

FIG LEAVES

Volume 18 Issue 7

July 2009

July FIG Meeting:

Sunday, 26 July 2009
3:00-5:00 PM

Natural History & Evolution at SunRock Farm

- Sunday 26 July from 3 to 5 pm

Sunrock Farm, 103 Gibson Lane, Wilder, KY 41076

www.sunrockfarm.org; cost \$ 5.00 per person.

For our July meeting we will take a tour of Sunrock Farm led by Farmer Frank Traina. Sunrock Farm is a natural history and evolution educational center, which stands in contrast to the creationist museum at the other end of I-275. Farmer Frank will lead us on an evolution tour through the animals at the farm and discuss the history of adaptations visible in the animals.

This is a working farm, please dress accordingly.

From Downtown Cincinnati - (10 minutes)

1. Take I-471 south until it merges with Route 27 Alexandria and becomes a business district.
2. Go to the second stoplight (Nunn Drive) and turn right into Northern Kentucky University.
3. Stay right as you approach the round-about and merge right onto University Drive.
4. Continue straight under I-275, cross one lane bridge and turn right at the stop sign onto Gibson Lane.
5. Go to the end of the lane into Sunrock Farm.

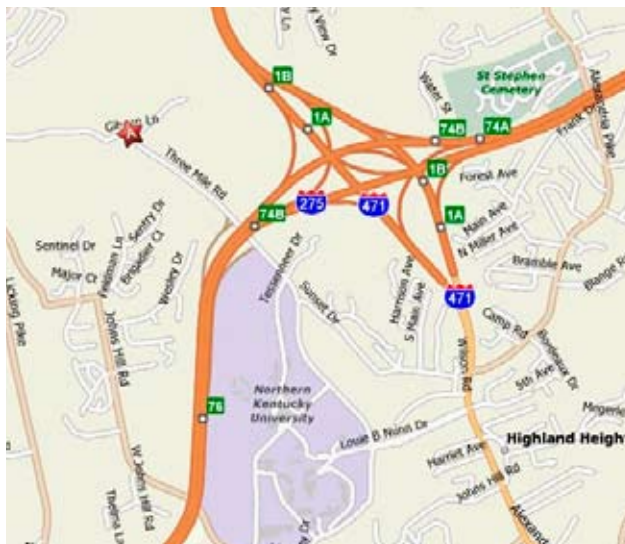
From Eastern Cincinnati -

1. Take I-275 into Kentucky.
2. STAY LEFT on I-275 and take the first exit after entering Kentucky (Alexandria exit).
3. Go to the second stoplight (Nunn Drive) and turn right into Northern Kentucky University.
4. Stay right as you approach the round-about and merge right onto University Drive.
5. Continue straight under I-275, cross one lane bridge and turn right, at the stop sign, onto Gibson Lane.
6. Go to the end of the lane into Sunrock Farm.

From Kenton County & West -

1. Take I-275 East until Exit 76 (NKU).
2. Make a left at the exit, go to a one lane bridge and turn right at the stop sign, onto Gibson Lane.
3. Go to the end of the lane into Sunrock Farm.

If you need further assistance please give us a call Sunrock Farm at (859)-781-5502.



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Events

July Meeting

Sunday July 26, 2009

3:00-5:00 PM, Sunrock Farm, 103 Gibson Lane, Wilder, KY 41076

August Meeting

There will be no August Meeting. Join us for the Potluck/Pool Party

Sept Meeting

TBD Tuesday Sept. 22, 2009



June Meeting

Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine and Science

Colin Thornton

Colin Thornton is a stay at home dad who calls himself The Skeptic Dad on his blog/website: Science Based Parenting. He presented a skeptical view of the ancient Chinese practice of acupuncture and also touched on the practice of using Chinese herbal remedies.

Many people cite the antiquity of acupuncture, the popularity of acupuncture, and the fact that some authority figures (Dr. Oz on Oprah) tout its benefits, as reasons to believe in its efficacy. These are all logical fallacies as follows:

Argument from Antiquity - Just because a practice has survived for about two thousand years does not in itself mean that the practice is viable. Are diseases caused by demons as the ancient Chinese believed?

Argument Ad Populum - It doesn't matter how many people believe that it works, popularity is not proof of efficacy. I can hear my mom now, "If your friends jump off a bridge would you do it?"

