# FIG Leaves

### Volume 14 Issue 2

### February 2005

### February FIG Meeting: Tuesday, 22 February 7:00 PM

#### **The Darwin Bootlegs**

Speaker: Dr. Gene Kritsky

The total Darwin Archive consists of over 15,000 letters and several thousand bits of papers with notes and observations. These letters and notes reveal aspects of Darwin that were not disclosed in his published writings. This presentation will examine some of these notes to reveal some of the unknown facts about Darwin and his thinking.

Last year Dr. Kritsky, professor of biology at the College of Mount St. Joseph, took time out of his busy schedule as a leading authority on cicadas to give us a wonderful talk about Charles Darwin as a person. We are delighted that he will come back to talk to us about the fruits of his research into Darwin's papers.

#### March FIG Meeting Tuesday, 22 March 2005

Randy Weaver and Wolf Roder will lead an wide ranging discussion on the role of the natural environment in history, economics, and sociology. The interchange will be based on the assertions of Jared Diamond in his global history *Guns*, *Germs and Steel* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 1997) about the role of geography in the history of tribes, nations, and civilizations.

#### Cincinnati **Atheists Meetup Group** has an event on **16 February**:

Please RSVP to the website - http://atheists.meetup.com/90/events/4107460/

What: Cincinnati Atheists February Meetup

When: Wednesday, February 16 at 7:00PM

Where: Joseph-Beth Booksellers; 2692 Madison Rd. Rookwood Pavillion

Cincinnati OH 45207; Phone: 513-396-8966

**Event Description:** More enlightened conversation with terrific people in a nice setting. Good food, if you want to eat; no pressure, if you don't. Do come!

#### Michael Shermer Lectures:

**Indianapolis, IN Tuesday, 5 April:** "The Science of Good and Evil" at 7:30 pm, Atherton Union Reilly Room, Butler University, Indianapolis, IN Contact: Stuart Glennan, sglennan@butler.edu or Norm Minnick, nminnick@butler.edu

**Greencastle, IN Wednesday, 6 April:** at 4:00 pm "Why People Believe Weird Things" and at 8:00 pm "The Science of Good and Evil" in Student Union Ballroom and Science Center, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN Contact: Keith Nightenhelser, k\_night@depauw.edu or Tavia Pigg tpigg@depauw.edu

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#### **Events**

#### **February Meeting**

Tuesday 22 February 7:00 PM at the Vernon Manor 400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, Ohio

#### March Potluck

Tuesday 8 March 6:30 PM At the home of

#### March Meeting

Tuesday 22 March 7:00 PM at the Vernon Manor 400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, Ohio





January Meeting.

#### Morality and the Laws of Evolution

Kirk Little, D.Psy.in private practice

Dr. Little started his talk by sharing some personal background information. He said he was raised without any formal religion by his parents even though his grandfather was a minister who was also a magician. He called himself the "Magic Minister."

To address his topic, the speaker said he needed to know what our values are. To determine this he referred to the back page of *FIG Leaves* where our purpose as a group is listed. Then he extrapolated the various meanings that could be derived from these



separate statements. He quoted the opening sentence: "Our purpose is to foster a community..." He said fostering is good, from this one can derive advancing, promoting, encouraging: communities are good; "dedication" is good, you want to be loyal and enhance things: to be secular is good. He actually listed about 19 different bases that relate to values. He took these values and categorized them by reframing them as wishes. It's pretty easy to discuss values by reframing them in terms of desires or wishes. If we say that we want to foster a community or provide a forum and form alliances and affiliations with humanist and atheist organizations that's about joining and it's very important to us that we value joining. What this articulates is a basic desire to be accepted and to belong. He went on to explain, "one of the things I do in my practice is I try to get to the foundation or the basic things. Sometimes people tend to deal in abstractions and I can't understand them so I want to take what they say and get to their basic wishes and fears. Would it be too much of a stretch to say that we wanted to belong - to share our values and articulate our beliefs within the group?" This is called "norming." When we first get into a group we need to decide who is "in" and who is "out". Then we have to decide who's "up" and who's "down." That is called "storming".

What do we mean by ethical practices? It is a code of conduct, that is relatively informal. It's codified here very loosely but even if you don't write anything down any group that is forming goes through these stages.

From what he could extrapolate from this is that the right to express and defend the right to secular belief is at the top of our agenda. Perhaps if we can understand and articulate the biological or innate natural and evolutionary source of our moral sense we'll get our needs met for freedom and acceptance within the larger community or even change society to what is more in synch with our own ideals. What makes it a moral system is that you can be cued or triggered to having certain thoughts or feelings when you are not getting your needs or wishes met. This is painful and you can recognize the inequity. Let's say that the opposite of our wishes would be our fears and we would be afraid of being rejected, isolated, or ostracized, so if you said that you were an atheist or secular humanist, or freethinker or someone outside the mainstream of society; people might react, "we don't serve those here," that would stimulate our moral system, a feeling of disgust, or lack of judgment, and a whole cognitive effective program would go into action. There might be withdrawal and you would walk away; or it might be, to confront or try to educate, how it comes across in your action might be variable but the fact that it stimulated a reaction in you is not. We think of people



**FIG Leaves -** Thoughtful articles, letters, reviews, reports, anecdotes, and cartoons are very welcome. Submit in Electronic format via the internet to:

figleaves@fuse.net; or on disk or typewritten via mail to Editor, FIG Leaves, P.O. Box 19034, Cincinnati, OH 45219. Contributions received before the first Friday of the month will be considered for publication that month.

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who don't approve of us, as rigid, close-minded, irrational, dogmatic. When we have a sense of righteousness, you can be sure that is a moral system expressing itself. To summarize: Would you agree that we want to be accepted wholly, self-determining, optimally challenged, and anything that triggers a threat to our not getting these intrinsically motivating needs met, stimulates this moral system which is comprised of



cognition, feelings and behaviors that we would call a sense of injustice.

"What I want to do now is to give a brief overview of moral systems and ethical systems and others discussed in philosophy." He explained:

"You may wonder what is the difference between morality and ethics? What I think of as morality is a set of core beliefs; what I think of as ethics might be considered second order beliefs. They are a reflection on our moral beliefs." To make this more intelligible Dr. Little used an analogy to music and musicology. So ethics is a conscious stepping back and reflecting on morality while musicology is a conscious reflection on music.

Etiquette is a part of morality but is less serious. If someone says, "it's nice to meet you;" that is etiquette. Laws are distinguished from morality, because they have very explicit rules. There are penalties, there are officials who have to interpret the laws and what the penalties are. There is considerable overlap governed by morality and by law. Religion we all know involves morality but is much more than that. In our country morality is often connected to Christianity. He was amazed to learn there are 34,000 groups in the world that identify themselves as Christian. In our country 75 percent of people claim they are Christians. What they mean by that is not always clear. When people talk about "their morality" we would like to know where they get it from. In all likelihood morality was the customary conduct between people who were forming groups. Moral ideas are the product of natural selection. Here is a more formal definition:

Morality is an informal public system applied to all rational persons, governing behavior that affects others and has the lessening of evil or harm as its goal.

