

UPCOMING EVENTS

Monthly Potluck - Our August Potluck/Pool Party will be held August 27th at the home of Edwin and Helen Kagin from 1:00 until 5:00. They will provide hot dogs, hamburgers, and drinks. Feel free to bring your swimsuit. Call 384-7000 for directions.

The Board Election - Board members are elected to two year-terms. Starting from the beginning, terms were staggered so that not all members are elected at the same time to preserve continuity. The elections take place at the Annual Meeting in August. This meeting coincides with the annual picnic. This year persons running for the Board include several whose terms are expiring and another who is running for the first time as follows:

Joe Levee	Inez Klein
Martha Ferguson	Philip Ferguson
Michelle Grinoch	

Note: Martha and Philip Ferguson were appointed to fill an unexpired terms since the last election and are now running for a full two-year term.

Other nominations may be included from the floor but in any case no more than five nominees are to be elected. The complete board numbers twelve members. Those board members whose terms are not expiring who will continue their service on the board for the coming year are: Edwin Kagin, Helen Kagin, Lyse Herd, Tim Kelly, Nurit Bowman, Robert Riehemann, and Gary Weiss.

Inherit the Wind - Bob Riehemann is organizing a FIG fieldtrip to attend Playhouse in the Park's production of *Inherit the Wind*, Friday, September 8, 2000 at 8:00 PM. As a non-profit organization, we qualify for a 20% discount, if we have at least 10 people in our group. The base price is \$37.00 and we will get them for \$29.60. Students and Senior Citizens (62+ years old) get in for \$15.00. Reservation of parking on the premises is \$4.00 prepaid. Parking is \$5.00 the night of the show but is almost never available. If you are interested, please contact Bob Brieheheman by e-mail (briehehema@cinternet.net) so that he can estimate the number of seats to reserve. If more persons want to go at show time, he will try to get more seats but they will probably not be available. So if someone is remotely interested, they should contact him. Cancellations can be done in August. A notice will be sent out in August as a payment reminder. Payments not received by the due date, Monday, 21 August, will result in canceled reservations for that person.

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NATIONAL LEADER TO SPEAK AT CLEVELAND SKEPTICS CONFERENCE

Dr. Paul Kurtz, founder and chair of national skeptic and humanist organizations, will be the featured speaker at the Belief and Dissent 2000 Conference Sat., Sept. 30, at the University Club, 3813 Euclid Ave., Cleveland.

Kurtz will deliver the luncheon address, "Defending Reason In An Irrational World." He is the chair of the Center For Inquiry in Amherst, NY, which houses the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) and the Council for Secular Humanism. Kurtz has authored 30 books, including "The Transcendental Temptation" and "A Skeptic's Handbook of Parapsychology."

The Cleveland conference is sponsored by the Free Inquirers of Northeastern Ohio (FINO) and the South Shore Skeptics.

Joining Kurtz on the slate will be Joe Nickell, author of 16 books who has become widely known as an investigator of myths and mysteries. Nickell will discuss his recent investigations of paranormal cases, such as the MacKinsey house haunting, the Nazca Lines and the Shroud of Turin.

Dr. Rick Rickards of Cleveland Heights, a longtime skeptic and humanist activist, will deliver the opening address, "Questions About Questions." The humanist session will feature Frank Zindler of Columbus ("The Fictive Geography Of The New Testament") and Jeremy Genovese of Cleveland Heights ("Creation and Human Variation").

The conference will conclude with a discussion of what skeptics and humanists can do to promote their viewpoints on a national and local scale.

For registration information, contact Brent Bowen at (330) 869-2025.