Argument From Authority - It is a dogmatic argument that is often inaccurate. Just because a person has a PH.D. or is experienced in a field does not necessarily mean he or she is always correct. Colin compared these fallacies regarding acupuncture with the fallacies that are used by apologists to defend Christianity.

Anecdotal "evidence" was the next to fall to the skeptical scalpel of Mr. Thornton. He stated that if you collected negative statements about the efficacy of acupuncture you could probably collect as many as you could positive ones. Those on both sides would be uninteresting from a scientific standpoint as neither are evidence. You can have ten or ten thousand people claiming that acupuncture works for them and there would be no difference in the amount of evidence you have collected. It would still be zero. Evidence must be collected from double blind experiments and reported in peer reviewed journals for it to have scientific validity.

"Acupuncture works," Colin stated next. Subjectively it works as well as a placebo for some people. Objectively it does not work. Acupuncturists take your blood pressure, pulse, inquire about your health, and make you comfortable and calm before they do any needling. This contributes to the strength of the placebo effect. Sham needles have been used in double blind studies and have been found to be just as effective as the real needles. Since "chi" is not falsifiable it is very hard to prove that acupuncture does not work. Since it is not falsifiable people fall prey to the logical fallacy of Special Pleading. "My claims are special and so they must be true." Colin claimed that he can shoot invisible lasers from his eyes that science cannot detect. Until that detection he can shoot lasers from his eyes!

Colin explained the concepts of meridians which are the channels that allow the mythical force "chi" to travel through your body. The Chinese concepts are found to be nearly identical to the ancient Greek concept of humorism. This theory uses the descriptions of the elements of the universe to relate to different states of health and sickness. The manipulation of the body's humors are achieved through the manipulation of needles inserted into specific points along the meridians which alter the flow of "chi." This is said to alter the patients health and well-being. There have been no scientific experiments that have found evidence for "chi" or the meridians it supposedly travels along.

Colin described the history of acupuncture. In China, it was first mentioned in the first century C.E. It was first mentioned in the western world in the 1600's. It was brought to America in 1820 and used in an attempt to bring dead kittens back to life. In Europe it was claimed that this could be done. The Chinese tried to ban acupuncture in the early 1900's. It was revived by Chairman Mao to provide inexpensive health care to his people even →



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

fignotes at(@) gofigger.org; or on disk or typewritten via mail to Editor, FIG Leaves, P.O. Box 53174, Cincinnati, OH 45253. Contributions received before the first Friday of the month will be considered for publication that month.

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Memberships run from:

1 January to 31 December.

One year: \$25

Family: \$35

If you join during the year, you receive a \$2 discount for each month that has passed.

We request contributions above membership dues. Contributions are tax deductible.



though he was quoted as saying that he did not and would not use it himself.

There are many studies which give good scientific evidence that acupuncture works no better than placebo. Colin lists these on his web site. He also lists the studies that make claims of the efficacy of acupuncture but he points out that these studies are flawed and lists the reasons why they are flawed.

What's the harm of acupuncture? Millions of dollars have been spent by our government to find no evidence for the healing powers of acupuncture. It's money better spent elsewhere. Acupuncturists are trained to find something, anything that they can treat, even when you are healthy. That is unethical. Acupuncture teaches incorrect ideas about anatomy and medicine. Also, effectual medicines may be avoided in favor of using acupuncture or Chinese medicine exclusively and that is a dangerous scenario for someone suffering from a serious disease or injury. In conclusion, I would have to agree with Colin that the tools of skepticism, logic, and scientific evidence must be used to examine all claims in every discipline, just as we use them to examine religious claims.

A very lively Q and A followed the talk. Colin was receptive and open-minded. He showed he is willing to change his opinions based on new evidence.

Colin has posted his entire talk on his web site <<http://skepticaid.wordpress.com/>> under the heading "Acupuncture." This includes comments from readers and you may leave your own comments.

- reported by John Welte ☘



Chiropractors Sue British Science Writer.

Simon Singh, award-winning science writer and author of *Fermat's Enigma*, is being sued under UK libel laws for an article in the *Guardian* in which he called the claims of chiropractors "bogus." That sounds pretty tame for a treatment that has no plausible scientific justification. Harm-

ing the reputation of a chiropractor would seem to be a civic responsibility. In the United States plaintiffs must prove that the defendant's statement is willfully false and defamatory. In the UK the plaintiff must show only that the statement harms his reputation. But under UK libel laws the burden is on Singh to prove he wasn't being libelous.