Informal means that there is no authoritative judge,

there's no decision procedure that provides the particular answers to all moral questions. So what does provide these answers? For example it's not morally justified to cheat or injure or kill people. It would be universally agreed that is wrong. There are some moral nuances about which we might disagree, but we accept the general rules as universal. Societies use political and legal processes to supplement this morality when disagreements have to be settled more formally. The fact that it is a public system says that every one subject to these sorts of judgments knows which ones are acceptable, which ones are prohibited, which ones are required, encouraged, allowed, in the sense that you are not irrational if you act morally. When we say that it applies to all rational persons, we make it clear that it is a guide, that there's some code of conduct that governs behavior. It also let's us know there are exceptions, meaning that children are not held to the same moral standard. This has to do with expectations. If I have an expectation of you, I'm making a formal prediction about what you're going to do in the future based on facts that I've accumulated over time. So really it's a probability statement about what's going to happen next. If I expect that someone will not kill: I am making a prediction that he won't because he is rational and all people who are rational certainly will not kill especially in an unjustified way.

We have a code of conduct. The code is the force. The power behind the force is public trust within society.

However, between two people can exist a personal trust such as that between married persons who have made a commitment. They make a promise not to have sex with anybody else. So they trust each other and thus make a prediction that we will not do that.



The speaker was deconstructing the definition of morality in saying that the goal is to reduce harm. This is a little controversial because the utilitarians say that the goal of morality is producing the greatest good for the greatest number, but it is better not to hurt people than not do good for them.

 $\Rightarrow$ 





What are the two general categories of ethics that we call normative? One is skepticism and moral nihilism is another. Skeptics say that there are multiple ethical theories and each one deserves separate study to determine its truth. To me that's just another way of saying be open-minded. Moral nihilism says there is no such thing as truth; everything is subjective.

We have normative approaches to ethics and we have descriptive approaches. In moral relativism the standards would relate only to local or temporal circumstances. Other people might have different rules. We could say there is moral subjectivism, which focuses on individuals and whether or not they live up to their own principles. Moral absolutism is a way of saying that there is one dominant system and we ought to teach it to everyone. It's a way of saying "you know the right answers;" all you need is to carry them out."

When we talk about ethics we can discuss it in terms that are prescriptive (what to do rather than what not to do).

The last thing I want to cover is "What do we mean when we say ethical systems? It means that we have worked out some coherent and clear and consistent set of principles that are easy to differentiate and enable us to be moral persons. To be a moral person is sometimes better than to act morally. To be a person of integrity and character is better than not to have character.

-- Submitted by George Maurer

The Big Show by Dorothy B. Thompson Why is it, people love a tragedy? They love the god stuff opportunity. Just cry and hang some notes upon a fence, Avowing devotion and penitence. They insult those who die because they say, Those who escaped were saved by God that day. Hey! How come God did not save those who died? I bet they begged for mercy and they cried. The convoluted logic drives me wild. Folks hold on to what they learned as a child. They'll drop the Easter Bunny, Santa too. But cling to god-belief, fiscous as glue. Crowds get together, light candles and pray. Then drag it out just as long as they may. Getting their kicks from other people's woes. It seems to me they really love these shows. Religion uses this to get more dough. And hopes it's something no one will outgrow. Some shooting at a school just fit the bill, But deaths at women's clinics never will

#### The Bible has no contradictions!



A Disagreement - who is right, the monkey or the Parrot?

Watson Heston, Old Testament Stories Comically Illustrated. (New York: The Truth Seeker Company, 1892)





# Letters To The Editor



Hi,

The attached article talks about some high school science teachers at Dover High in Pennsylvania who courageously refused to read a statement drafted by the school board that criticizes evolution. I got the address of the high school and I drafted a letter, also attached, applauding the teacher's actions and sent it to Robert Eshbach, a science teacher who was quoted in the article....Margaret.

January 17, 2005

Mr. Robert Eshbach Dover High School 46 West Canal Street Dover, PA 17315

Dear Robert,

Having just read the article in the Cincinnati Enquirer entitled, *Alternative to Evolution Splits PA. Town*, I am writing to applaud the gutsy and principled decision you and your fellow teachers made to not read to your students the statement written by your school board calling Intelligent Design an alternative to evolution. As a public school teacher myself, I know teachers in my district and surely teachers all around the country are being told to teach things that they know are not in the best interest of their students. Your stance gives us all a little more backbone when faced with wrong headed directives issued by administrators, school boards and/or politicians.

Sincerely, Margaret O'Kain

#### What's He Saying?

Communication "broad in scope, complex in nature, difficult in mastery"

George Bernard Shaw once observed that there is only one religion, though there are a hundred versions of it. He forgot to add an extra digit, but even then the same could be said for human communication, at least for its definitions and concepts, some of which follow.

First of all, it was Aristotle who said, "Much of what passes for knowledge is really opinion." Or to look at it in a more humble fashion, "one acquires knowledge after he

dispenses it." This leads to Charles Weingartern's hyperbole on the subject: "Too much thinking rots your mind." One guesses he had in *his* mind Shakespeare's "The world is a comedy to those that feel/ And a tragedy to those that think." Which in turn probably caused Fenelon to opine that "the more you say, the less people remember." But what you do say and think must coincide: i.e, "All messages are on two levels: intent and content, and it's the clarity of intent which makes communication possible." Which means that there must be congruence between the intent and the content of your message, the message being part of one's own feelings.

Since it is the ability to conceptualize, symbolize and abstract that separates us humans from other organisms, we are then reminded of Earnest Wrage's "It is vital that intelligent individuals be made to articulate in order that intelligence prevails." He must have had his head together with the rationalist who believed that "Men are never so likely to settle a question rightly as when they discuss it freely." And it is for those intelligent and free men and women that communication must be complete, but not encyclopedic; we'd go insane if we weren't selective in conveying our experiences. It also must not be vague to intelligent people, for such poor communication would be insulting and dehumanizing. The purpose of a message or act is determined by the feedback; and this response (always on a two-way street) could have either a fire or ice effect, to analogize from Robert Frost. Communication is also defined as anything that gets a reaction. Or to be all-inclusive, something that is equated with experience itself – whether it is interpersonal or intra-personal, verbal or non-verbal, metaphysical or massive.

Obviously mass communication with its electronic eye is the most powerful kind we know. Whether it is public imagemaking or personal image-satisfying, television's ability to inform and entertain, in its total influence, either to shape us or to mirror us, really winds up as the ultimate persuader. As someone once said, "telling is selling."