Men of simple understanding, little inquisitive and little instructed, make good Christians." Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, 1580

2000 Years of Disbelief by James A. Haught

Who's Who in Hell

Warren Allen Smith is a roué and sybarite who lives in New York City's Greenwich Village. A retired teacher and recording studio entrepreneur, he has written widely as a book reviewer, a columnist, and a skeptic. The title of his book, *Who's Who in Hell*, refers to his attempt to counter centuries of successful preaching about how terrible unbelievers are. In its 1,500 pages Smith has an encyclopedic A to Z listing of several thousand individuals who have been agnostics, atheists, deists, humanists, non-theists, rationalists, secularists, or other types of unbelievers. The term theologians invented, "Hell," is ridiculed. Instead, and in keeping with Mark Twain's view, it's now Heaven for the climate, Hell for the company. The 2-volume set is the first such of its kind since Pierre Sylvain Maréchal's *Dictionnaire des athées* (1798). Publisher Lyle Stuart and his wife, Carole, are both listed as non-believers.

<http://idt.net/~wasm/rationalistsny.htm>

Editor's Note: Several FIG Members are included

WHAT'S NEW by Robert L. Park, 12 May 2000
ALTERNATIVE SCIENCE: CONGRESS BRIEFED ON INTELLIGENT DESIGN.

Darwin took a pounding on Wednesday, 10 May, when The Discovery Institute (www.crsc.org) brought its top guns to Capitol Hill to brief members and their staffs on the need for "Intelligent Design" in public school science curricula as an alternative to Darwinian evolution. They portray ID as the scientific middle ground between biblical literalists and Darwinists. The controversy, however, is not a debate between scientists. Brown biologist Ken Miller, an outspoken critic of the ID movement, asks, "How many papers on intelligent design have been published in the peer reviewed scientific literature?" The answer, Miller says, "is none."

THE AMERICAN PHYSICAL SOCIETY (Note: Opinions are the author's and are not necessarily shared by the APS, but they should be.)

FIG Leaves Volume 9, Issue 7, July 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 can be reached in care of this publication, or through e-mail at: edwinkagin@fuse.net

ODE TO WITCH DOCTOR LAURA

Have you heard of that witch Dr. Laura
That ecumenical moralbabelizing horror
Who knows what is right
In her and god's holy sight
And that most sex will just lead you to sorrow

The Ten Commandments must be followed and posted
Those who don't like them are doomed to be roasted
Though not very bright
Laura knows what is right
And her right thinking is everywhere hosted

If a woman lives with a man to whom she's not wed
And sinfully repairs to his bed
She's an unpaid whore
A slut, nothing more
Laura knows all the "Shall Nots" god said

If a single female gets pregnant don't think
She can just suck her blessed unborn down a sink
Giving birth is her fate
So don't consummate
Laura tells us god's will for to god she's our link

Hear Dr. Laura opine that all gays
Have deviantly chosen their immoral ways
They could all be changed
And live lives less deranged
If they only saw truth through her biblical haze



If a baby is adopted, or is by other sperm made
Than by that of the husband of a mother who strayed
The child must never know
Dr. Laura's so low
She says truth and trust must be morally betrayed

Laura's advice is as pious as prayer
Don't send your child off to some godless day care
Be your kid's mom
Drive her to the prom
There are bad things, like life, that are waiting out there

If Dr. Laura's words seem Christian to you
Please recall that she is a Jew
One of those killers of Christ
Who god knows just aren't nice
So what can this Jew say to you that is true

Once in a lewd and much less holy mood
Ms. Laura adulterously posed in the nude
See this vicious threat
Revealed on the net
Hypocritically lustful, wanton, naked, and crude

Dr. Laura's much hyped PhD
Is not a psychology degree
It's in physiology
Yet without apology
This fraud dispenses bad counsel for free

So this exhibitionist tart of much younger days
Now stars in morality plays
Maybe tomorrow
Witch Dr. Laura
Will be prayed to like those saints that some praise

Edwin Kagin
July, 2000

Edwin is to speak to the Unitarian Church, 536 Linton St., (Linton & Reading Rd.), Cincinnati, on Sunday, August 6, 2000, at 10:30 am. Topic is to be on Current Threats to Separation of Church and State.

ANOTHER OPEN LETTER TO DR. LAURA

Dear Dr. Laura (An Open Letter),

Inasmuch as countless others are contacting you daily regarding God's law and family matters, I felt that I should do so as well.