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 12 June 2009

Celebrate Your Intellectual Independence! Join American Atheists At Our New, Low Rate

Here's a "stimulus package" for Atheists! We know that times are difficult. Nonbelievers are like everyone else in the country - you can get laid off or put on part-time, you can see important investment and home value evaporate. And many people are cutting costs, postponing vacations, cutting back whenever and wherever they can.

So, American Atheists is making it easier than ever before to join up in the fight for Reason, separation of church and state, and the effort to give America's unbelieving community "a place at the table" in the discussion over First Amendment public policy. You can join American Atheists for only \$20 per year; you receive the American Atheist Magazine, a leading journal for news and opinion; plus all of the discounts and other benefits of membership. It's easy to do! Visit <http://www.atheists.org/store/index.php?main_page=index&cPath=26> to sign up using our secure, on-line transaction server.

Your membership in American Atheists shows that you care about taking a stand for Reason, civil liberties for Atheists, and the total, absolute separation of church and state! Membership is open to all who agree with our Statement of Aims and Purposes. Joining American Atheists, though, also has it rewards! Benefits and Privileges of Membership include.

Membership dues and donations to American Atheists are tax deductible.

A beautiful Certificate of Membership suitable for framing signed personally by the President of American Atheists.

Participation in our on-line discussion group, AACHAT.

Participation in our special "Atheist Singles" program (see below). A special 10% discount on ALL books and products offered through American Atheists Press.

A special discount when you present your Membership Card for registration at American Atheist Conventions, Regional Atheist Meets and other select activities.

A subscription to the American Atheists Magazine - a leading source of news about AA activism and First Amendment issues!

Eligibility in the new American Atheists Scholarship Program. The Scholarships will provide generations of American Atheist families with funds, and help to defer costly education expenses. Members of American Atheists benefit from our Savings Partners program of discounts on goods and services from both local and national businesses. And there's a special gift waiting for you when you join American Atheists! By joining American Atheists, you're making a major contribution in helping to protect civil liberties for Atheists, and preserve Jefferson's "wall of separation" between government and religion. Let us hear from you today!

http://www.atheists.org/store/index.php?main_page=index&cPath=26

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THINGS TO DO....

THINGS TO SEE...



Media Events/Programs

The Humanist Perspective

Show times on Time-Warner Cable:

Channel 15: Tuesday 3:30 AM,
Saturday 7:30 PM.

Channel 24: Friday 12:30 PM.

Programs:

14-17 July: *Searching for Meaning without Religion*, with Tom Flynn

21-24 July: *The Black Humanist Experience*, with Norm Allen.

The Cincinnati Atheist Meetup(s)

When: Monday, 20 July 2009 at 7:00 PM

Where: Joseph-Beth Booksellers 2692 Madison Road Rookwood Pavilion Cincinnati OH 45208(513) 396-8960

Atheists, Agnostics, Humanists and Freethinkers meet here. Regular monthly gatherings are held on the 3rd Mondays. New people join every month, and we all wear name tags (no quizzes). Check the Message Board for current hot topics.

This is a purely social gathering. No agenda, no speaker, no rules of order. If you'd prefer a bit more structure, please check the calendar for lectures, FIG meetings, and other events.

To find us: Go in the front doors of the bookstore and turn left. Enter the Bistro and walk straight back as far as you can go. We're all freethinkers, so we'll look just like you.

The Bistro has a full menu, including vegetarian options. If you like, enjoy dinner, dessert, tea, or a brewski. Restaurant direct line: 513.396.8970 The Bookstore / Bistro is not associated with this meetup group, and will not be able to answer questions. Please use our Message Board to connect with fellow group members.

Critical Views from a Critical Few:

Aurore Press Takes on Religion with *godLESS*

Aurore Press' latest project is a chapbook we call *godLESS*, a critical view of religion. Tough subject, especially in this town, but it has to be said. The book, edited by Chuck Byrd, Mary Anne Cowgill and Betsy Young will feature pieces by Jughead, Mark Messerly, Nathan Singer, Abiyah, Neil Aquino, Jacurutu:3, Justin Patrick Moore and more, 21 varied works in all including 3 members of FIG, John Welte, Jana Vaught and Chuck Byrd. Plus fantastic cover art by Amy Kreitzer!

