

# FIG Leaves

Volume 11 Issue 3

March 2002

## March Meeting

### Discussion with the founder of the *Institute for Humanist Studies*

Larry Jones will tell us why he founded the Institute for Humanist Studies (IHS) in 1999 and how it differs from other national humanist organizations. One of the Institute's major efforts is the IHS Fund, which in less than two years has provided grants of almost \$250,000 to humanist projects around the world. One of its first grants was to Camp Quest. Larry will tell us what criteria they use in awarding these grants.

The other major activity of the IHS is the Humanist Internet Project. It develops websites to explain and promote humanism to the widest possible audiences, and to support humanists, skeptics, and non-religious people throughout the world. A major effort here is a unique online education program that will provide humanist courses in eight study areas. Each of these courses will provide introductory material and optional advanced studies.

Larry is on the boards of the Center for Inquiry and the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, CSICOP -- publisher of *Skeptical Inquirer* magazine. He lives in East Greenbush, New York, not far from the IHS headquarters in Albany.

Joe Levee

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## Events

### March Meeting

#### *Institute for Humanist Studies*

Tuesday, March 26, at 7:00 P.M.

Vernon Manor Hotel

### April Potluck

Wednesday April 10,

at 6:30 PM

## DEBATE: On the Existence of God Monday, April 15

Edwin Kagin, attorney, published author, former college English Instructor, Presbyterian Minister's son, Eagle Scout, founding member of the Free Inquiry Group, Inc. (FIG) of Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky, and Director of Camp Quest, the first residential summer camp for the children of atheists, humanists, and other freethinkers, has agreed to engage in a live debate on

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## FIG February Meeting

**Speaker:** Bob Richardson, UC Philosophy Department

**Subject:** Science after The Origin

The discussion centered around some of the scientific criticisms of the Darwinian Theory of Natural Selection in the nineteenth century as presented to various professional groups and in reviews by William Thompson (Lord Kelvin) and an engineer named Jenkin.

Although Darwin's theory was modified somewhat between the first edition of *The Origin of Species* and the sixth edition his basic tenet remained the same in explaining speciation and adaptation. Natural selection was driven by small variations and selection over long periods of time. Jenkin's criticism was leveled at the small variations while Lord Kelvin's was at the long periods of time. The British generally accepted the concept of evolution within about ten years after the publication of Darwin's book but did not necessarily accept the concept of natural selection.

Darwin felt that "the laws of inheritance are quite unknown." At the time he was unaware of Gregor Mendel's work with plant inheritance. What he did believe was blending, e.g. a tall individual mating with a shorter one would produce offspring that were intermediate; individuals with different skin colors mating would produce offspring that were intermediate, i.e. the skin color of the offspring would be between the skin color of the mother and father.

At this point one questioner asked if Darwin was aware of cloning. He would have been familiar with it but he did it in the area of plants. He worked a lot with plants and in that world cloning is a straightforward process. As related to human beings he probably would not have been surprised by it.

Thomas H. Huxley, a biologist and physician, came to be known as "Darwin's Bull Dog" because of his vigorous defense of Natural selection, went about the English countryside "preaching" the Origin of Species. He talked to coal miners and scientific communities alike and was very successful in promoting (in the modern sense) the idea of evolution and natural selection. The members present seemed to want to move out of the nineteenth century and into the twenty first judging by the nature of the questions and comments that then came up.

The primary question was why in this day and age there is such a push forward for creationism to be taught in the public schools. This is mostly American and mostly a twentieth century phenomenon. One answer may be that the vulgarization of US education has brought about the idea that everyone should be educated to attend college and with the attendant scientific education to prepare them for this eventuality.

There were no science textbooks in the nineteenth century such as there are today and the opposition to Darwinian "theory" stems from what parents want their children to be taught in schools. And they think they have the right to determine it whether what they want taught is true or false.

