think about this format.

George R. Maurer





# Book Reviews



## ***False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism***

by John Gray  
(London: Granta Books, 1998)

It is unusual to find Thomas Jefferson and Karl Marx mentioned in the same breath, but together with Tom Paine and John Stuart Mill the author of *False Dawn* sees them among the rational thinkers of the Enlightenment. The book is devoted to the thesis that the Enlightenment experiment, the wish to build a harmonious universal society, a common civilization, in which all nations will share the rational values of market efficiency has failed and is bound to continue to fail. "The United States today is the last great power to base its policies on this enlightenment thesis."(p. 2) The Washington ideas of a global democracy and free market capitalism will not prevail.

Free markets according to the author do not just naturally happen, they have to be planned and imposed by a powerful government. He cites nineteenth century British history, Thatcherite economic measures, and Reaganomics in support of his thesis. Neither do free markets create wealth for all. On the contrary, a genuinely free economy encourages the ruthless pursuit of money objectives which will lift some to great wealth, others to well being, while creating a large underclass left behind in poverty and insecurity. Something of a similar pattern will occur on the global stage. A few countries benefit from free markets, while others lack the natural and cultural resources or find it impossible to overcome the headstart of early industrialization.

Gray defends the major thesis that democracy is simply not compatible with free markets. You may have one or the other, not both. Human beings have no interest in "free markets" as such. Rather, we generally desire security of life and property, general well being for ourselves and family, and a comfortable old age. We also wish to maintain our religious beliefs and the habits of our cultures. Free markets in contrast, bring considerable change in culture and religion. They also bring great insecurities of well being as labor, capital, resources, medicine, and all goods and services are freely bought and sold. A democratic society will not tolerate the insecurity of life provided in a free market. People will vote, against commercial monopoly, for job security and unemployment benefits, for universal education, for free medicine, and old age benefits. In short, against the free market. What is more, ordinary folk will soon vote changes which will allow them to share in the wealth generated by technological progress. For the free market to persist in its pristine and ideological form, the beneficiaries of the system will need to use their wealth to

enforce it on the rest of society.

Even the leaders of industry and commerce have only a limited interest in the free market. While they may wish freedom of trade for themselves, they would just as well see their competitors freedom restrained. Allowed freedom of action, leaders they will band together into cartels to control the market, rig the movement of capital for their benefit and against the public, and hire, fire, downsize, and isolate labor in any way possible. Gray cites many examples of corruption, restraint, and other consequences of the free market from the US, Russia, China, and Europe.

Rather than expectations of secularization and peace through trade, what we see in the present are resurgent religions, revivals of ancient ethnic conflicts, and territorial rivalries. We see the use of new technologies for the pursuit of war not wealth creation. In the US meanwhile, "conservatives have become ranting evangelists for global capitalism" (p. 104).

This is a very disturbing book. Not everything Gray says is either accurate or precise, but it is a very different and a very thoughtful assessment of our prospects for the coming years. I would wish that all who have a deep and abiding belief, a near religious faith in the free market and in democracy would take the time to read this book.

**Wolf Roder**

## ***How we Believe*** ***The Search for God in an Age of Science***

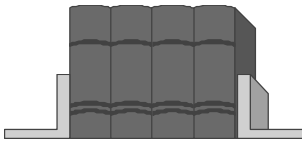
by Michael Shermer  
(New York: W. H. Freeman and Co. 2000)

The question is not "why people believe in god," but how they believe, how they have made that choice for belief, and what role that belief plays in their world view, which of necessity includes their view of reality. Shermer accepts that more people believe in god now than at the beginning of the century. He says he has no ax to grind with religion, rather himself is an agnostic, in the sense of "not knowing." Shermer's attitude to religion thus is rather conciliatory, an attempt to understand why religion has become such a powerful institution in human life. It is a quest for the relationship between religion and science, between knowledge and faith, and why belief in the sacred can thrive in an age of science.