To descend from the outer image to the inner id, we hear Wendell Johnson claim, "We are our most enchanted listeners." In speaking to others we are really talking to ourselves, thus unraveling our thoughts and waiting with enchantment to hear what we are going to say. Furthermore, in *being* and in *doing* as communicators, we are "a bundle of roles in which there is no real self, no real you, "according to Hume. Whether this be so or not, we are still people, and "only people can have meanings," to quote Don Fabun. Yes,





this gets us into trouble, as the essence of meaning is response; and when words get in the way of this stimulus-response cycle, the lack of semantic clarity affects all involved—negatively. Or as Carl Rogers put it, "We never do really understand each other."

Another case of communication breakdown is clarified by this analogy: Inter-personal relations are much like viewing works of art or hearing music. The perceiving of the sender (or artist) and his or her message is determined by the receiver's prejudices and preconceived notions. Thus, in general, if you don't like someone, you won't like what he or she says (or does).

To ascend to the basic goodness in man, we hear Socrates saying, "If you give people the data, they will act 'good'." And given the right kind of climate, some communication can come across. In addition, this way of interpreting experience can be a highly developed art, if what we interpret and respond with is universal, individualized and suggestive in nature—just as artists do with good literature, art, music and film. And if we really practice an art of the behavioral transmission of thoughts and feelings, that is another way of saying: "to fully communicate to another person is to love that person." Awareness, sensitivity and honesty then become by-words and by-products for those mutually interacting persons who have open minds and loving hearts. Moreover we might ponder the belief that "a man without a heart is more in trouble that a man without a mind." But whoever and whatever that person may be, Isaac Marcosson avers that "the highest compliment that you can pay anyone is to listen intently to him." All of this adds up to mean that proper communication by anyone helps to improve the quality of human life.

We all take risks when we seek to communicate on any subject, aware of the ultimate complexity of the action: "I know that you believe that you understand what you think I said; but I'm not sure that you realize that what you heard is what I meant." Edgar M. Richardson, Ed.D. Cincinnati

lecture in Belfast in Northern Ireland. People in the audience immediately wanted to know whether he was a Protestant or Catholic. So he had to explain, that as a freethinker he did not believe in god at all. As the audience settled down an old lady in the back got up to insist: "Now, tell me Sir, is it the Protestant or the Catholic god you don't believe in?"

A famous philosopher was about to give a

## Can we distinguish between Atheism and Secular Humanism? Some suggestions:

**Atheism** only requires a lack of belief in god, or the supernatural, or the transcendent. Another expression of atheism is materialism, the thought that the material world is all there is. It can also be called a *naturalistic world view*.

**Secular Humanism** is not theistic, and does not accept supernatural views of reality. This means that secular humanism includes atheism or materialism. But most secular humanists would claim there is more:

Humanism is a democratic and ethical life stance which affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives. It stands for the building of a more humane society through an ethics based on human and other natural values in a spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities.

from: the Minimum Statement adopted by the IHEU 1996

Secular humanism affirms an ethical system that is:

- rooted in the world of science, reason and human experience
- equally accessible to every human who cares to inquire into value issues
- ethical choices are judged by their results
- social and political limits on human freedom must be justified by benefits achieved

(Source: Free Inquiry, Fall 2002, p. 38)

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- What are these ethical choices, how do we know when we have them?
- How do we, the society agree on the choices, how do we achieve a common ethic?
- What is to prevent any one person from subverting the ethic, i.e. rational selfishness?
- Will this humanistic ethic simply be the same as "the law?"
- How will people behave without sanctions, i.e. without the fear of god?
- How do we inculcate them to our children without creating another religion?





#### OmniMyth of Kentucky Theme Park Proposal

Answers in Genesis has led the way with its brand new, soon to be opened, multimillion dollar extravaganza in Kentucky, called the "Creation Museum." This delightful diversion into fantasy could be but the first in a major undertaking to expand the area into a world class amusement theme park complex in rural Kentucky. Permit me propose that this pooling of the preposterous be known collectively as "OmniMyth of Kentucky."

This suggested grouping of sites, featuring magical explanations for everything, is an idea whose time has come. OmniMyth could provide genuine creative comedy relief in a world all too weary with the mess created by failed attempts to solve real problems with make believe. The theme parks could also make their owners a decent profit.

The possible recreational facilities that could be constructed are limited only by the creative imagination of potential designers. The Creation Museum, after all, posits the proposition, which no educated person would hold as true, that the Earth is only a few thousand years old and that it and all life on it were created by magic. The lushly exhibited creationist fantasy rejects, as its central premise, the fact that humans developed from less complex life forms in the process of change over time known as evolution. Instead, the visitor is treated to the myth, presented as true, that humans were magically made from dirt. One can be transported to a time before computers, space stations, and wireless telephones when people wrote on rocks, set broken bones without x-rays, and answered tough questions, like where did people come from, by saying a god did it.

Similar delightful ideas could be represented by similar theme parks grouped in OmniMyth of Kentucky, making the attraction truly international in scope. The diversity of the project might contribute to a lessening of tensions among the world's peoples, who could come to visit and to see and to laugh at our

commonality of recognition that we all share primitive pasts in which our ancestors created make believe stories to explain things not understood. Ancient Greek stories of gods living on a mountain and hurling thunderbolts of lightening. Egyptian stories of preparing the dead for an afterlife by removing the brain. Indian stories of a god who was crucified and arose from the dead. Eskimo stories of a raven who made the sun, moon, stars, the earth, people, and animals.

OmniMyth of Kentucky can put Disney to shame. Thanks to *Answers in Genesis* for leading the way.

#### Here is a possible advertisement:

Antidotes to thought. Magical reasons for everything. Fantasy is made real and Myths become true. Pretend it is so and it will be so. See models of humans and dinosaurs together—and you can believe they lived at the same time. See a model of a god pulling the sun across the sky in a chariot—and you can believe it is true. Forget reality for a few hours at OmniMyth of Kentucky where Reality is Fantasy and Fantasy is Reality."

Edwin Kagin January 6, 2005

**CREATIONISM:** Should warning messages be required on books? Manufactures are required to include warnings on labels. Why not text book publishers? Besides, the stickers Cobb County wanted on biology texts weren't exactly wrong, evolution really is "just a theory." Science is open. If someone comes up with a better theory, the textbooks will be rewritten. Although requiring warning labels on medicine bottles is vital, on books they become official doctrine. Several readers suggested stickers for Bibles in Cobb County:

This book contains religious stories regarding the origin of living things. The stories are theories, not facts. They are unproven, unprovable and in some cases totally impossible. This material should be approached with an open mind, and a critical eye towards logic and believability.