At this point the discussion departed from the topic and became a discussion of belief systems and politics. Finally one questioner brought us back to the topic of the evening by asking if the

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## Philosophy for Life

If a person's religious beliefs and personal philosophy seem to help them meet all of life's challenges, then they are very unlikely to change them.

My religious beliefs fell apart at the age of 16. Creationism didn't really seem like a valid explanation for our existence when all the fossil records and scientific theory pointed toward an earth millions of years old and a gradual evolving of species over that decidedly unbiblical time frame.

Likewise, I struggled with the concept of God as the creator of all things, both good and evil. I have been told that you have to rely upon faith when serious questions arise in the Biblical explanation of all things. It's just not a step that I was willing or able to take. My humanist beliefs fit me quite well. They offer me a framework to look at the world and feel that it all makes as much sense as is possible. I don't have all the answers, but then again I don't believe that it is possible or perhaps even desirable to have all of the answers. I've noticed over the years that those who believe they have all of the answers are bordering on unbearable.

What has surprised me in recent years is that even Christian philosophy does not seem adequate to help me cope with every day life. I don't know of a single person who has not faced major challenges. The Christian view that I was raised with encouraged us to believe that if your belief in God was strong enough, you would never be given anything with which you were not capable of coping. There was the subliminal message that if you were a decent enough person, you would not be singled out by God to face many trials at all. The whole Job story was merely a one-time contest between God and the Devil. God proved his point and no longer needs to torture any of his chosen few. Bad things should not happen to good people.

And if something bad enough does happen, then there must be something bad about that person of which you just are not personally aware. Christian Scientists carry this view to major extremes, but even mainstream Christianity tends to encourage this belief.

What do many Christians comfort themselves with in the face of crises? ...the belief that heaven will be their final reward. All the suffering here on earth will be repaid with unimaginable wealth and privileges in the hereafter. Good people just naturally expect that only good things will happen to them...if not at this very moment, then at least when their life is tallied up at the end of eternity and all their suffering is forgotten in the pure bliss of heaven.

So why are all of us faced with so many challenges in the first place? I think Buddhism may offer a more realistic philosophy. Not being a student of philosophy or Buddhism, it is my understanding that Buddhists expect suffering as an integral part of life. Good people are not being singled out to suffer at God's or the Devil's whim. All people suffer...it's as natural as breathing. And since suffering is common to all people, we can expect it. We can understand that our challenge is not to avoid it, but rather to cope with it as best we can. There are lots of studies that show that all people experience stress. Those who seem to thrive in spite of it have mastered the skill of accepting stress and finding a way to enjoy life in spite of it.

Buddhists also place a lot of emphasis on living in the moment. I have wasted an incredible amount of time, emotion, and energy worrying about things that might happen in the future. How much simpler life would be if I could only learn to enjoy the moment and not see the good times as a prelude to disaster.

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**Just because we reject  
the supernatural in  
religion does not mean  
that we should refuse  
any philosophical ideas  
associated with  
a religion that help  
us cope with life.**

### Do we have your e-mail address?

How can you tell whether we do, or not? If you did not receive an e-mail reminder of last month's meeting, we don't have it.

We are planning to send out such meeting reminders each month. It would also be helpful to be able to contact you by e-mail for action alerts on such issues as the proposed teaching of intelligent design in Ohio schools. Various other possible uses include notifying you that our speaker can't come for some reason.

If uncertain, please send your e-mail address to Joelevee@aol.com and he will check our records.

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I don't feel the need to convert to Buddhism. Like I said, humanism fits me quite well. But I believe that part of being a humanist is to look for answers in all places, even in religions. Just because we reject the supernatural in religion does not mean that we should refuse any philosophical ideas associated with a religion that help us cope with life. Most religions are inseparable from the philosophy of their times, and most practitioners of these religions pick and choose from them at will. So it hardly matters to me how these ideas came to us as long we find comfort and strength in them.