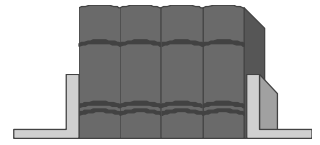
Shermer considers humans a pattern seeking animal. We constantly look for regularities, generalizations, laws in nature and society. Thus it was important for our hunting ancestors to know "antelopes come through this

*(Continued on page 7)*





# Book Reviews



(Continued from page 6)

valley at this time of year" and consequently when the sun goddess returns. We also tend to adopt generalizations easily and carelessly usually based on very little evidence. Listen to children, who are good at explaining their world in general terms. Many of these insights are false, but we adopt them anyway, astrology for instance, others are correct but are discarded, that clouds not Zeus make rain and thunder. Thus Shermer sees science, magic, and religion as fundamentally part of the same impulse to explain and understand the world we live in. Some general statements are right, which become science, others are mistaken but are held on to as magic and paranormal explanations of reality, while others try to understand purpose and beginning of the world and become religion.

Anthropologists consider both magic and science derive from environmental conditions. We cope rationally with those things we can understand and master, e.g. building a boat. The forces which seem haphazard and chancy, such as storms at sea, we try to master with magic and religion. Shermer tries to ask a deep question; what if the universe has not been created for us by an intelligent designer, and instead is just an accident full of sound and fury? Can we discover meaning in this apparently meaningless universe? Meaning here seems equated with "the sacred." Shermer's answer is yes, and this is so whether you are an atheist or religious.

The urge to understand the universe and our place in it is both the basis for science and for religion. The two thus are seen as closely related. Moreover, it is not the truth or error of belief that is important, rather what matters is "the process of thinking about the questions and contemplating their ultimate meaning. God is not dead because God represents these ultimate concepts that have been with us as long as we have been human" (p. 30).

Shermer's argument is interesting and plausible, and his book makes a good case for such similarities and parallels. He is widely read and experienced and draws on many aspects for his explanation. Yet, I am reluctant to follow him in equating faith and knowledge. I tend to see the skepticism which alone makes science possible as the very antithesis of faith.

Men become civilized, not in proportion to their willingness to believe, but in proportion to their readiness to doubt.

- H.L. Mencken

Man's idea is that the deity sits up nights admiring him.

- Mark Twain

**Wolf Roder**

## ***Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life Among the Lowly***

by Harriet Beecher Stowe

Signet Classic Edition, 1966

Originally published in 1852

Introduction by Darryl Pinckney 1998

Darryl Pinckney reminds us in the introduction to this edition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, (UTC) that Stowe seems to have changed her mind about Tom's moral stance late in her life. She praised the actions of John Brown, the (white) man who led an attack of blacks and whites against a US arsenal in order to get weapons to free slaves, contrary to the Christian forbearance towards the institution espoused by Tom. Pinckney also notes that Frederick Douglas, while admitting that Stowe's book was very important to the anti-slavery cause, felt that the Dred Scott decision required blacks to become insurrectionists, "...and that they would not, like Uncle Tom, remain an inoffensive people shouting about glory." Dred Scott, a slave, had lived in both a free state and a free territory and his suit for freedom was ultimately denied by the US Supreme Court. (As an interesting note, the Republican Party was formed in order to prevent slavery in the territories.)

The outspoken author James Baldwin also expressed discontent with UTC in his essay, "Everybody's Protest Novel" from his 1955 book, *Notes of a Native Son*. For Baldwin, UTC "...is a very bad novel, having in its virtuous sentimentality, much in common with *Little Women*. Sentimentality...is the mark of dishonesty." Moreover, UTC is filled with violence and this "...is explained by the nature of Mrs. Stowe's subject matter...an explanation which falters only if we pause to ask whether or not her picture is complete; and what constriction or failure of perception forced her to depend on the description of brutality---unmotivated, senseless---and to leave unanswered and unnoticed the only important question: what it was, after all, that moved her people to such deeds."

Yet this book sold 10,000 copies the first week and 2,000,000 within the first 2 years, mostly to white readers. It was a phenomenal success and brought Stowe international fame; it is regarded as a classic. I have gathered some anecdotal information which suggests that the book is still read mostly by whites, is valued in the Quaker community, and is ignored or deplored by blacks. If this is generally indicative of these communities, one wonders why.