Source: What's New Robert L. Park, (28 Jan 05)





### AHA Convenes 22 Organizations for Inauguration Summit

Leaders Gather to Strategize on How to Challenge Bush's Latest Agenda

(Washington, DC, January 20, 2005) The American Humanist Association convened leaders of twenty-two national nontheistic organizations to address the unprecedented challenges that naturalists face in the wake of the recent election results, to discuss how those results continue to be interpreted, and how President George W. Bush's latest agenda will affect every level of government and society. Humanists, atheists, Ethical Culturists, secular Jews, and other freethinkers gathered in Washington, DC, the weekend before the presidential inauguration for a vital Inauguration Summit conference.

The summit meeting brought together diverse organizations that share the common goal of preventing non-theists from being treated as second-class citizens. The summit opened with a reception for the leaders at the AHA's national headquarters the evening before the day of strategy sessions.

To make sure the sessions were successful, the bulk of the time was reserved for strategy discussion. But time was also found for experts like Americans United executive director Barry Lynn, National Organization for Women president Kim Gandy, American Civil Liberties Union legislative counsel Chris Anders, who work with the AHA here in Washington and brought knowledge of the essential issues to those assembled. To encourage participation and to get the event started with an atmosphere of giving and cooperation, the AHA underwrote the cost of the event.

Our first presenter discussed "court stripping," a dangerous tactic now being pushed in Congress by the Religious Right which would strip federal, state, and local courts of their jurisdiction to hear cases on certain issues like the Pledge of Allegiance, same-sex unions, and the Ten Commandments. Also discussed is how it's absolutely essential to the education of America's youth to keep creationism and "intelligent design theory" out of the public school curriculum.

Another presenter outlined step by step how Roe v. Wade is being threatened and explained how the anti-abortion provision recently passed in an omnibus spending bill is a direct strike on Roe. This provision allows federally funded healthcare providers to refuse to provide abortions or even refer clients to legitimate abortion providers. The Religious Right's creation of the term "fetal personhood" further lays the

groundwork for restricting women's reproductive rights. Later in the day those assembled heard how coalition work has managed to stop the faith-based initiatives in Congress but how there's little that can be done to stop over a billion dollars a year being handed out to faith-based programs by executive order. Still, strategies to prevent further expansion and entrenchment of the faith-based initiatives were explored.

This summit meeting was more than a chance for leaders in the community of reason to meet and hear from each other; it was a valuable opportunity to build the bonds that are already opening the doors of cooperation and collaboration.

- To show that patriotism shouldn't be equated with religious beliefs, the AHA joined a number of those convened to unite with American Atheists in their Atheists in Foxholes march scheduled for Veterans Day, November 11, 2005, on the National Mall.
- Some of the organizations gathered, including the AHA, will collaborate on a project to hold a briefing for representatives, senators, and their staffs on legislation affecting the creation-evolution debate.
- Others discussed working together on lawsuits that support and enforce the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.
- Also discussed were educational and public relations programs to inform the general public about nontheists and make sure we have a seat at the table.
- All those gathered agreed to take part in an ongoing discussion group to expand upon the possibilities for coordination.

The participating organizations were American Atheists, American Ethical Union, American Humanist Association, Anti-Discrimination Support Network, Association of Humanistic Rabbis, Atheist Alliance International, Brights' Network, Camp Quest, Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations, Freedom from Religion Foundation, Gay and Lesbian Atheists and Humanists, Humanist Institute, Humanist Society, HUUmanists, International Humanist and Ethical Union, Internet Infidels, Institute for Humanist Studies, Objectivity Accuracy and Balance in Teaching About Religion, Secular Coalition for America, Secular Student Alliance, Society for Humanistic Judaism, Unitarian Universalist Infidels.

The gathering attracted significant press attention including stories in the *Washington Times*, United Press International and the *St. Louis Dispatch*, as well as invitations for AHA executive director Tony Hileman to be a guest on multiple radio shows.





#### Ed Doerr on Church/State Issues: Post-Holiday Perambulations

Christian fundamentalists, having helped enormously to consolidate the U.S. government in the hands of people unfriendly to church-state separation, civil liberties, and democratic values, have now consciously switched into a frantic "secularists are destroying Christianity" paranoia mode. Every mild attempt by public officials or civil libertarians to keep government neutral toward our rich mosaic of religious traditions is met with shrieks about the sky falling.

A few reminders are in order. About 85% of Americans identify themselves as Christians, as do over 90% of members of Congress. There are about 2000 religious radio and television stations owned and run by religious groups, nearly all of them evangelical or fundamentalist. There are more "Christian" bookstores and book displays in supermarkets than there are gas stations. Religious book publishing is expanding rapidly.

And the fundamentalist apoplexy over alleged attacks on Christmas and religious symbols is both hilarious and ahistorical. Have they forgotten that their Puritan ancestors in colonial New England frowned on celebrating Christmas and actually made it illegal? That Christmas was not a legal holiday in all states until late in the 19th Century? That Baptists, Presbyterians, and Methodists did not celebrate Christmas until after the Civil War, and that many fundamentalists still don't (like Ken Starr's Church of Christ), because the scriptures say nothing about when Jesus was born? That our 1796 treaty with Tripoli specifies that "the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion?" That Congress was officially in session on Christmas until 1856? That the Postal Service delivered mail on Sundays until well in the 1800s? That the first religious motto did not appear on any of our coins until the Civil War, not on all coins until the eve of World War I, and not on our paper currency until 1955? That "under God" was not added to the Pledge of Allegiance until 1954, after we had won two world wars against an adversary whose troops wore the motto Gott mit uns (God with us) on their belt buckles?

Finally, a year end survey by evangelical pollster George Barna showed these interesting results: that only 51% of senior Protestant ministers have "a biblical worldview" (i.e., a fundamentalist worldview); that "two-thirds of all evangelical Christians and one-third of all U.S. adults support a constitutional amendment to establish Christianity as the official religion of the United States"; that Bible reading and

church attendance have been rising significantly in the relatively secular West Coast states; that only 7% of bornagain Christians actually tithe [I guess they'd rather have government support their programs, as President Bush has been pushing]; that most Americans want "displays of the Ten Commandments on public property [though few churches display them on their internal or external walls] and creationism taught in public schools". Obviously, those of us who care about religious freedom and church-state separation need to be a lot busier. For 2005 I would suggest increased support for and involvement with groups like the ACLU, People for the American Way, the Texas Freedom Network, the National Committee for Science Education, NARAL, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, and not least, the group I have headed for 23 years, Americans for Religious Liberty (http://arlinc.org). Building broad, inclusive coalitions to deal with these issues is critically important.

#### Dear Editor,

For years I have been urging progressive groups and individuals to utilize the mechanism of letters to the editor—to convey information, to influence opinion, to respond to editorials, news items, op eds, and other letters. To little avail. Like talk radio, letters columns tend to contain more conservative than progressive material.