My teenage son became rebellious, disobedient, and drank and ate too much. I knew that the Old Testament(OT) required me to gather my neighbors together and take my unruly son to the edge of the city and stone him to death (Deut. 21:21). Should I have obeyed the OT?

My neighbor suspects his young vivacious wife with infidelity. He is consumed with jealousy just thinking about

this. His wife denies his accusations. The OT(Numbers 5:11-31) provides a way to reconcile this dilemma for the couple. What it allows, is, for the husband to take his wife to the priests, or rabbis, and have her fed poison. If she is innocent she will not be harmed. If she is guilty she will get what she deserves; her insides will bloat and her thighs will rot away and she won't be able to have any more children (they already have five). My question to you is: "Do you believe this a failsafe way for my neighbor to handle this problem?"

I recently heard of someone who has come down with leprosy, of all things. According to the OT(Leviticus 14:1-8), the first step in cleansing leprosy is to have the priests or

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rabbis to kill a dove and spill its blood into an earthen bowl. Then the priest or rabbi is to take a live dove and, dip it in the bowl of the blood of the first dove. Then the live bird is to be loosed in the fields. If this doesn't work one can take a larger more expensive animal, such as sheep, and do a similar exercise (the priest gets to eat the meat). Would you advise that this person, diagnosed with leprosy, seek this kind of help from one of your Rabbi friends--perhaps the one with whom you co-authored your book?

My spouse, --"the wife of my bosom"-- for some 57 years, has, in recent years, sought comfort and solace in some aspects of the "New Age" religions. She has talked repeatedly and glowingly, to me, other members of our family, and people generally, about the joy and contentment she finds in some aspects of this. Sometimes I fear she may be becoming a later-day pagan. She has definitely turned away after other gods. I am told (Deut.13:6-11), in no uncertain terms, that I must personally kill her, lest she contaminates me and others with these gentler, un-God like, non-biblical beliefs. I really don't want to stone her to death. Our children and our grandchildren love their mother and grandmother very much, and are opposed to my killing her, refusing to help me as they are required to do. After all she is her children's mom. Is there any way out of this for me?

I have two brothers who pre-deceased their wives. One of these women was childless. I understand that it was my duty as the husband's brother (Deut. 25:5-10), to go in unto this childless sister-in-law, and bed her, and take her as my wife and bring up an heir for my poor dead brother. Dr. Laura, did it matter that I was already married? Did it matter that my wife took a dim view of my actually doing this? Was letting my sister-in-law publicly spit in my face

the only alternative I had to doing this? That was pretty damn humiliating, I can tell you! Even so, that is much better than what happened to poor pitiful Onan (Gen. 38:9-10)! Now that was a sad business. Not only God killing Onan was sad, but also extrapolating from this that male masturbation is a capital offense, is a real downer for a lot of men and boys--this includes a good many deeply religious folks.

Dr. Laura, I know that you have not long been a convert to the God of the OT. But you do speak as one of the anointed ones, with the most certainty I have ever heard. Certainty is not uncommon in new converts but yours is exceptional. You say that you are knowledgeable in all the world religions. You can see why I have turned to you. My personal problems are rather pressing. Even though I have several biblical reasons for stoning my wife to death (she may have also been guilty of using perfume and body oil intended for priests and rabbis, Exodus 30:22-38)--I wouldn't put it past her--I just can't bring myself to throw the first stone. Like me, my wife is 75 years old, and if I put off killing her indefinitely she may die of old age, or I may die, and then I would not be able to kill her. What am I to do?

Oh by the way, do these commands of God apply only to Orthodox Jews? Are Reformed Jews, Christians, Muslims, Mormons, or others, who worship the OT God, bound by these laws as well? If you are an Orthodox Jew and your wife becomes a Christian, are you required to kill her, or is that OK? Is it all right for wives who believe in the OT God to kill their husbands if they turn to other gods, like football, say? These are just a few of the questions I have when I hear you singing the praise of your newfound fundamentalist faith.

Blessings and Shalom!

WANTED!

Your Favorite Superstitions!!!!

Collecting Superstitions for a
Superstition Bash Party

Friday, October 13, 2000 at 7:30 p.m.