Consider now the text. Tom is immediately sold to save the finances of Mr. Shelby, Tom's Kentucky owner. This is apparently quite consistent with the economics of the

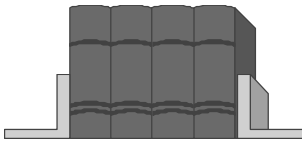
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**January 2000**

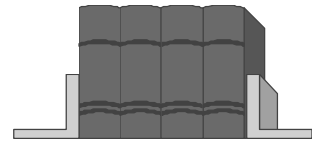


**7 FIG Leaves**





# Book Reviews



*(Continued from page 7)*

period. Slavery was profitable in the southern states as a result of the cotton gin, but was not profitable elsewhere. As part of the same sale a child slave, son of the slaves Eliza and George, is sold. Eliza learns of this and immediately escapes with her son. The chase results in the famous scene where Eliza crosses the Ohio river on the ice. George, owned by another Kentuckian, had already escaped a master who envied his intellect. Of the 3 main characters, Tom, Eliza, and George, only Tom has black features. As Baldwin sarcastically describes Eliza and George, "...we have only the author's word that they are Negro and they are, in all other respects, as white as she can make them." George and Eliza separately make their escape with the help of the Quakers. They meet each other along the way and continue on to Canada. At one point they fight for their lives and hurt, but do not kill, one of the pursuers. The injured slave trader is nursed and ultimately converted by the Quakers. Here I note that a Quaker friend of mine was very proud that his Indiana community was associated with this book.

The story of Tom's trip down the river finds him first sold to an extremely kind master, Augustine St. Clare, in New Orleans, whose little girl, Eva, is sweet beyond belief. Tom saved her life during the trip and becomes her guardian, playmate, and pet. Pinckney faults Stowe for this relationship, but it was by far the most popular image of Tom at the time. Pinckney notes that the image of Eva on Tom's knee was immediately placed on English Staffordshire pottery, a tribute reserved for royalty, sports figures, and other people in the news of the nineteenth century. In fact, he tells us, it is easier to find this pottery today than to find an early edition of the book. He goes on, "It is hard to forgive Stowe their sentimental bond. Eva is a tyrant of exasperating cuteness, but she is precocious in her morbidity. She and Tom read the Bible together. They are especially drawn to dim wondrous passages from Revelations and the Prophecies." Eva, about 10, says that she would die for the slaves. She foresees her death from TB, and very dramatically hands out locks of her hair to everyone, including the slaves, and succeeds in converting most of them. Here Pinckney quotes Oscar Wilde on a similar scene in Dickens, "...it takes a heart of stone not to laugh at the death of Little Nell."

During the stay with St. Clare, who is in many ways like the sybarite, St. Augustine, before conversion, the most sustained, intellectual arguments against slavery occur. Economic and social circumstance, Biblical recommendations, a poverty of intellect and civilization among the enslaved, destruction of family bonds, especially between mother and child, are all discussed by

the intellectual St. Clare and his sister Miss Ophelia. Here and throughout the book, the high moral tone is carried by white women and this again is consistent with the reported popular sentiments of the day. Stowe especially plays upon the presumed sentiments of white women as loving mothers to argue her case.

The tone of these arguments is always religious. This frustrates Pinckney though he admires her courage in contradicting the received wisdom of the pulpit. He notes: "Stowe's God is apt to chasten those He loves in a furnace of affliction." Yet Stowe's main argument solved this problem of evil by waiting for salvation in a future world. The injustice of this world would be rectified by God in the next. "Her exhortation was bold, given how much pro-slavery arguments depended on the Old and New Testaments because they seemed to sanction slavery. Did not Paul urge the runaway slave to return home?"