Coinciding with the release of the book we're having a spoken performances on July 25 at The Comet in Northside. The event begins at 7:00 pm followed by a performance by SS-20's Jughead and Pedro! So come out for a night of readings and performances from some of the contributors of *godLESS*, have a pint and a burrito, join in if you want to! True to our usual style, we'll be donating a portion of the proceeds from the sale of *godLESS* to the Free Inquiry Group of Great Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky.

What: *godLESS* Book Release Party **When:** Saturday, July 25, 2009 @ 7:00 pm. **Where:** The Comet, Northside, 4579 Hamilton Avenue, Cincinnati, OH 45223 Directions. **How Much?:** FREE

Featuring: Nathan Singer, Jughead, Abiyah, Chuck Byrd, Justin Patrick Moore, Jacurutu:3, Mary Anne Cowgill, a performance by Jughead and Pedro of SS-20, plus much more!

Hear! Hear! *Answers in Atheism* at

<www.answersinatheism.net>

JOIN US! - We are live on the internet Thursday evenings from 7 pm to 8 pm EST. Our shows are also available as archived audio files, so you can listen later at any time. Please tune in at www.answersinatheism.net.

The Answers in Atheism crew

2009 SCIENCE BOOK CLUB Schedule - all meetings will be on the 3rd Sunday every month except for June 14 and June 28.

Meetings at the downtown Cincinnati Public Library, Room 3A at 2:30 pm.

July 19 - *Why Science* by James S. Trefil

Aug 16 - *Death by Black Hole : and Other Cosmic Quandaries* by Neil deGrasse Tyson

Sept 20 - one of a number of books on complexity theory and applications

Oct. 18 - *Are Universes Thicker Than Blackberries?: Discourses on Godel, Magic Hexagrams, Little Red Riding Hood, and Other Mathematical and Pseudoscientific Topics* by Martin Gardner

Nov 15 - *God, the Failed Hypothesis* by Victor Stenger

Dec 20 - *Origins of Creativity* by Karl Pfenninger & Valerie Shubik





Center for Inquiry Launches Campaign for Free Expression June 18, 2009

Essay and Cartoon Contests, Blasphemy Day, Exposure of Censorship to be Included.

As stalwart defenders of free speech, the Center for Inquiry (CFI) has been troubled and dismayed by trends in recent years to limit freedom of expression, in particular speech deemed critical of religion. Various United Nations bodies, including the UN's Human Rights Council, have adopted resolutions condemning so-called "defamation" of religion. Although these resolutions are not as of now legally binding on member states, CFI anticipates efforts will be made to have the resolutions acquire the force of international law. Moreover, these resolutions already lend credibility to efforts to suppress dissent and criticism, especially in Islamic countries.

But it is not just the Islamic world that is suppressing religious criticism. Western European countries have been debating whether measures should be adopted to prevent religiously offensive statements. In fact, Ireland seems poised to enact a new blasphemy law that would prohibit publication of material "insulting in relation to matters held sacred by any religion."

In addition to religious institutions, many governments try to place severe restrictions on free expression. The recent suppression of protests in Iran, along with media coverage of such protests, constitutes a vivid reminder of government interference with free speech, but there are many more examples. China has announced plans to require all personal computers to have Web filters that would block access to government-disfavored sites, and even nominally democratic nations such as Russia legally prohibit insults "of a representative of authority." Then, of course, there are the unofficial means of suppressing free speech, such as the murder of journalists and dissenters.

CFI believes we must increase public awareness of these threats to freedom of expression, discuss and develop plans to prevent curtailment of free expression, and demonstrate that people care about their rights to free expression and are eager to exercise them. As CFI President and CEO Ronald A. Lindsay observes, "Preserving the right to uncensored expression is important not only because it is indispensable for an objective examination of truth claims-it is no accident that dictatorships uniformly suppress speech-but also because it has intrinsic value. Human dignity requires the freedom to express oneself as an individual."