Martha Ferguson

*(Continued from page 2)*

scientists who questioned natural selection were driven by their science or their religion? At the time those who accepted evolution but not necessarily natural selection could find a direction that allowed a purpose. They accepted the "Great Protestant Compromise" that god chose evolution as the means to create the universe. At this point it is difficult to say whether that was their motivation.

The meeting was brought to a close by the ringing of a cell phone.

George R. Maurer, Secretary

### Walnut Hills Alumni to Speak

Barby Ganulin is the Director of Alumni Relations for the Walnut Hills High School Alumni Foundation. She is also the wife of Rick Ganulin, the courageous Cincinnati lawyer who spoke to us about his unsuccessful lawsuit to stop Christmas from being a national legal holiday.

She has asked us to call to your attention two upcoming lectures by alumni of Walnut Hills. On April 17, Dr. John Mendelsohn will speak about "New Approaches to Preventing, Detecting and Treating Cancer." Dr. Mendelsohn is the President of the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center.

Dr. Frank Benjamin Foster, III, has been in the music business for over fifty-five years. A two time Grammy Award winner, he was a member and leader of the Count Basie orchestra for many years. On May 1, he will talk about "My Life in the Jazz Lane." Barby says we shouldn't be surprised if he pulls out his saxophone!

Lectures are on Wednesdays at 7:30 PM at Walnut Hills High School, 3250 Victory Parkway in Cincinnati. Free secured parking will be available. Tickets are \$15 and can be purchased at the door. Call Barby at 569-5582 if you have questions.

## Obituary

Harold G. Miller died on October 10, 2001, but we learned this only recently. Harold was a friendly man and pleasant to chat with. He was a member of FIG for many years and attended most of our meetings. He attended the UC Institute for Learning in Retirement course on "Exploring Secular Humanism" which Wolf Roder and Joe Levee taught several years ago. FIG and secular humanism were clearly an important part of his life.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TWO-MINUTE ACTIVIST

When I was a Christian, I always heard it said that the only thing that needed to happen for evil to prosper was for good men to do nothing. Though my notions of “good” and “evil” are quite different from when I was theistic, the saying, as a relative socio-ethical dynamic, still holds true. So as I began my journey into humanism and atheism, I was quite surprised to find such a relatively small degree of organized activism compared to the fundamentalistic Christianity I had just left. Their network of political and social activism is quite extensive, and sometimes even impressive in its effectiveness to sway public policy.

As a local and national organization, we are one of the biggest supporters of individual rights, yet we made no contributions or sponsorships for the local Gay Pride parade. We are one of the biggest proponents of freedom of expression, yet issued no statements or made no calls when people like Larry Flynt and Elyse Metcalfe were “assassinated” by the local city government. These were smaller local concerns, and it would have been so easy to have done something. I began to consider activities and strategies for getting my humanist family better informed and more involved in pivotal events that would not only promote our group, but give humanism a strong local voice and presence.

Then, in October of 2001, I became aware of a fundamentalist effort to discredit the PBS series “Evolution.” I immediately sent an e-mail out to a number of humanists informing them of the fundamentalists’ effort and asking them to e-mail or call PBS to let them know how much they appreciated the show and the quality of the information presented. I was amazed at how favorably and quickly people responded to the request, and how far up the line the request was circulated. Seeing the potential, I decided to do similar activities on a more regular basis, but it needed good “packaging.” I realized that people already had enough to read and already had too many demands on their time. It needed to be something that could be quickly read, assimilated, and acted upon--something that, sitting at your desk, would only take a couple of minutes. I decided that it should be kept to

roughly one page and consist of three sections: the first outlining the problem or opportunity at hand; the second outlining a quick response that could be quickly done by e-mail, phone, or fax; the third would be lighter and more of a personal nature, sometimes sharing a humorous thought or news item, sometimes an incredulous one. And thus was born the series that is today growing and known as The Two-Minute Activist. To subscribe, simply send your e-mail address to:

uss\_darwin@yahoo.com  
Tim W. Kelly

### Two-Minute Activist

Welcome to a special fifteenth edition of the Two-Minute Activist. Thanks for your participation.