Send your favorites to: ART-Superstitions, P.O. Box 12896, Cincinnati, OH 45212 or e-mail me at droughry@fuse.net (Donna Loughry).

Science Book Club

The July meeting of the Science Book Club will be in the downtown Public Library, 8th and Vine, from 2:30 until 3:30, third floor, room 6A, on the 4th Sunday of the month, July 23th. If you need assistance finding us, ask at the information desk when you walk in. The reading for this month will be *The Elegant Universe* by Brian Greene (539.7258 G799 1999). Bob Riehemann will be leading the discussion.

Substitute 'white' for 'Christian' and note reaction. If a white supremacist used the expression "It's the white thing to do" in a letter to the editor, would P-I editors refuse to print the letter? Probably. The P-I would at the very least replace the word white with right, correct, good or a similar adjective. The editors wouldn't print the original expression because it's a bigoted statement and implies that only whites do the right thing. Using a term related to a particular segment of society as a synonym for good or bad is offensive and would not be allowed by newspaper editors.

So why did the P-I publish a letter (July 9) in which a writer used "Christian" in the same manner? The author wrote, "Kicking people when they are down is hardly . . . Christian." Why specify Christian? Does this mean that Jews, Buddhists, Muslims, agnostics and other non-Christians do like to kick people in that circumstance? Kicking people when they're down is not a human thing to do.

Matthew J. Barry



FIG Leaflets

The muddy priest that came and went up and down the North Pike promised us kids hell fire and purgatory, promised us devils and pitchforks, and the horror of burning forever, punishing the faults of our lives. He held out to us, like sugar candy, the pretty picture of heaven and the angels and the saints. But they didn't seem very likely, to me, as being up there some place.

As I grew and got chased through the berry patches, I saw it was not better among the Presbyterians, the Methodists, the Baptists we live among. Most of them were full of fears of hell and fat on hope of heaven. But they also beat their religion into the asses of their kids with mule skinner's whips. In no time at all I didn't believe in the hell fire and didn't hold much with heaven. Absolute damnation like absolute happiness seemed something to talk about and never really to experience. You could only bamboozle me so far even then.

Nell Kimball (1854-1934)
Her Life as an American Madam
(NY: Macmillan Co. 1970) p. 14

A Vatican Joke.

A newborn infant is found in the chambers of the *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith* (the Inquisition). The Prefect is scandalized and afraid one of his priests is responsible. A Monsignor endeavors to assuage his anxiety: "Surely it is not by us. In this office nothing is completed in nine months." Another priest concurs: "A baby is a very fine thing, it is a fruit of love. Therefore it is surely not by us."

From Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh,

Will god know his own?

Two fundamentalist religious gurus, broadcaster and former presidential aspirant Pat Robertson and "Moral Majority" founder Jerry Falwell disagree. Robertson says he believes the death penalty is morally justified, but thinks it's applied in an indiscriminate manner that "doesn't provide enough opportunities for mercy." Falwell, on the other hand, thinks executions should be speeded up. "While courts do make mistakes," Falwell said, "I don't believe the mistake level is at the point where we need to rethink our whole system, and I personally believe that we need to reduce the time between conviction and execution." (AP)

The Secular Family

We have a moral dilemma growing behind our house in the form of about 1000 Christmas trees. It was a very small dilemma a year ago before we joined the Free Inquiry Group. We live on a family farm with two other Christmas Tree operations, so it seemed like an innocent attempt to finance our sons' college education. It requires a small output of cash each year and a slightly larger amount of labor to mow and trim the trees.

I grew up in a religious home and my family celebrated Christmas each year in an understated way, trying to keep the "true meaning" of the holiday. When I lost my faith in high school, Christmas became a confusing holiday. Over the years, it evolved into a joyous secular occasion, especially after our children were born. What's not to like about twinkling lights and presents?

Then Margaret Downey spoke to the Free Inquiry Group and made us question our choices on several matters, including Christmas. Every secular humanist makes many compromises in his or her life in this predominately Christian country, and she challenged us to think carefully about the ones that we choose to accept. We immediately killed Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy, but we continued to care for our Winter Solstice Tree Farm with the nagging suspicion that we had 1000 small compromises growing.