To defend the right to free expression, CFI plans a cam-

paigned for the balance of 2009 that will include these elements among others:

- A cartoon contest, judged by professional cartoonists, in which the theme will be the doctrines of humanity's many and various religions (CFI aims to be as ecumenical as possible)
- The launching of a new Web site, <www.please-block.us>, which will be maintained and updated by CFI's affiliate, the Council for Secular Humanism. This Web site will feature reports on recent censorship attempts and controversies as well as original material that would be suppressed under the laws of some countries. By its very nature, the site will be an invitation to oppressive governments to block its material from their citizens' access, thus highlighting their opposition to free expression. Offending nations' names will be listed on the "Meet the Censors" section of the site
- A contest open to all students currently enrolled in accredited colleges and universities in which students will submit essays on the value of free expression, with the winner receiving an award \$2,000
- Sponsorship of International Blasphemy Day, Sept. 30, 2009, in which persons around the world will demonstrate that they believe in uninhibited expression of their views of religion
- Public discussions and writings devoted to the contemporary champions of free expression
- A petition drive urging relevant United Nations bodies not to limit speech critical of religion
- Special events with prominent guest speakers; and much more.

Details of all these initiatives will be forthcoming in the near future, and will be announced on CFI's Web site, <www.centerforinquiry.net>.

The theme for CFI's campaign is:

Ideas don't need rights—People do. Protect Dissent.

The Center for Inquiry/Transnational, a nonprofit, educational, advocacy, and scientific-research think tank based in Amherst, New York, is also home to the Council for Secular Humanism, founded in 1980; and the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry (formerly CSICOP), founded in 1976. The Center for Inquiry's research and educational projects focus on three broad areas: religion, ethics, and society; paranormal and fringe-science claims; and sound public policy. The Center's Web site is <www.centerforinquiry.net>.



Francis Collins was nominated to head National Institutes of Health.

NIH is flush with stimulus money, and Collins will oversee the world's largest single scientific research budget. He was a natural choice for NIH director, having led the National Human Genome Research project in its successful race against maverick Craig Venter. Although

Collins' scientific credentials are impressive, and he aligns himself with science on issues of fact, including intelligent design and stem cell research, scientists wince when he describes himself as an "evangelical Christian."

But now that Collins has been nominated we should look more closely. Religious converts tend to be zealots. In the final chapter of his book, "The Language of God," Collins, attributes his conversion, at 27, from atheism to Christianity to a powerful religious experience. It led him to examine the evidence for a god. He said he was persuaded by two arguments: 1) the anthropic principle, and 2) the moral law. . . **and what do other scientists of faith believe?**

All seven physicist-winners of the Templeton Prize cite the same two arguments as persuasive: 1) The anthropic principle, which states that "Nature's laws were designed to make life possible." I would paraphrase that in less pompous language, "If things were different, things would not be the way things are." 2) The moral law, which states, "we know the difference between right and wrong." Neuroscience agrees; basic morality is hardwired in our brain at birth.

My priest friends explained that the wiring was done by the Holy Ghost. I suspect that the Ghost consulted with Darwinian evolution. Given the right triggers, everyone seems susceptible to emotional experiences that appear to transcend the rational. As *WN* said before, it is troubling that a PhD chemist with an MD did not recognize such an experience as a hormone rush.

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 10 July 2009

Seven Billion People Are Already Too Many.

When was it that the media stopped mentioning "population"? We read almost daily headlines about global warming from CO2 in the atmosphere. It's our own fault, we're told; we caused it by burning fossil fuels; we should have been driving fuel-efficient automobiles, living closer to work, and using nuclear and solar power generation. That's all true, but it won't help if we just let the population grow.

Name a single world problem that isn't made worse by population growth. Biologist Paul Ehrlich shook us awake in 1968 with *The Population Bomb*, but in 1980 he lost a public wager with University of Maryland economist and libertarian

Julian Simon over the price of minerals. Ehrlich lost. Today, although population has risen to double that in 1968, the media avoid even mentioning it. The June issue of *Scientific American*, however, has "Population and Sustainability" by Robert Engelman of *Worldwatch*. Everyone should read it.

More than a billion people are malnourished. Most of them are in Africa. A review of *Enough*, a book by Roger Thurow and Scott Kilman, in Sunday's *Financial Times*, blames the problem on agriculture. It's clear from the numbers, however, that the real culprit is uncontrolled growth of population, which has led to proliferation of small, unproductive *shambas*.