The book's ending finds Tom sold to the evil, atheistic, Simon Legree, a man originally from the north, bent on breaking every moral scruple in Tom. A perfect image of the suffering Christ, Tom is tempted but manages to morally overcome his oppressor through religious belief, though it costs his life. This is beyond doubt the most dramatic image which Stowe wanted to convey. And it is here that we learn the meaning of the title, that Uncle Tom's Cabin is a symbol of the freedom which the remaining slaves in Kentucky obtained as a result of Tom's death. For it was Tom's death, in the arms of George, the inheriting son of Tom's original owner, which convinced George to set his slaves free. Christ redeemed all people from their sins and Tom redeemed his family and friends from servitude. Christ is memorialized in His cross and Tom in his cabin.

This finally enrages Baldwin who finds the entire worldview constricting, mechanical, categorizing, and without reference to the real thoughts and desires of humans, especially blacks. Baldwin wants a novel to approach the truth, "...and truth, as used here, is meant to imply a devotion to the human being, his freedom and fulfillment." Baldwin sees Tom and the character Bigger from Wright's *Native Son* as different manifestations of the same problem. Bigger in his anger and impatience with whites took precisely the opposite strategy as Tom: he raped and murdered, finally ending on death row as a result. But "Bigger is Uncle Tom's descendent, flesh of his flesh..." "...Bigger's tragedy is not that he is cold or black or hungry, ...but that he has accepted a theology that denies him life, that he admits the possibility that he is sub-human and feels constrained, therefore, to battle for his humanity according to those brutal criteria

*(Continued on page 9)*





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bequeathed him at his birth." The unification of Tom and Bigger described above, therefore makes this Tom's problem also.

What then have we found in this classic? It seems that UTC truly galvanized the world, but that the images are unsatisfying to the African-American community if Baldwin and Pinckney are either typical or leading spokesmen. Evidently, as a pamphleteer, Stowe did an important job, though she, Douglas and a host of others, seem to have had second thoughts about the meek approach which her main character, Tom, recommended. Why is this? I believe that it is actually a recognition that the story of the dying god, redeeming all sinners, does not work for people who are oppressed. It is perhaps convincing as a dramatic story to those on the sidelines, the whites and the Quakers, who risk something, but nothing like that risked by a piece of human property, the slave. However, it was this simplistic view of Stowe, her version of Christianity, put into a sentimental story form, which finally brought the issue to the attention of a nation, troubling its conscience. There are lessons here for atheists: about communication and the importance of understanding an audience and how to approach them.

Perhaps we should try to learn these lessons, but if we do there is a final problem. Imagine Uncle Tom. How old is he? Pinckney states that today Uncle Tom is often confused with Uncle Remus, "...the old darky." "Uncle Remus is ...made to express admiration for white folks, to ridicule black education, and to praise the Old South and the old ways. Uncle Remus telling stories to entertain a white child, is a revision of Uncle Tom." Yet Stowe's Uncle Tom died in his prime; he endured so long because of his strength in both body and character. Tom had become a leader, teacher, and sage on Legree's plantation. Look what happened to Tom; we should not

### FIG Potlucks

It feels like I waited all my life to walk into a room full of secular humanists. FIG Potlucks are our best kept secret. Put 10 to 20 free thinkers in a room and the conversation never stops. We talk about religion and no one says, "You shouldn't say that!" We talk about politics, racism, movies, history, motorcycles, philosophy, etc. Humanists are not all cut out of the same fabric. We do not always see things the same way. But we agree to disagree and enjoy sharing ideas. There is a lot of laughter and a real sense of community. There is a freedom to share that I have never experienced anywhere else. So often we are faced with a choice in society. We can express our views on religion and be ostracized, or keep quiet and feel dishonest at times. It's a delicate balance. But facing society is somehow easier when you have a group of people behind you that shares your basic viewpoint. So come to a potluck and experience the freedom to think and say what you feel. We may not agree with you, but we will defend your right to say it. And the food isn't bad either!

Martha Ferguson

### MEN, WOMEN

You can't turn back the clock

A letter writer criticized women who work outside the home, stating that the Bible requires women to stay home and serve their husband. The writer's interpretation of the Bible is correct, as evidenced by verses such as Genesis 3:16.