Why, oh why, did Tom Flynn ever come speak to FIG? We were coping with the situation fairly well until he arrived with his book, "The Trouble with Christmas". We really enjoyed the book, but he did convince us that there is a lot of trouble associated with our celebrating Christmas, and he very carefully removed the comfort we had found in re-labeling the whole thing Winter Solstice. We had 1000 little symbols growing that told the rest of the world that we were thrilled to have a religious holiday supported by the government and forced down everyone's throats. Our dilemma grew.

Christmas trees are a 5 to 10 year commitment from the time you plant them in the ground until you are able to sell them to the public. How were we to know as we slipped the little 6 to 12 inch trees in the ground that our concern would grow as they did? But having made the investment in time and money over the years and having planned to use the profit from the operation for such a worthy cause, we cannot merely abandon the project. We can certainly consider modifying the way we choose to celebrate or not celebrate the holiday, but we are committed to selling those trees.

I don't believe that many people in our area will drop in to purchase an "Atheist Winter Evergreen That You Can Do With as You Will". I foresee an effort on our part to decorate the barn with those lights and tune the radio to those festive songs, creating the proper atmosphere for the general public to overlook the fact that we are charging them a large sum of money. It's a dilemma we will have to learn to live with.

Martha Ferguson



It's About Power!!

by Barbara Stocker

Reprinted from Secular Subjects, Newsletter
of the Rationalist Society of St. Louis

The Supreme Court rightly decided this week that prayers over the loudspeaker at high school football games violated the First Amendment restriction of establishment of religion.. The Santa Fe, Texas school district tried to circumvent Constitutional protections by having a student elected for the purpose of giving an "inspirational message" which could include prayer but was not required to include it.

Predictably, letters to the editor and calls to talk shows decried the loss of religious "freedom." One writer states, "Religious liberty is the birthright of every individual." Of course this is true. But how does restricting organized prayer at football games limit this right? The claim that "God has been kicked out of schools." But others have observed that there will be prayer in schools as long as there are math tests.

Others claim that the founding fathers only meant that the government should not show favoritism among various religions but it was all right for the government to show favoritism to religion in general over non-religion. The First Amendment, however reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion..." not "...establishment of a religion..." This makes it clear that non-belief is included.

Why all the confusion? Why does such a seemingly simple concept generate such diverse opinion? It seems reasonable that once it is explained that an individual's private religious

practices have not been restricted that people would understand and be quiet. But it just doesn't happen.

Neither do we see people take advantage of their right to private prayer. Rarely do you see people quietly bow their heads and give thanks before a meal in a restaurant. In spite of the conspicuous piety by the players at sporting events, you rarely see someone in the stands quietly pray.

Why the discrepancy? Why do people demand their religious freedom and then fail to take advantage of it?

Perhaps all is not as it appears. Perhaps those who ask for religious freedom really want religious power. Perhaps they want the power to force others to listen to them when they pray. Perhaps they want the power to include their religion in our laws and the power to use tax dollars for their own ends.

Nothing incites passion like lust for power. It explains why an issue will not go away after decades of divisiveness.

It also explains the inconsistencies such as tax exemptions for churches, a religious motto on our money, paid chaplains in Congress and our legislatures and religious oaths of office. These are just the examples where the religious zealots have won so far. These instances need to be revisited another time.

Do not believe then these pious demands for religious freedom. Religious freedom is already the law of the land. These people want the power to limit the rights of those who do not agree with them. We must continue the fight for separation of church and state.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

"My earlier views on the unsoundness of the Christian scheme of salvation and the human origin of the scriptures have become clearer and stronger with advancing years, and I see no reason for thinking I shall ever change them."
— 1862 letter to Judge J.S. Wakefield, after the death of Willie Lincoln

"The Bible is not by book nor Christianity my profession." —
quoted by Joseph Lewis in a 1924 New York speech