- *What's New* Robert L. Park, 19 June 2009

After \$ 2.5 Billion "Alternative Medicine," There Is Still No Cure.

More than a third of all Americans use some form of alternative health remedies. This week, Associated Press reporter Marilyn Marchione has written a series of articles on the failure of alternative remedies from herbals to acupuncture to demonstrate any measurable efficacy in placebo-controlled double-blind studies conducted for NIH. The possible exception is ginger capsules to treat nausea from chemotherapy.

WN strongly opposed the creation of the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine at NIH when it was created in 2000, on the grounds that it would be seen as evidence that the medical world was taking alternative and complementary medicine seriously. It was. Nevertheless, when asked later to serve as the lone physicist on the steering committee, I agreed. The Problem had simply become too large to ignore. The director Stephen E. Straus was both rigorous and fair, and although half the steering committee members were from the alternative world, there was a consensus on most issues. Tragically, Stephen Straus died of brain cancer in 2007. That desperate people still fall for these sham cures is also tragic.

- *What's New* Robert L. Park, 19 June 2009

Sweden's Economy Grows As CO₂ Emissions Drop.

On Wednesday, Sweden assumed the presidency of the EU from the Czech Republic just in time to lead the EU into the Copenhagen Summit on global warming, which may have had something to do with the timing of the summit. The president of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Klaus, a libertarian economist, authored a book that translates to something like *Blue Planet in Green Shackles*. He describes global warming as a myth. Swedish Prime Minister Frederik Reinfeldt, who replaces Klaus as EU President, immediately called on the EU to do more to combat climate change. Sweden is a perfect example, with a 50% economic growth since 1990



combined with a 10% cut in CO₂ emissions. All of Sweden's electricity comes from hydroelectric or nuclear power giving it a 20% rate of renewable energy. "We have put our renewable target at 50% for 2020," Reinfeldt said, "so we are preparing for a huge increase in wind power."

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 3 July 2009



Texas School Board Makes The Rules On Creationism.

The Texas school book market is so humongous that publishers must pay heed to new guidelines on what students should learn. It has been a battleground for years with the National Center for Science Education under Genie Scott battling the creationists from the Discovery Institute in an increasingly conservative state. So far science has been winning but it's a close thing every year. The latest round in this epic battle is described by Yudhijit Bhattacharjee in today's *Science*.

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 12 June 2009

A Small Step Toward Cooling The Greenhouse.

The American Clean Energy and Security Act, alias The Waxman-Markey Energy Bill, alias the Climate Change Bill, barely passed in the House by weakening key features and adding tons of pork. To capture farm votes, for example, they added a provision blocking any accounting of the carbon emissions from biofuels, corn ethanol in particular. Senate Democrats, reinforced by Al Franken, must now pass their version. Their 60 vote, filibuster-proof majority won't help, only 45 Democrats can be counted on.

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 3 July 2009



Just How Many Unbelievers Are There In The United States?

A new belief question was introduced into ARIS in 2008. Table 4 shows that when asked about the existence of God less than 70 percent of Americans now believe in the traditional theological concept of a personal God. This question was not asked in 1990 and 2001. A surprisingly large proportion of contemporary Americans, just over 12 percent, believe in a deist or paganistic concept of the Divine as a higher power. Whereas Table 3 showed that only one percent of Americans actually self-identify as agnostics, Table 4 reveals that 10 percent hold agnostic beliefs (5.7% a "softer" form and 4.3% a "harder form" of agnosticism). These findings about the "belief" aspect of religiosity tend to complicate our interpretation of some of the trends and findings in the earlier tables relating to "belonging." If 76 percent of Americans self-identify with Christianity and 80 percent with a religion then many millions do not subscribe fully to the theology of the groups with which they identify.

The rise of the Nones has been one of the most important trends on the American religious scene since 1990. The overall rate of growth of those expressing no religious preference slowed after 2001 but the numbers offering a specific self-identification as Agnostic or Atheist rose markedly from over a million in 1990 to about 2 million in 2001 to about 3.6 million today. The historic reluctance of Americans to self-identify in this manner or use these terms seems to have diminished. Nevertheless as Table 4 shows the level of under-reporting of these theological labels is still significant.