Practicing what I preach, I have published a guesstimated 2,000 letters to editors over the years, in magazines, opinion journals, and major newspapers. My third collection of letters has just been published in book form (*Somebody Has to Say It*, Rocinante Press, Box 6656, Silver Spring, MD 20916, \$10).

But if progressives have not been making full use of letters columns, conservatives and fundamentalists have. An outfit based in Chicago called the "Father John A. Hardon, S.J., Media Apostolate" has been operating to "bring [fundamentalist] Catholic viewpoints to the public forum and help shape public opinion." (FYI: I debated Fr. Hardon several years ago at a conference in Washington on educational policy; I stayed on the subject, but Hardon spent all his time attacking reproductive rights.)

The "Hardon Apostolate," in its "tips on writing effective 'letters to the editor'," advises: "Use the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as your inspiration," but paraphrase rather than quote. Beyond that, their suggestions are what I myself would recommend: be brief, courteous, prompt; concentrate on a few essential points; commend when possible; write to

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persuade, not just to make yourself feel good.

Another outfit promoting letters to editors is Citizens for Educational Freedom (a more honest name for it would be Citizens for Educational Feudalism), founded nearly 40 years ago by Fr. Virgil Blum, a Jesuit on the faculty of Marquette University. CEF's main thrust is pushing vouchers and other gimmicks for diverting public funds to faith-based schools.

If progressives expect to counter the agendas of fundamentalists and ultraconservatives, they need to learn from them how to use the simple, democratic letter to the editor.

#### **Nobles and Knaves**

Owned by Rev. Sun Myung Moon and his pals, the Washington Times, probably the most hyperultraconservative paper in the country, would be a joke if only it were funny. It is a well laid-out paper, I must admit; too bad it's not laid-out for burial.

The Times runs a weekly editorial about the "noble" or "knave" of the week. On January 1 it ran a feature editorial, "Noble and Knave of the Year." Heading the list of Knaves is George Soros, for being a leading campaigner against George W. Bush. Soros was followed by Ted Kennedy, "the mainstream media," John Kerry, Jimmy Carter (for criticizing the Iraq war), Kofi Annan, Sen. Harry Reid (for calling Justice Thomas an "embarrassment"), Rep. Jim McDermott (for leaving out "under God" when he led the House in the Pledge), the Kerry campaign, and Howard Dean.

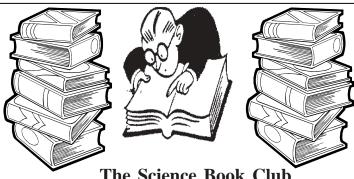
Noble of the year is Mel Gibson, for bankrolling and producing his anti-Semitic sick film about Jesus' last hours, which ignored the Sermon on the Mount, followed by an assortment of Iraq War "heroes," Italian P.M. Silvio Berlusconi (for "standing firm" against terrorists), and, no surprise, "Bush's brain" Carl Rove.

The Times wishes its readers a "Happy New Year."

#### **Dobson on the Warpath**

James Dobson, the influential Colorado Springs fundamentalist broadcaster who operates Focus on the Family and a sister lobbying group (combined budgets for 2004, \$130 million; \$170 million for 2005), is threatening to go all out in attacking six Democratic senators up for reelection in 2006 if they try to help block Bush's stacking the federal judiciary with ultraconservatives. The six targets are Senators Ben Nelson (NE), Mark Dayton (MN), Robert Byrd (WV), Kent Conrad (ND), Jeff Bingaman (NM), and Bill Nelson (FL). Dobson seems not to be worried about losing his tax-exempt status.

Edd Doerr, president of Americans for Religious Liberty and immediate past president of the American Humanist Association, is author, editor, or translator of 24 books and has contributed to 24 other books.



The Science Book Club Schedule for 2005

We will continue to meet in room 3A at the Cincinnati downtown library at 2:30 on the 4th Sunday of each month except where noted.

**Feb 27** - The Life and Death of Planet Earth: How the New Science of Astrobiology Charts the Ultimate Fate of Our World by Peter D. Ward, Donald Brownlee, 2003

**March 20** (3rd Sunday) - *The Ages of Gaia : a Biography of Our Living Earth* by James Lovelock, 1988

**April 24** - The Ancestor's Tale: a Pilgrimage to the Dawn of Evolution by Richard Dawkins, 2004

May 22 - Opening Skinner's Box: Great Psychological Experiments of the Twentieth Century by Lauren Slater, 2004

**June 26** - Prime Obsession: Bernhard Riemann and the Greatest Unsolved Problem in Mathematics by John Derbyshire, 2003

**July 24** - Facing up: Science and its Cultural Adversaries by Steven Weinberg, 2001

**Aug 28** - *Godel, Escher, and Bach* by Douglas Hofstadter, 1979

**Sept 25** - *The Electric Meme : a New Theory of How We Think* by Robert Aunger, 2002

Oct 23 - Where Mathematics Comes From by George Lakoff and Rafael Nunez, 2000

**Nov 20** (3rd Sunday) - Eyes on the Universe: a History of the Telescope by Isaac Asimov, 1975

**Dec 18** (3rd Sunday) - *The Science of Good and Evil :* Why People Cheat, Gossip, Care, Share, and Follow the Golden Rule by Michael Shermer, 2004

#### **:**Quote

#### Iraq

The United States fought a needless war against a phantom menace. — Charles V. Peña, at Cato Institute





#### God did it, or did He?

By Massimo Pigliucci (February 2005)

In 1755 a great earthquake struck the city of Lisbon, in Portugal. As a result, roughly a hundred thousand people died, in the process sparking a new debate about an old and deep theological dilemma: if (the Christian) God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good, how could this happen? The answer, such as it is, has always been that we simply can't understand how such calamities fit into God's plan, so we should simply have faith in the supreme being and not be as "arrogant" as constantly questioning His plans.

Of course, any human being who deliberately causes the death of thousands, regardless of the motive or "higher" purpose, is branded as a horrible criminal, hunted down and prosecuted to the full extent of human law. Rational people feel rather frustrated by this sort of nonsensical double standard, and one defense against the irrationality of the world is, as Mel Brooks once said, a good sense of humor. A little good came out of the Lisbon earthquake: it inspired the French philosopher Voltaire to write what became a classical masterpiece of world literature, Candide. In it, Voltaire makes fun of the simplistic attitude that we live "in the best of all possible worlds," as affirmed by one of the main characters, Dr. Pangloss (loosely based on the philosophy of Gottfried Leibniz), and clearly implied by theological "explanations" of natural disasters.

Recently, I have witnessed two more examples of "Pangloss' syndrome," one in response to an event publicized throughout the world, the other while attending a religious gathering celebrating a rite of passage. The scopes of the two episodes are wildly different, and yet they reflect the same irrational, and highly dangerous, attitude about what happens in the world and why.