"I am approached...by religious men who are certain they represent the Divine Will.... I hope it will not be irreverent in me to say, that if it be probable that God would reveal his will to others, on a point so connected with my duty, it might be supposed he would reveal it directly to me." —(Cardiff)

"It will not do to investigate the subject of religion too closely, as it is apt to lead to infidelity." — in *Manford's Magazine*

"What is to be, will be, and no prayers of ours can arrest the decree. — (Noyes)

"I have never united myself to any church because I found difficulty in giving my assent without mental reservation to the long, complicated statement of Christian doctrine which characterize the articles of belief and the usual confession of faith." — *ibid.*

from *2000 Years of Disbelief*, by James A. Haught



July 9th Speaker Review - MEDICAL ETHICS AND HUMANISM

At our meeting on July 9, Tim Madigan discussed what humanism has to say about medical ethics. Tim has a Ph.D. in philosophy, has taught ethics, and has been involved for 15 years with groups studying new medical developments and their ethical implications.

He mentioned several philosophers who in recent history have been concerned with bioethics, such as Sidney Hook and Paul Kurtz. He focussed on the work of Joseph Fletcher, who began his career as an Episcopalian priest and is infamous in some circles for his advocacy of "situation ethics."

Prior to Fletcher, in approaching ethical questions, the "rule model" was generally followed. That is, one sought out the appropriate rule and applied it to the situation. Such rules were frequently religion-based. For example, the Catholic Church used "natural law" as a basis for prohibiting artificial means of birth control. Fletcher rejected the idea that the birth control pill was artificial. He contended that anything humans create becomes part of their natural world.

Fletcher said that the overriding purpose of ethical decisions should be to make life better for humans. He counseled that we should look at the *situation* and decide what actions will maximize good and minimize harm.

Eventually Joseph Fletcher concluded that Christianity was too wedded to rules. He became a secular humanist, concluding that the precepts set out in the ancient religious texts were not relevant to modern life.

Fletcher warned that scare tactics are often used in an attempt to keep people from using new knowledge. This

reminded me of Cal Thomas's July 2 warning in the Cincinnati Enquirer concerning the mapping of the human genome. He foresaw that by using this new knowledge to move forward without firm ethical guidelines - implicitly to be derived from religion - we may well stumble into something like the chaos of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*.

Tim recommended a recent book edited by Glenn McGee, *Pragmatic Bioethics*. McGee takes seriously peoples' fears concerning eugenics, recognizing their misuse in Germany and even in certain states in our country. He says such misuse generally arises when treatment is forced on people by governments. We must not let such fears prevent us from using new scientific advances to achieve our desires for improving the health of our children and other members of society.

McGee says we should not treat bioethics as an academic study apart from our everyday life. There is continuity between our genetic hopes and our everyday hopes. We should not let the media portray as a kind of science fiction our hopes to use increasing knowledge of genetics to give us a longer, healthier life.

The discussion which followed Tim's remarks involved members in a heartfelt discussion, focussed primarily on the ethics of keeping alive old persons who want to die and of maintaining seriously premature or deformed babies. It was one of the most memorable discussions our group has had because members spoke of tragic medical situations they had experienced or observed.

Joe Levee

June 20th Discussion Group Contd.

The scheduled speaker was unable to attend the FIG meeting of June 20th due to illness. Instead, we held an impromptu continuation of the discussion on Atheism and Agnosticism. This began with a brief recap of the previous discussion, where the world was neatly divided into two groups: theist and atheist. While it seems that everyone should fall into one group or the other, it was not always so simple for people to decide which group they identify with.

A theist's concept of God could be quite similar to an atheist's understanding of nature. The only difference between the two may be in the matter of a root cause. The theist and atheist may agree on the same laws of nature, but the theist may insist that they were created by God, while the atheist may say that they are a result of the Big Bang. Neither one necessarily has a ready explanation for what came before God or the Big Bang, if such a concept is even possible.

The discussion then turned to the meaning and interpretation of various words. Some observers stated that 'belief' implied uncertainty, while others stated that it referred to knowledge that was not subject to debate. Both shadings may be valid when referring to religious belief, which is often not based on firsthand experience and yet not subjected to rational scrutiny.