- SOURCE: American Religious Identification Survey - ARIS 2008

Many Churchgoers and Faith Leaders Struggle to Define Spiritual Maturity

A new study from the Barna Group identifies an underlying reason why there is little progress in helping people develop spiritually. America may possess the world's largest infrastructure for nurturing human spirituality, complete with hundreds of thousands of houses of worship, thousands of parachurch organizations and schools, and seemingly unlimited products, resources and experts.

Yet, a new study from the Barna Group identifies an underlying reason why there is little progress in helping people develop spiritually: many churchgoers and clergy struggle to articulate a basic understanding of spiritual maturity. People aspire to be spiritually mature, but they do not know what it means. Pastors want to guide others on the path to spiritual wholeness, but they are often not clearly defining the goals or the outcomes of that process.

Editor's comment: *Maybe these people know more than they think they know!*

Table 4.

Beliefs about God among U.S. Adult Population 2008
Regarding the existence of God, do you think . . . ?

There is no such thing	2.3%
There is no way to know	4.3%
I'm not sure	5.7%
There is a higher power but no personal God	12.1%
There is definitely a personal God	69.5%
Refused	6.1%
n = 1,000	100%



Farewell To A Secularist Hero

Turkan Saylan, famous secularist and women's rights champion who changed the life of thousands of poor young girls in rural Turkey by supporting their education, has died on 18th May in the age of 74. Her funeral in Istanbul was attended by thousands of people from all backgrounds and ways of life, many among them women, who mourned for their mother and benefactress. "You, my dear daughter, stop asking yourself, 'Why am I born a girl?' and aim at becoming the best you can be," said Saylan's letter to the girls of Turkey that was read at her funeral. She had written it shortly before her death for a yet unpublished book.

Turkan Saylan was a dermatologist, former professor at the University of Istanbul and WHO consultant, fighting leprosy. She built up the Turkish Leprosy Relief Association and was a founding member of the International Leprosy Union. In 1986, she received the International Gandhi Award for her work in this field. In 1989, she founded a charity with the name Cagdas Yasam Destekleme Dernegi (CYDD; meaning association to support contemporary life) and dedicated herself to the education of poor children. Since then, the organisation facilitated the education of about 58,000 children, most of them girls, by providing student grants and scholarships to them. Aysel Celikel, former minister for justice and Prof. Saylan's right-hand woman, will succeed her in the organisation.

Saylan was suffering for 19 years from breast cancer - all throughout her relentless work for the education of the poor. At the end of last year, her physical condition worsened dramatically. Most of the last five months of her life, she had to spend in hospital undergoing chemotherapy. What may have weakened her more than her illness during this time, however, was the brutal harassment of the governing Islamist Justice and Development Party. A staunch secularist as she was, she had long been a thorn in their flesh. Now she had to appear several times in front of public prosecutors and defend herself against the absurd accusation that she was a conspirator planning a military coup against the government. In the second week of April, when her doctors allowed her to spend a weekend at home, the right wing used the opportunity to deal her a brutal blow. This very weekend, police raided her home and offices and Dr. Saylan, frail and sick unto death, had to watch helplessly how they confiscated and destroyed private and professional documents. Her colleagues were put under surveillance too, 17 offices of the CYDD were raided and scholarship documents for more than 500 girls vanished; they would not be able to



get financial help now. In a statement on the CYDD's website <www.cydd.org.tr>, Dr. Saylan insisted that the organisation supported neither a military coup nor Islamic law, but the secular ideals of Turkey's founding father Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. She clarified her position again in a live television interview and accused the government of the injustice meted out to her and her organisation. The public was shocked and outraged.

Fury against the government and the emphatic avowal of secularism resounded during Turkan Saylan's funeral and made it a political event. Besides gratitude and respect shown to her as a doctor fighting leprosy and an educationist fighting poverty and gender inequality, she was celebrated as an icon of secularist resistance against the onslaught of Islamic fundamentalism. "When her activities are considered to support a coup, then all of us are 'coupistas'!", said Aysel Celikel under thunderous applause. "Turkey is secular and will stay secular!" people were chanting again and again in the streets. The army sent a wreath with the inscription "We are all Atatürk's soldiers," and the national flag was draped around her coffin. The government did not dare to send any representative and kept mum.

- *Rationalist International Bulletin* #181, 8 July 2009



Cold Fusion As A Never Ending Controversy?