The largest event was, of course, the tsunami that caused two hundred thousand people to die in south Asia. For several days after the tragedy there was a serious debate in the media, eerily similar to the one that moved Voltaire's pen: how could God allow such a tragedy to occur? Christian theologians, Jewish rabbis, and Muslim clerics all gave the same answer: we don't know, but it must have been for a higher good. Some of these self-

appointed experts went so far as to claim that the people who died were in fact somehow undeserving, and that the tsunami was God's punishment for their sins. A colossal and outrageously insulting instance of blaming the victim, if ever there was one! It is hard for me to imagine the degree of mental gymnastics that one must perform in these cases to save one's cherished religious views. This sort of event must cause an almost unbearable degree of cognitive dissonance, and one has to be particularly skilled at fooling oneself in order not to perceive the sheer absurdity of the whole plot. And yet, it seems to work for hundreds of millions of people the world over. This attitude "explained" Lisbon, the tsunami, the 9/11 attacks on the US, and essentially anything else bad that happens in the world: it is either our own fault, or it is for the pursuit of God's inscrutable (but certainly supremely good) plan.

The same bizarre logic applies in reverse, just in the same way as God is never responsible for anything bad happening to us, He takes all (or most) of the credit whenever something good happens. The second example I witnessed falls into the category of "God did it (because it's good)." I was at a religious ceremony celebrating an important rite of passage for a young girl, followed by a feast at which everybody was having a jolly good time. At one point, the father of the girl took the microphone and told us a very poignant story: his daughter had actually been born very prematurely, and both she and her mother had barely survived the ordeal. Moreover, the girl had been in desperate condition after birth, and the doctors had little hope that she would make it. However, one doctor had the daring and brilliant idea of trying a new experimental drug, after having asked the parents' permission. It worked, and the result was the beautiful young woman that we were celebrating.

Had the story ended there it would have been a wonderful and moving tale of human compassion and ingenuity. But of course the father had to go on and add that, although he was sure the doctors had some merit for the final outcome, really this was a clear example of a miracle, a direct intervention of God to save his child. There are so many things that are simply wrong with this, it is, hard to imagine how perfectly normal, functional, people can sincerely embrace this sort of "reasoning." To begin with, why does God get the credit for solving the problem, but not for creating it in the first place? Second, isn't such an unwarranted shift of credit insulting for the doctors who did the actual hard work and took on a huge responsibility in case of failure? More generally, if we all (including doctors) adopted such attitude, wouldn't that spell the end of any attempt to better humanity's condition? If it's all in God's hands, then why bother? Which is, of course, exactly the attitude of so-called Christian scientists (an oxymoron grotesque proportions), who leave their children to die because they think that all disease is the result of poor faith and can be cured only by restoring the latter.

I am no Voltaire, and this essay is no Candide. Therefore, I will leave it to the great French Enlightenment writer to make a final comment: "Doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is absurd." We would find ourselves in a much better world if more of us lived by such words.





#### Between the rock of Islam and a hard place of neo-fascists.

In Europe, Muslim women speaking out against extremism risk backlash

By: ARTHUR MAX - Associated Press

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands — Novelist Yasmine Allas doesn't believe in happy endings. That's strange, considering her own unlikely road to success. The daughter of a wealthy army officer, she fled as a teenager from her repressive childhood in Somalia, where she had dreamed of becoming an actress, dating men, drinking wine and living the life she saw in movies. Now in the Netherlands, having gained an audience for her bleak stories of oppressed women and failed immigrants, she finds she still can't escape fear.

Since the slaying of filmmaker Theo van Gogh last month in Amsterdam, there have been death threats against two prominent Muslim women — politicians Ayaan Hirsi Ali in Holland and Mimount Bousakla in Belgium — who have spoken out against repression in Islam.

Allas, 35, is among a growing group of young women from Muslim backgrounds who are making it in politics, the arts, media or the law in Europe, and in some cases are putting themselves at the forefront of the fight against extremism from two directions — Islamic fundamentalists and Europe's far-right fringe.

From a television journalist in Italy to a standup comic in Norway, these women are speaking up in voices that may never have been heard had they remained in their native lands. In Somalia, says Allas, "If you are a girl, you always are in fear of your parents, your older brothers, your male neighbors. It is always the man ... It is always fear and fear and fear." Now her sister says she fears raising her small children here because of the heated anti-immigrant climate. Her two brothers have left the country. "When I came to Holland, for me it was, Whew! What freedom! What a country! It was love, immediately," she recalls. "But Holland is not the same."

Nusrat Chagtai, a Muslim human rights lawyer of Pakistani origin who works in Birmingham, England, acknowledges that "we are very fortunate we have a lot more freedom." Yet the higher profile comes with risks.

Fatima Elatik, deputy mayor of Amsterdam's heavily immigrant Zeeburg borough, was assigned bodyguards after receiving threats from a right-wing Dutch extremist after the Van Gogh killing. Since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks "there's been a lot of Muslim- and Islam-bashing in our society that really was very frightening," said Elatik, 31. She deals often with young immigrant men and women who want to be Dutch yet

feel alien. Even though she wears a head scarf, she considers herself a modern, liberal Dutch woman. "What is typically Dutch? I don't look Dutch, I don't have a Dutch name. But I wear Dutch clothes. Even my scarf, my hijab, I buy in Dutch stores. What more do you want from me?"

Elsewhere in Europe, some women confront the culture clash in unusual ways. In Norway, Pakistan-born Shabana Rehman uses humor. A women's rights activist and professional comedian, her stories — told in saucy, slangy Norwegian — focus on the taboos of Islam, and culture conflicts. "I go up on stage with texts from my own daily life. Openly, and with some wonder, I share with the public how I experience sexual and cultural expectations," she says on her Web site.

In April, Rehman caused a stir during a televised debate on Islam attended by Mullah Krekar, the founder of suspected terror group Ansar al-Islam, who lives as a refugee in Norway. Rehman talked Krekar into allowing her to perform "a little test" on the stage to see if he was a fundamentalist. She grabbed him by the hips and lifted him. "A man who can be carried by a woman can't be a fundamentalist," said Rehman to howls of laughter. Krekar exploded with rage and threatened a lawsuit.

In Italy, Rula Jebreal, 31, of Palestinian descent, anchors the late-night news on LA7, a national TV network. She sees Western freedoms as "absolutely compatible with the Muslim religion." She's also a critic of the Iraq war, to which Italy contributed troops. "When I criticized the war I received messages with insults and threats," she said.