It was especially hard to reach agreement on the meanings of 'knowledge' and 'truth'. One participant defined knowledge as 'justified true belief', which implies some degree of inherent uncertainty. Today's truth may be found false tomorrow, when it will be replaced with new and better knowledge. Others felt that the term 'truth' is reserved for concepts that are not subject to empirical falsification.

To some secular humanists, an atheist who denies the supernatural with certainty is considered to be as arrogant as a religious fundamentalist. Some participants expressed a need for myths as a way to cope with a reality that is not always pleasant or easy to understand. From a historical perspective, it was argued that myth and religion were created to justify social stratification. It may be easier to accept one's place in society, no matter how low, if it is perceived to be pre-ordained by an omnipotent force.

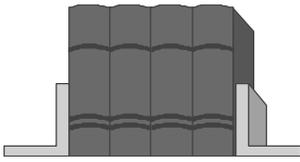
The meeting ended with a brief discussion of determinism. It was argued that humans are material, and material follows natural laws, so humans follow natural laws. Every human action therefore has a natural cause, but the multitude of causal variables currently make it impossible to decipher. Until determinism is proven, however, most of us are content

Philip Ferguson

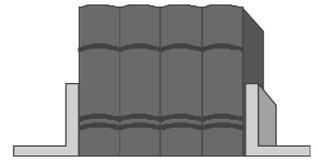
July 2000



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Book Reviews



***Way out there in the Blue:
Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War*
by Frances Fitzgerald
(New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000)**

I like this book because I agree with the author that President Bonzo did not know what was going on in his administration. I also think he was the worst American President in this century. A man who praised the family, but was our first divorced president and did not know his own grandchildren. A warrior president, who shirked service in the war. A man who told stories he remembered from Hollywood movies as true. A president who did not know the difference between telling the truth or an untruth and made it quite clear he did not give a damn.

Ronald Reagan presented himself as clear-sighted and steadfast, a man of the people who could cut through thickets of government bureaucratise with a simple truth told as a parable. He pretended to homespun virtues of an everyman, who would fight the wily and devious special interests that rule in Washington. "Tip O'Neill, the speaker of the House, and Reagan's favorite antagonist, saw him, by contrast, as stubborn, simple-minded and ignorant of the world." (P. 27) He playacted the presidential role, but did not want to understand the land he governed.

FitzGerald describes Reagan being retooled for running in California as a citizen politician. His handlers found out quickly "that the candidate knew zero about California" (p. 60), and was not interested in learning. But, they discovered, he "was happy to be coached and happy to be spoon-fed answers to questions." (P. 60) What is more, the author recounts Reagan's acting style in a very similar vein. Reagan was always good and prompt at learning his lines, but he showed no interest in studying his character or getting into the person he portrayed. Which is one reason he always remained merely a good actor and never became a great mime.

Reagan essentially stayed an actor and speechmaker. The details of policy and governing did not interest him. He simply left the work of governing to his underlings, and relied on them to coach him in what to say in interviews. His presentation was an act, which went over well with the public as long as his handlers "provided Reagan with the kind of direction he seemed to require. 'For eight years,' Reagan later said, 'somebody handed me a piece of paper every night that told me what I was going to be doing the next day'." (P. 64)

"Issues of ethics and legality seem to pass over his head." (P. 67) He saw Agnew as a decent man who had been treated unfairly. He continued to support and defend Nixon as the Watergate scandals unfolded, not out of deliberation, but because he simply could not understand

the break in was a crime not a movie caper. He spoke of Congress as a lynch mob out to get the President.

Not only did he not care for the day to day management of the government, "...Reagan lacked interest in many forms of reality. He had his views about how the world worked, and he had his solutions lower taxes, less government and a stronger America. But he had small interest in the application of his ideas." (P. 103) Reagan spent money freely both as governor and as President. He raised taxes in California, and left the Federal Government with the largest increase in debt in its history. He was simply incapable of appreciating the gap between his words and his actions.