**TODAY’S ACTIVISM:** March 10th is (was) the National Day of Appreciation for Abortion Providers, but this year it fell on a Sunday (not very pragmatic). For some reason, I thought it was today. Either way, it is still not too late to let your voice of appreciation be heard.

**THE REQUEST:** This is short and easy. Simply place a call to your local Planned Parenthood, or other abortion service provider, and let them know in a sentence that you appreciate them and their perseverance, courage, and commitment to women. Please don’t put this one aside because of its seeming simplicity. Encouragement as gratitude and appreciation is important.

In Cincinnati the number is (513) 287-6488.

**THANKS FOR YOUR HELP!**

Tim W. Kelly

**PURELY PERSONAL:** As Edwin Kagin always points out, why do fundamentalists, when they believe that life begins at conception, emphasize being born again instead of being conceived again? Things that make you go “hmmmm.”



# Book Review

## *Archaeology and the Bible*

by John C. H. Laughlin  
(London: Routledge, 2000)

Let me start with this generalization: connecting the artifacts unearthed by archaeology with the documents of history is a notoriously difficult undertaking. History deals with the thoughts and deeds of kings and other important people, often legendary. Archaeology digs up the simple materials of ordinary people. Only occasionally is the palace of a king or a city known to history the objective of an archaeological excavation. Some historical figures simply can never be confirmed by archaeology, while important cities may be dug up which never figured in the written history.

The author of this book is a student of the Bible as well as a working archaeologist. He tries to introduce us to the enormous body of sophisticated research which has been completed in Israel in the past thirty years. Much of this research questions the historical accuracy of the Biblical narrative. Frequently, the Bible is just plain wrong, with place, people or activity non-existent:

For a non-believer this development is not particularly troublesome. But for those who claim the Jewish or Christian faith as their own, the consensus now developing in archaeology as well as in critical literary studies raises many acute questions concerning the use of the Bible as a source of religious truth (p. 14).

Laughlin's explanations hold strictly to modern scholarly understanding. Middle Eastern pre-history, and this book, are divided into Stone Age, particularly the neolithic, the Bronze Age, early, middle, and late, and ends with the Iron Age when the written word came wide spread use in Palestine.

As far as can be seen from the record, there is no evidence for the Patriarchs of the Biblical narrative. The central questions scholars have tried to answer concern the historicity of the Exodus from Egypt and the later Conquest of

Canaan. Neither these foundational stories can be verified or documented outside of the Hebrew scriptures themselves.

The story of the Exodus appears only in the Bible, no literary evidence of an Egyptian sojourn or flight can be found in the extensive hieroglyphic literature or inscriptions. This is true regardless of whatever date one might assume for the event, which would fall into the late Bronze Age. Neither has archaeology traced any evidence of thousands of Israelites wandering in the Sinai desert. It must be questioned if there was such an event at all (p. 87).

Both the textual and archaeological evidence shows the Philistines as a people who arrived from the sea and settled in the coastal areas of Palestine, hence the name. They were a sophisticated, highly civilized people, with many achievements in trade, ceramics, architecture, and other crafts. On the other hand, the conquest of Canaan in the Bible appears "entirely divorced from historical reality" (p. 116). Although there is a Jericho, and evidence of its destruction in several layers, none of the unearthed events can be brought into conformity with the story of Joshua.

Scholars envision the establishment of Israel as a series of skirmishes of hill country and desert nomads with the more settled villages of the plain and in the hills. This creation of the nations of Israel, Samaria, and Judea took place over a long span of time in the early iron age. Only with the late Iron Age in the last millennium BCE in the age of David and Solomon do Bible and archaeology sometimes agree.