Those verses consigned women to second-class status for thousands of years. Those days are gone, and religious fundamentalists can't turn the clock back. But we should not view such anachronistic goals as quaint or harmless. Fundamentalists are not harmless.

Almost every culture has a segment of religious extremists who wish to impose their beliefs on everyone else. Fundamentalist Jews in Israel have blocked streets and rioted to prevent secular and less orthodox Jews from watching movies on the Sabbath. It's even worse if fundamentalists take power, such as the Taliban theocracy in Afghanistan. Muslim extremists kill women if they dress improperly or speak to someone they're not supposed to.

Fortunately, our Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the separation of church and state. Imagine, though, if religious extremists > gained power and rewrote the Constitution. Their beliefs -- based on ancient Bible verses -- would become law.

No more working women. We would be forced to comply with the First Commandment, which requires belief in one particular god. Homosexuality and atheism would be outlawed, perhaps even punishable by death. Forced tithing would send our taxes to support fundamentalist churches (the only churches permitted) and their religious schools.

Is this likely? Not if we're vigilant and protect the wall that separates church and state.

Matthew J. Barry, Redmond

Letter to the Editor in the *Eastside Journal*  
(<http://www.eastsidejournal.com/Opiniondocs/letters/>)

### How we got Christianity.

The circumstances [after the Jewish war of 66-70] demanded a strong leadership which the plight of the Nazarene [Jewish Christian] leaders prevented them supplying at this time, and which the church in Rome was in the most advantageous position to offer. Information was coming increasingly to hand that the Christian converts in many areas, confused and bewildered by events, were apostasising or giving ear to eccentric teachers. Toward the end of the first century conditions were ripe for the introduction of cults which could offer solace, even if wrapped up in Judaeo-Hellenic mumbo-jumbo. The Christian communities for the most part were made up of people who were not particularly intelligent and who were easy victims of these who now began to prey upon their credulity.

Hugh J. Schonfield

Those Incredible Christians

(NY: Bernard Geis Assoc. 1968) p. 140-141

January 2000



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AMERICAN ATHEISTS, INC. PRESS RELEASE

Jan. 3, 2000

<http://www.atheists.org>  
<http://www.americanatheist.org>

**Barna Research Group Finds That Atheists Less Likely to Divorce than Born-Again Christians  
Churches likely places of rejection rather than support**

In a Dec. 21 survey conducted by Barna Research Group Ltd. of Ventura, CA, they found that Christians, Mormons, and Jews, are more likely to divorce than Atheists.

A nationwide survey of nearly 4,000 adults, noted that these "national statistics have remained the same for the past half decade." They noted that Protestants, with a 34% divorce rate, were among the highest, with Baptists (29%) leading the way among Protestant groups. Jews had a 30% likelihood of divorce while Mormons rated at 24%. Atheist families experienced only a 21% divorce rate.

"These findings confirm what we have always been saying," noted Ron Barrier, National Spokesman for American Atheists. "Religious claims of a superior morality is not supported by this data. With Atheism, women and men are equally responsible for a healthy marriage. There is no room in Atheist ethics for the type of 'submissive' nonsense preached by Baptists and other Christian and/or Jewish groups. Atheists reject, and

rightly so, the primitive patriarchal attitudes so prevalent in many religions with respect to marriage."

In view of the current demand for 'faith-based' solutions between government and religion to "strengthen" American families, currently touted by presidential hopeful Al Gore and religious organizations, American Atheists points out that Barna Research noted, "Even more disturbing, perhaps, is that when [Christians] experience a divorce many of them feel their community of faith provides rejection rather than support and healing."

The report also went on to question "the effectiveness of how churches minister to families."

"It would seem to me," said Mr. Barrier, "that churches are the last places one should go for family support. The statistics now bear this out."

Ellen Johnson, President of American Atheists, said, "Religion is not, and never was, the panacea it has claimed to be for so long. It is time to take a second look at Atheism as a rational approach to healthy family life in America."