Reagan promoted the Star Wars initiative, the idea of building a deterrent to nuclear missiles by shooting them out of the sky. It is a movie idea, not a realistic assessment of technical possibility. The Star Wars idea has cost the country billions and will cost it more billions. It will not work, not because it is technically impossible to find and hit an incoming missile. That is difficult, but with enough time and money feasible. It is a stupid idea because any adversary can easily defeat such a defense with relatively cheap decoys and by shooting an overwhelming number of missiles or by mounting an unforeseen sneak attack. In general Star Wars will make the nuclear stalemate less stable and more easily defeated.

But then, Reagan really believed in the need for a shield. Robert McFarlane quotes him thus:

"You know," he would say, "I just wish we could deliver on these things and protect Americans from this scourge of nuclear annihilation." He was convinced that we were in fact heading toward Armageddon, the final battle between good and evil. "I'm telling you, its coming" he would say. "Go read your Scripture." (P. 191)

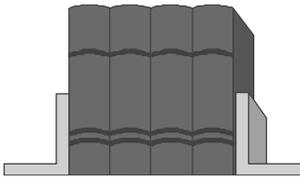
Wolf Roder

***Between Church and State:
Religion and Public Education in a Multicultural
America*
by James W. Fraser
(New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999)**

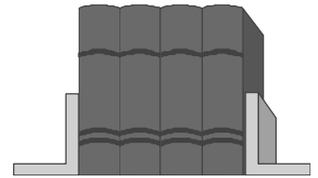
"God's place within the public schools of the United States has been debatable, and subject to controversy, for as long as there have been public schools."(p. 3) The relationship between Church and State, prayer and public schools in the United States has a complex history. Although some of the fathers of the Constitution were deist

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Book Reviews



(Continued from page 8)

doubters, most took the existence of the Christian god for granted. The First Amendment was not intended to place a barrier between religion and government. Rather, it was written to prevent the Federal Government from interfering with the established Churches in the various States. Fraser's book recounts the history of schools in America in their interaction with religion.

Schooling in this as in other countries began as a religious activity, and most early schools were run by churches. As schools over time became common and public, the various state governments took it for granted that prayer and Bible reading would be a daily activity. These prayers were Protestant, not Roman Catholic or much less Jewish. As the public school systems grew they were Protestant in fact and designed to bring all Americans into the national fold, which was taken to be Protestant. Proselytizing in the schools was sufficiently insistent, that the Roman Catholic Church felt itself forced to develop a separate school system.

Early 19th century American society was overwhelmingly Protestant, and had no compunction about enforcing this consensus on all, especially new immigrants, slaves, and Native Americans. Most immigrants wanted to fit into their new country, and acquiesced at the religious indoctrination to learn the language and ways of America. Government supported missionary schools financially to separate young Indians from their home and culture. Fraser also examines the role schooling played for slaves and freedmen. For a long time, in many parts of the country the consensus held. America was a Protestant Christian country, in which the schools would start the day with Bible reading and a generic Protestant prayer. If you insist on *not* being part of the Protestant majority why then you ought to suffer. Such as by paying school fees to a private Roman Catholic school. That at least was the underlying attitude.

When the religious right claims this country was founded on Christian principles, and that the schools ought to go back to prayer and Bible reading and posting the ten commandments, they are hearkening back to a time when that was in a large measure fact. The states and in particular the cities gradually dropped the religious requirements for schools in the later part of the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth. The religious right wants not only to bring prayer back but to return to a time of Protestant hegemony:

.... those wanting something much more far reaching and ominous: a dream of a Protestant restoration, a longing for a past in which Protestant religion and Protestant values

dominated all aspects of the nation's life, especially the curriculum and moral tone of the public schools. (P. 238)

Much of the history of public schools turns on the question of money, more specifically whether the common schools financed from taxes could or should include the Roman Catholic schools. As Irish and German immigration increased in the early part of the nineteenth century there was a moment when Catholics might have fed at the public trough. But no public money was to go to expressly religious schools, never mind that the public schools were in effect not merely Protestant, but downright hostile to the RC church. To a large extent the controversy is still about money, whether called vouchers, support of secular teaching in religious schools, or something else.

Wolf Roder

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