Many of the artifacts unearthed point to a considerable diversity of religious practices, not to the single minded worship of a lone supreme deity. One image I like especially is in a drawing on a jar showing god with his wife. The author comments:

". . . these inscriptions and other material remains mentioned above all point to the fact that in popular religion, at least, many Israelites associated Yahweh with a female consort." (p. 148)

Wolf Roder

(Continued from page 1)

the issue of whether or not there is a God.

The exact wording of the debate topic is:  
“Resolved That God Exists.”

This debate will take place on Monday, April 15, 2002, at 8:30 pm, in room 128, Pearson Hall (the science department), Miami University, Oxford, Ohio. The debate will be hosted by the Forensics Department, and it is jointly sponsored by the Organization of Atheists and Agnostics of Miami University and by a Christian Fraternity. It was rescheduled from January 30, 2002.

Speaking for the existence of God (the Affirmative) will be Dr. Ben Voth, Director of Forensics, and professor in the Department of Communication, of Miami University. Dr. Voth appears to be a formidable opponent. He is a debate judge at the national level, and the advisor and coach for the Miami University forensic debate team, which has performed with distinction in national and international tournaments. Edwin will debate the Negative of the Resolution.

Edwin has had wide formal and informal debate experience. In High School, he was on the debate team that won the Kentucky state championship. He won oratory contests in High School and college, and he was on the winning Moot Court team each year of law school. He has been a featured speaker at both regional and national meetings of a number of freethought organizations.

This promises to be a fun evening.

You are invited and encouraged to attend and to bring guests. At such events, the Christian student groups, and local churches, always seem to manage to pack the audience with theists to jeer at any speaker or debater who dares challenge their belief system, so it is important for atheists and agnostics to be represented. Otherwise, the Christians can give the impression that virtually everyone believes as they do. If they could have their way, maybe

everyone would.

Here are the directions to Miami University:  
[http://www.ucm.muohio.edu/About\\_Miami/visitingmiami/index.cfm](http://www.ucm.muohio.edu/About_Miami/visitingmiami/index.cfm)

Pearson Hall is located in Oxford, Ohio, on the Miami University Campus. It is on the Northwest side of the intersection of High St. and Patterson Ave. Patterson Ave. is also known as State Route 27.

## Take Another Look Items of Interest on the Web

1— If you haven't already seen it, The Cincinnati Enquirer ran a column by Karen Samples on 2/16/02 exploring experiences of atheists and other like-minded folks during the past five months since 9/11. A Fig member was interviewed and quoted (me) and two Fig members, Joe Levee and Bob Riehemann had their letters to the editor published.

2— The St Petersburg Times (Fla.) 3/14/02 reports on the brouhaha caused by their canceling a license plate that proclaims, “ATHEIST” [http://www.sptimes.com/2002/03/14/State/\\_ATHEIST\\_\\_plate\\_raise.shtml](http://www.sptimes.com/2002/03/14/State/_ATHEIST__plate_raise.shtml)

3— There is always The New York Times. Sunday 3/17/02—an article “correcting” Billy Graham's memory as revealed on White House tapes of the Nixon era just made public, where he is espousing many anti-semitic beliefs. His apology is included. [www.nytimes.com/2002/03/17/opinion/17SUN2.html?ex=1017392675&ei=1\(ID,Ed.\)](http://www.nytimes.com/2002/03/17/opinion/17SUN2.html?ex=1017392675&ei=1(ID,Ed.))