The suspect in the Nov. 2 killing of Van Gogh, 26-year-old Mohammed Bouyeri, wrote a five-page letter pledging that "Islam will celebrate victory with the blood of martyrs" and allegedly left it impaled on the knife in the filmmaker's chest. The letter explicitly threatened Hirsi Ali, a 35-year-old

Somali-born Dutch politician who collaborated with Van Gogh on a film denouncing the treatment of Muslim women. She has not appeared in public since. A telegenic former refugee who describes herself as a "lapsed" Muslim, Hirsi Ali campaigned against Muslims who reject Dutch values such as gender equality and gay rights. She outraged the Muslim community by saying the Prophet Muhammad was a tyrant by today's standards, and by urging women to abandon their traditional veils or head scarfs.

In Belgium, Mimount Bousakla, a 32-year-old senator of Moroccan origin who criticized a Muslim group for failing to condemn Van Gogh's murder received a telephone call threatening her with "ritual slaughter." Two years ago, Bousakla wrote a book, "Couscous with Belgian Fries," critical of forced marriages and the subjugation of Muslim women. She has continued working in the Senate, but stays away from home at night. A Belgian convert to Islam has been arrested and confessed to threatening Bousakla.

It is in the Netherlands that the culture clash has been the most explosive perhaps because it was long obscured by the nation's fabled tolerance and progressive views. Since the Van Gogh slaying there have been some twenty arson attacks on mosques or Muslim schools, and apparent retaliatory attacks on churches. For years, anti-immigrant feelings were "fearfully repressed" by Dutch governments haunted by the Holocaust, when seventy percent of Holland's Jews were slaughtered by the Nazi death machine, said Meindert Fennema, a professor of political theory and ethnic relations at the University of Amsterdam. "These feelings were always

AP correspondents Doug Mellgren in Oslo, Norway, Victor Simpson in Rome and Catherine McAloon in London contributed to this report.

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#### From our Board:

The Free Inquiry Board would like to thank all those who have renewed their Free Inquiry Group membership or subscriptions and also extend a special thanks to those who made additional donations. All these contributions allow us to continue printing our monthly newsletter, put on monthly programs, maintain our website, PO Box and Voice Mail. Please see Cash Flow Statement for 2004 submitted by Bill O'Kain, Treasurer.

It is more essential than ever for people to have the opportunity to get together with others who believe in the separation of church and state, and who value the role of human initiative and scientific progress in solving the pressing problems we face today.

We will continue to publicize our ideas and events through our newsletter, website and media releases. This year we also want to try staffing FIG tables at events where potentially interested people might gather, such as neighborhood festivals, scientific conferences or other groups' presentations on relevant topics.

If you have any ideas on possible places to set up a FIG table and/or would like to help staff one, please e-mail Margaret O'Kain; okain@fuse.net

- Margaret O'Kain, FIG President

#### **Cash Flow Statment**

Balance 01/01/2004	3,226.95
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#### FIG Income

Memberships	2,763.00
Contributions	1,335.00
Subscriptions	175.00
Sales of Books, etc.	48.00
Money for Coffee	126.75
Miscellaneous	10.00
Memberships & Subscriptions	17.00

TOTAL INFLOWS	4,474.75
TOTAL FIG Income	4,474.75

#### **OUTFLOWS**

#### FIG Expenses

TIG Expenses	
FIG Leaves (Printing & I	Mailing) 821.41
Meeting Room Rental	1,344.42
Honorariums & Travel	1,000.00
Voice Mail & PO Box	190.44
Web Page Expenses	185.94
Advertising	48.00
PNC Bank Charges	15.50
Supplies, Business	143.29
TOTAL FIG Expenses	3,749.00
TOTAL OUTFLOWS	3,749.00
OVERALLTOTAL	725.75

Balance 12/31/2004 3,952.70



#### A Priest and a Rabbi talk it over.

A Catholic priest and an Orthodox rabbi are sitting next to each other on an airplane. After a while the priest turns to the rabbi and asks: "Is it still a requirement of your faith that you not eat

pork?" The rabbi responds, "Yes, that is still one of our beliefs." The priest then asks, "Have you ever eaten pork?" To which the rabbi replies hesitatingly, "Yes, on one occasion I did succumb to temptation and tasted a ham

sandwich." The priest nodded in understanding and went on with his reading.

A while later, the rabbi spoke up and asked the priest, "Father, is it still a requirement of your church that you remain celibate?" The priest replied, "Yes, that is still very much a part of our faith." The rabbi then asked him, "Father, have you ever fallen to the temptations of the flesh?" The priest thought for a time and finally replied, "Yes, rabbi, on only one occasion I was weak and broke with my vow." The rabbi nodded understandingly. He was silent for some time. Then he commented: "Sure beats a ham sandwich, doesn't it?"







Facing Death: Epicurus and His Critics by James Warren (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004)

We skeptics must face death without the consolation of a religious person's belief in an afterlife. When our heart stops beating and our neurons stop firing, there will be no pearly gates waiting for us. We have no image of a transcendent superhuman being to provide us with solace as the end approaches. So, when Death comes knockin', who ya gonna call? Epicurus, the death-buster, that's who! says James Warren, author of *Facing Death: Epicurus and His Critics*.

Epicurus (341-270 B.C.) is the founder of Epicureanism, one of the schools of thought, along with Stoicism and Skepticism, that dominated philosophy during the Hellenistic Period—the three centuries beginning with the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C. and ending, by convention, with the victory of Octavian over Mark Antony in 31 B.C. Today, "epicurean" means enjoying sensual pleasures and possessing sensitive and discriminating tastes. However, Epicurus himself, and Hellenistic Epicureanism in general, advocated the pursuit of simple pleasures such as friendship and aesthetic contemplation. In his Letter to Menoeceus, Epicurus writes:

For it is not continuous drinking and revels, nor the enjoyment of women and young boys, nor of fish and other viands, that a luxurious table holds, which make for a pleasant life, but sober reasoning, which examines the motives for every choice and avoidance, and which drives away those opinions resulting in the greatest disturbance to the soul.

Among "those opinions resulting in the greatest disturbance to the soul," according to Epicurus, were religious beliefs and the fear of death. Epicurus disputed the foundations of popular Greek religion, which he recognized as the source of the fear of divine judgment and eternal punishment. Warren quotes Epicurus' *Tetrapharmakos*, his fourfold remedy for these disturbances of the soul:

God should not concern us. Death is not to be feared. What is good is easy to obtain. What is bad is easily avoided.

That "death is not to be feared" asserts Epicurus, can be demonstrated by rational argument. The simple summation of Epicurus' thesis is his well-known statement that "death is nothing to us" because at the moment we die—the instant we cease to exist—we experience nothing. As Warren says, "for something to be good or bad for some person, that something ... must be perceived by that person." Death is not perceived by the individual because the cessation of life marks the cessation of all sensation, including that of physical and mental pain. Death is merely the termination of a stream of consciousness. It is unreasonable, says Epicurus, for us to be fearful of a future event that will not harm us when it occurs. "What is no trouble when it arrives is an idle worry in anticipation," Epicurus explains in his Letter to Menoeceus. Warren notes that Epicurus limits his thesis to the attitude he believes is reasonable for the individual to hold regarding his or her own death, not to pain before death, or to the death of others.