For more information, please contact:

Ellen Johnson, President (973)334-5110  
Ron Barrier, Spokesperson (718)967-6453

American Atheists, Inc.  
P.O. Box 5733  
Parsippany, NJ 07054-6733

Have you ever heard of the "Tonight Show" with Jay Leno? Well, before Jay Leno, the "Tonight Show" was run by Johnny Carson. And before him it was run by Jack Paar. And before him it was run by Steve Allen. Steve Allen started the show. He was and is a great comedian who was really popular on TV in the 1960s. I used to watch him as a kid. Steve Allen is also a famous pianist and musical composer. One of his songs is "South Rampart Street Parade." Well, Steve Allen is a humanist. And he says so, writing books on how to think clearly and rationally. Humanist organizations have given him awards and he has spoken, told jokes, and played the piano at many humanist conferences over the years. In the 1970s he went on radio and told millions of listeners that they should learn more about humanism.

Fred Edwards, Camp Quest Staff Member

**Quotes from Steve Allen...**

The proposition that the entire human race--consisting of enormous hordes of humanity --would be placed seriously in danger of a fiery eternity characterized by unspeakable torments purely because a man disobeyed a deity by eating a piece of fruit offered him by his wife is inherently incredible.

The fundamentalists, of course, are caught in a trap from which there is no escape, except that of abandoning at least the more absurd of their arguments. If we start with the unquestioned assumption that there is a God and that he is, by definition, good, then it inescapably follows that the countless atrocities attributed to him in the Old Testament are not only lies, but insulting lies at that. Since this is something the fundamentalist cannot even consider, much less concede, they are, as I say, trapped in an intellectual prison from which there is not the slightest possibility of escape. Their greatest anger, alas, is reserved for those who would do them the greatest service of freeing them from their prison.

--1990



### U.C. Skeptics Upcoming Events

Wednesday, January 19, 6:00 pm: Paul Paolucci of the UK sociology dept. will speak about "The History of Business Labor Relations." The Room is TBA shortly.

Thursday, January 20, 6:00 pm: Earth Company is bringing in a speaker named Chris Crews to speak about his experiences at the World Trade Organization conference/protest that was recently held in Seattle. The room is TBA.

Thursday, January 27, and Thursday, February 3, 6:00-8:00 pm: We will be watching the Great American Thinkoff 1999, which focused on this question: Which is More Dangerous: Science or Religion? Right now, we are planning on watching them in 429 TUC with pizza and beverages, but we may switch to a room that is more fully equipped with audio/visuals.

Thursday, February 10, 6:00, 429 TUC: Bill Gertig will lecture on Religious Pluralism--this will be followed by an interreligious panel discussion of various issues raised by his lecture.

The majority of our meetings are in 429 TUC, so go

### World Wide Web

Petition a Cornerstone of National "S.O.S.: Save Our Science, Save Our Schools" Campaign

See <http://www.campusfreethought.org/sos/>

#### On Etiquette in Heaven

Sunday afternoons, when you go with the rest of the redeemed to lean over the balusters and see the little unbaptised Presbyterian and Roman Catholic children roasting in the red fires, don't *crowd*; remember, others want to see, as well as you. And you must rub your hands together, and laugh a little, and let on to enjoy it; otherwise people will suspect you are not as good a Christian as you look, and you will get talked about, and perhaps avoided. If a mother wants to look down and see her child, give her your place. When she remembers how she used to hug that little creature to her breast and smother it with kisses, she will have a great pain at her heart; and if it recognizes her and joyfully puts up its hands to her believing she will fly to its help, caring nothing about the flames of hell and all the devils if she can but rescue it, lay your hands quickly upon her or she will throw herself over the baluster to join her child; and once in hell she can get back to heaven no more. In fact she will not *want* to get back among any such human refuse.

Mark Twain, (1910)

*Etiquette for the Afterlife:*

*Advice to [his biographer Albert Bigelow] Paine*

(This is Twain's last writing, about a week before his death)

- Regular Membership, \$25 per year
- Family Membership (includes all persons in family), \$25 per year
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