4— A Humorous Look at Intelligent Design [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/main.jhtml;\\$sessionid\\$UR5FONAAAB3MVQFIQMF](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/main.jhtml;$sessionid$UR5FONAAAB3MVQFIQMF)



# FIG Leaflets

**A course in Introduction to Anthropology From the current issue of Anthropology News, where contributing editor Jonathan Marks writes:**

"And on the theme of history, I'd like to share with you a parting anecdote from the AAA meetings. Sidney Mintz (Johns Hopkins) taught intro cultural regularly at Yale in the 1960s, a very popular course....Anyway, one year (1966?) he was up for sabbatical leave but had difficulty getting any of the regular Yale faculty to jump in and teach his intro class. So on the suggestion of the dean, he got a visitor to come in and teach intro cultural at Yale that year. "So Margaret Mead commuted up from New York and taught intro cultural. But Mead didn't like grading, so she gave the class all As. "And one A became enshrined as the only A on the undergraduate transcript of the new President of the United States, George W Bush."

**A great-great-grandson of Charles Darwin confesses:**

In early childhood I was told how Darwin's theory of evolution had demolished the biblical story of creation. And if the very first chapter of the Good Book was nonsensical and untrue, why should the rest be any more credible or useful? My parents tried to raise me as a Christian, but ultimately lacked the conviction to boost me over the numerous improbabilities.

Matthew Chapman, "Sermon Under the Mount" Reports of the NCSE, 20 (Sept/Oct 2000) p. 31

## **Thanksgiving Prayer**

Ahem, in this time of war against Osama bin Laden and the oppressive Taliban regime, we are thankful that our leader isn't the spoiled son of a powerful politician from a wealthy oil family who is supported by religious fundamentalists, operates through clandestine organizations, has no respect for the democratic process,

bombs innocents, and uses war to deny people their civil liberties. Amen.

Huey Freeman in *The Boondocks* Aaron McGruder (2001)

## **What would the world be like today if the Industrial Revolution had begun in 250 AD?**

Ironically, the very technological achievements of the Romans that moderns admire most in retrospect are those that show most clearly their ability to alter and control nature in ways that are sometimes productive, but often destructive. Granted their proficiency, it is strange that they seem to have been on the verge of further inventions and a technological revolution that remained unachieved for unknown reasons; a slave economy, psychological resistance, a desire to preserve jobs, and failure to develop interchangeable parts have all been suggested as playing a role. Yet it would be pointless to criticize the Romans for not achieving the Industrial Revolution 1,500 years before it actually occurred.

Many Christians thought that the study of physical phenomena was a waste of time because the material world is temporary. So science in general, and ecology in particular, remained undeveloped after a brief period in which the seeds were planted by the Peripatetic School and flourished, but bore little fruit.

from R. Donald Hughes Pan's *Travail: Environmental Problems of the Ancient Greeks and Romans* (1994) p. 197

## **Arctic Tales**

The youngest, a chunky black-haired lad claims to have caught such a huge trout that the photo weighed five pounds. Another reports a char so large that it took three huskies to bark at it, while a third swears that the local fuel truck driver radioed in to report that he'd finished fueling the Beaver that had just arrived. When the office replied, "What Beaver?" he discovered that he'd just pumped 120 gallons of gas into one of Baker Lake's smaller mosquitoes.

George Erickson, *True North* (2000) p. 90

Thanks to Wolf Roder for the quotes.



# Rationally Speaking

A monthly e-column by Massimo Pigliucci

N. 22, March 2002  
Darwin who?

In 1859 the world got a piece of shocking news: it seems that not only is the earth not the center of the universe, as Copernicus and Galilei had amply demonstrated, but that human beings are not the pinnacle of creation after all. This devastating blow to our self-esteem-the second in three centuries-was dealt by Charles Darwin, a quiet Englishman who had made his lifelong activity the understanding of the natural variation of living organisms. As is well known, the publication of his *On the Origin of Species* caused quite a stir in academic circles and among the general public. The first kind of controversy (the scientific one) lasted only a few decades: by the turn of the 20th century the theory of descent with modification (as Darwin called it), or evolution (as we now refer to it), was as solidly established as general relativity or the theory of gases.