Epicurus grants that it is not irrational to fear the possibility of pain prior to death, or to the experience of losing a loved one. However, if we have a dying friend or family member who approaches death with an Epicurean perspective, some of the pain of our own grief may be lifted. Additionally, says Epicurus, the fact that "death is nothing to us," does not prevent us from recollecting with fondness pleasant memories of our loved ones. In fact, looking back allows us to edit out past painful experiences by simply choosing not to recall them.

Of course, our anxieties about death reflect not just the fear of ceasing to exist, but also the awareness of having something precious taken away from us, of being eternally deprived of an existence that would have continued to yield pleasure. Epicurus' response to this challenge is that *ataraxia* (the Hellenistic term for tranquility or imperturbability), not duration, is the criterion of a life well lived. Once *ataraxia* has been achieved, happiness cannot be augmented, either by more accomplishments or by a longer life. This notion may be difficult to accept for those who see life as a coherent narrative with a beginning, middle, and end. According to this view, our lives have a "plot," which must be played out in order to be complete. The fear of death significantly relies on this disposition to see one's life as an unfolding story.

For Epicurus, this narrative structure—the way many people experience their being in time—is just an arbitrary conceptual construction. The important questions are not "What have I made of my life?" or "What will I make of my life?" but "How am I right now?" It is the present-shaping consequences of the past and our attitude to the future that matter, not the past and future as such. If I am experiencing ataraxia, I am a perfected Epicurean, and logging in more





months or years, or attaining more goods or honors, is beside the point. From this perspective, death deprives me of nothing and is nothing to be feared. In the words of the Epicurean philosopher Philodemus:

The one who understands, having grasped that he is capable of achieving everything sufficient for the good life, immediately and for the rest of his life walks about already ready for burial, and enjoys the single day as if it were eternity.

Warren notes that Philodemus' observation is reminiscent of Wittgenstein's affirmation that "he lives eternally who lives in the present." They also bring to mind Alan Watts' conclusion that "life requires no future to complete itself, nor explanation to justify itself. In this moment it is finished."

As the subtitle suggests, Warren also engages Epicurus' critics. Perhaps the most effective argument potentially undermining the Epicurean perspective is that it is at odds with our visceral emotions. Warren concedes that logic may simply not be powerful enough to overcome the fear of death. Reason must compete with other intuitive, possibly innate, and unconscious sources of motivation. Warren grants that, "it is possible to claim that the fear of death is a crucial evolutionary product, 'hard-wired,' as it were, into our minds in order to allow us to survive." Of course, if death is in fact bound up in the structure of our brains, we are stuck, and the Epicurean project is dead in the water. However, as Warren puts it, "if it is possible to live a human life without fearing death then fearing death is not essential to being human." Only our own subjective and attentive response to Epicurus' philosophy can answer the question of whether the fear of death can be overcome. Those of us who respond to Epicurus' reasoning can say to him, along with Diogenes of Oinoanda: "I agree with what you say about death, and you have persuaded me to laugh in its face."

Doubters of Diogenes will say he is whistling in the dark, and that attempting to reason oneself out of the fear of death is folly. They will say that our adult attitudes toward death are too deeply embedded to be modified. But are they? If we recognize that our view of death is molded during childhood and reinforced over many years by the cultures into which we are born, we will see that it is a constructed concept subject to rebuilding. As Warren says, "For the Epicurean, learning to think about death correctly is an integral part of living a good life." Expecting Epicurus to convert us overnight to his "death is nothing to us" perspective may be asking too much, but his project is a worthy one. His reasoning, well explicated by Warren, is sound, and his philosophy, if understood and applied,

is literally life changing. Epicureanism does have the potential to emancipate us from the fear of death. Thus freed, we see life in a new light.

- reviewed by David Voron

David A. Voron, M.D lives in Arcadia, California

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#### Who was this guy Jesus?

#### THREE PROOFS THAT JESUS WAS MEXICAN

- 1. His first name was Jesus
- 2. He was bilingual
- 3. He was always being harassed by the authorities

#### THREE PROOFS THAT JESUS WAS BLACK

- 1. He called everybody "brother"
- 2. He liked Gospel
- 3. He couldn't get a fair trial

#### THREE PROOFS THAT JESUS WAS JEWISH

- 1. He went into his father's business
- 2. He lived at home until he was 33
- 3. He was sure his Mother was a virgin, and his Mother was sure he was God

#### THREE PROOFS THAT JESUS WAS ITALIAN

- 1. He talked with his hands
- 2. He had wine with every meal
- 3. He worked in the building trades

#### THREE PROOFS THAT JESUS WAS A CALIFORNIAN

- 1. He never cut his hair
- 2. He walked around barefoot
- 3. He started a new religion

#### THREE PROOFS THAT JESUS WAS IRISH

- 1. He never got married
- 2. He was always telling stories
- 3. He loved green pastures

#### (and now the most compelling evidence:)

#### THREE PROOFS THAT JESUS WAS A WOMAN

- 1. He had to feed a crowd, at a moment's notice, when there was no food
- 2. He kept trying to get the message across to a bunch of men who just didn't get it
- 3. Even when he was dead, he had to get up because there was more work for him to do

### Now let's make up some new ones, how about: JESUS WAS AN EXTRATERRESTRIAL

- 1. He said my kingdom is not of this world
- 2. His "father" lived somewhere in the sky
- 3. When he left, he disappeared into thin air and clouds.

#### JESUS WAS AN ATHEIST

- 1. He rejected all religious Sabbath and dietary laws
- 2. He thought the poor were as good as the rich
- 3. He stood mute when Pilate asked him about god





FIG Leaves P.O. Box 19034 Cincinnati, OH 45219

### Our Purpose

## FIG

The Free Inquiry Group, Inc. (FIG) is a non-profit organization founded in 1991. FIG is allied with the Council for Secular Humanism as well as an affiliate of the American Humanist Association and of the American Atheists.

Though most of our members are secular humanists, we welcome to our meetings anyone interested in learning about or furthering our purpose.



To foster a community of secular humanists dedicated to improving the human condition through rational inquiry and creative thinking unfettered by superstition, religion, or any form of dogma.

In accordance with our purpose, we have established the following goals:

- To provide a forum for intelligent exchange of ideas for those seeking fulfillment in an ethical secular life.
- To develop through open discussion the moral basis of a secular society and encourage ethical practices within our own membership and the community at large.
- To inform the public regarding secular alternatives to supernatural interpretations of the human condition.
- To support and defend the principles of democracy, free speech, and separation of church and state as expressed in the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights.

For more information, write the Free Inquiry Group at the address above, e-mail figinfo@go figger.org, or leave a message at (513) 557-3836. Visit our web site at gofigger.org.