Not so for the second sort of controversy: while the general public in most European countries does not consider the notion that we are closely related to chimps and monkeys particularly outrageous anymore, a vocal minority in the United States refuses the very idea on ideological grounds: it's not in the Bible, so it can't be. How can this bizarre state of affairs persist into the 21st century? To a scientist, this seems as incredible as somebody seriously defending the theory that the earth is flat (which a few people belonging to the Flat Earth Society in California actually do!). Scientists are not in the business of questioning people's religious beliefs, but they are also paid to teach the best of what we have good reasons to think we know, leaving individuals to make decisions on how to reconcile the discoveries of science with their own religious views.

It is this disconnect-between what scientists accept as established beyond reasonable doubt and what a sizable portion of the American public believes-that has prompted the annual celebration of "Darwin Day," which just occurred on February 12 (that is, on Darwin's-as well as Lincoln's-birthday). Darwin Day is an international effort, mostly focused on the United States with a few outlets in Canada and Europe, to encourage the public to learn about evolutionary biology and to prompt scientists to get out of their ivory towers for at least a few hours and talk to the people who, after all, pay their salaries and research grants. Surely this sort of communication between experts and lay people can't be a bad idea.

Darwin Day was actually started in 1996 at the University of Tennessee as the result of a reaction to the silliness of a bill then being considered by the state legislature and which would have curtailed the teaching of evolution in Tennessee's public schools. A group of students and faculty of the then recently created Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology was discussing the situation over a beer (at a several-times-since-defunct brewery on Gay Street in Knoxville, TN) and decided to create a group whose mission would be to dispel the so many myths and misunderstandings about evolution and Darwinism that periodically fuel such misguided legislative attempts as the 1996 Tennessee Senate bill n. 3229. (The bill fortunately died in committee, although it generated enough negative publicity that the BBC did a special show on the controversy). So was born the Tennessee Darwin Coalition.

Just in case you'd like to start your own Darwin Day for 2003, let me tell you what we did in Tennessee this year. The events started on February 11 with a workshop for local junior and high school teachers on how to use evolution as an example of critical thinking. Imagine! The idea is that it would be much better for students to learn about the process of science and how certain conclusions (e.g., that we did evolve

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**Quote of the month:  
"The roots of  
education are bitter,  
but the fruit is  
sweet." -Aristotle**

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from a common ancestor shared with currently living chimps) are actually reached instead of just learning facts that they have to take on faith. On February 12 there was a whole array of events, starting with an all-day information booth at the student union where faculty and graduate students will answer questions about evolution, and continuing with a documentary festival in which videos were followed by a discussion of the main ideas presented. Darwin Day 2002 in Tennessee concluded with a special lecture by philosopher Elliott Sober (of the University of Wisconsin-Madison), who nicely showed why intelligent design theory is actually no theory at all. Now, you don't have to do all this to have a Darwin Day next year, but make sure to borrow a biologist or a philosopher from your local college and the fun is guaranteed.

While it is astounding to see that the state of science education in this country is so poor that people proudly "reject" well established scientific theories simply because they don't fit with their preconceptions, there is a bright side to almost everything, and the evolution-creation controversy is no exception. After my rude awakening to the realities of creationism when I moved to Tennessee, I started to study the problem and its roots. In so doing I learned quite a bit about why people believe what they believe, and what shortcomings of science education are contributing to cause the problem. The result has been a better awareness of the situation and a renewed willingness to do something about it (and a new idea or two to try out). The feeling is spreading throughout the nation: the Society for the Study of Evolution (the premiere professional society of evolutionary biologists) now has a permanent committee dealing with creationism and many of its members are starting to wake up from the torpor of their shielded academic lives to get back into the classrooms and in the public arena.

The reason this is excellent news for everybody, creationists included, is because it goes far beyond the scope of this particular controversy. It means that scientists-shaken by

attacks on their discipline from as varied sources as the religious right and the academic left-may be finally starting to realize that they have a moral obligation to come to the public and explain what they are doing, why and how. This, as the final words of Casablanca famously went, may be the beginning of a beautiful friendship. The result could be a better informed and critically thinking public, the true guarantors of a democracy.

#### **Further readings:**

The Complete Idiot's Guide(R) to Evolution, by Leslie Alan Horvitz. You can't start any more simply than this...

Tower of Babel, by Robert T. Pennock. An excellent treatment of the evolution-creation controversy, with particular reference to the so-called intelligent design theory.

#### **Web links:**

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

The National Center for Science Education, the premier organization to learn about evolution and creationism and help fight the good fight (if you're not sure which one that is, visit this page!).

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

Darwin Day International, the international coordination center for D-Day events.

<http://fp.bio.utk.edu/darwin/>

Darwin Day - Tennessee, where it all started!

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Next month:

Those who "understand" Bin Laden

© by Massimo Pigliucci, 2002

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Many thanks to Melissa Brenneman and Bob Faulkner for patiently editing and commenting on Rationally Speaking columns.

## Intelligent Design Proposal for Ohio

The proposal to teach the theory of intelligent design in Ohio schools has received a lot of publicity. We don't propose to recapitulate the subject here, but to tell you that FIG is following the matter closely. From time to time we will suggest you contact state legislators or members of the Ohio Board of Education. It will be helpful if we have your e-mail address, as stated elsewhere in this issue.

Our recommendation at this time is that you visit the website of Ohio Citizens for Science (OCS). Their site is <http://ecology.cwru.edu/ohioscience/>. This is the best source of current and in-depth information on this subject. OCS is actively working to avoid having ID taught in our Ohio schools. Their website makes recommendations about what you can do to help

resist the ID campaign.

On March 16, their website contained the following message:  
"Send a letter in the next week or so. Such letters could be pivotal, as the writers are just finishing a new draft of the standards, & pressure by creationists is going to be intense to get something included. It would be lovely to have the OBE [Ohio Board of Education] & legislators (newspapers too) flooded with letters encouraging them not to compromise our standards. Our kids deserve to learn real biology, and that means evolution --with no apology to special interest groups."

The OCS website provides suggestions on writing such letters. It also includes a petition to the Ohio Board of Education which you can sign online. Check it out!

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### About Ohio Citizens for Science

*OCS represents Ohio's great diversity of religions, political views, philosophies, and scientific traditions. What we share in common is the goal of improving science education in our schools for the good of our communities, our state, our country, and our world.*

Ohio's children need contact with real working scientists. Science and technology is the future of Ohio's economy. Our students need to see how the jobs are done so they can see themselves doing those jobs when they grow up. And sci-tech jobs change constantly. Our students need to gain self-confidence in their intelligence and intellectual skills so that as adults they can enjoy continuing to learn. This can come only from contact with real scientific theories, and from understanding the unity of science and the methods of scientific inquiry.

"OCS has a number of short- and long-range goals including:

#### 1) Science Standards

Short-range: To defend the current draft of Ohio's new science standards from the recent political attack.

Long-range: To see the level of scientific literacy rise

in Ohio so that those standards will be re-written in 5-10 years to include even more science.

#### 2) Contact with scientists

Short-range: To help scientists educate community groups about the role of evolutionary theory in the world of science today so they can understand why it is essential to include it in the science standards.

Long-range: To promote contact between students and scientists in all fields through visits by scientists to schools, and visits by students to universities, businesses, laboratories and other sites of scientific activity."

Pamela Keiper  
Science Resource Center  
Cleveland Museum of Natural History  
University Circle, Cleveland, OH, 44106  
216-231-4600 ext 211, [pkeiper@cmnh.org](mailto:pkeiper@cmnh.org)

Patricia Princehouse  
Department of Philosophy  
Case Western Reserve University  
Cleveland, OH 44106  
216-368-2632, [pmp7@cwru.edu](mailto:pmp7@cwru.edu)