In the Wall Street Journal, June 6, 2009, Eugenie Reich discussed "the five best books on scientific fraud," including my "Voodoo Science" (Oxford, 2000), which she referred to as "devastating" on the subject of "cold fusion." Cold fusion 20 years later remains a curious mix of self deception and outright fraud.

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 12 June 2009



Quote

"Why is it when we talk to God we're said to be praying, but when God talks to us we're schizophrenic?"

- Charles Dickens

Unquote



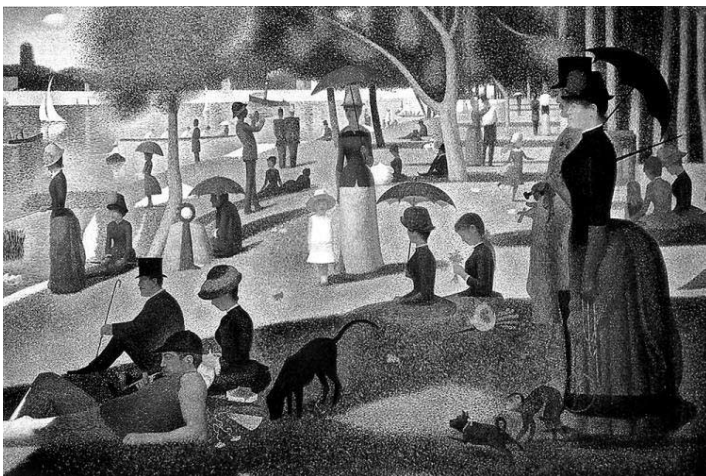
Balance

by Laurent Joffrin, *Liberation*, 7 July 2009

Laurent Joffrin reports that with respect to the French government's intention to authorize Sunday commerce, the majority of French citizens, "object to a one-dimensional society dedicated solely to consumption, in which ultimately commerce alone gives meaning to existence. They prefer to husband a little beach of time collectively chosen and free of monetary relations for the majority of citizens."

A little lesson on capitalism. A number of consumers want to consume on Sunday; a number of workers agree or would agree to work that day: the freedom of economic agents leads to authorizing work on Sunday. Such is - beyond all the rhetoric about "the end of hypocrisy" or the "necessities of tourism" - the essence of the government's argument. Question: in a balanced society, must the freedom of economic agents overcome every other consideration? Those who have not learned the specific lesson of the economic crisis we are currently going through will answer in the affirmative. Others will demur. The market is not always right. When it is legitimate, the power of the government is based on seeing to it that collective values prevail. The majority of French citizens - our poll shows - do not want commercial activities to pervade the totality of life. They object to a one-dimensional society dedicated solely to consumption, in which ultimately commerce alone gives meaning to existence. They prefer to husband a little beach of time collectively chosen and free of monetary relations for the majority of citizens. Boutiques, department stores and supermarkets are not modern churches where one should have to ceaselessly sacrifice to the god of commerce. Once a week, we may suspend the cult of consumption and do something else. Focus on one's individual development, one's family, one's passions or whatever one desires. On life, that is ...

- translation Leslie Thatcher



Economic Crisis Solved?

It is June. In a small town on the South Coast of France, the summer holiday season is in full swing, but it is raining so there is not too much business happening.



Everyone is heavily in debt.

Luckily, a rich Russian tourist arrives in the foyer of the small local hotel.

He asks for a room and puts a Euro100 note on the reception counter, takes a key and goes to inspect the room located up the stairs on the third floor.

The hotel owner takes the banknote in a hurry and rushes to his meat supplier to whom he owes 100 euros.

The butcher takes the money and races to his supplier to pay his debt.

The wholesaler rushes to the farmer to pay 100 euros for pigs he purchased some time ago.

The farmer triumphantly gives the 100 euro note to a local prostitute who gave him her services on credit.

The prostitute goes quickly to the hotel, as she was owing the hotel for her hourly room use to entertain clients.

At that moment, the rich Russian is coming down to reception and informs the hotel owner that the proposed room is unsatisfactory and takes his 100 euros back and departs.

There was no profit or income. But everyone no longer has any debt and the small townspeople look optimistically towards their future.

Could this be the solution to the global financial crisis?

Comment On The Southeast Asian Tsunami And Other Disasters:

On the more liberal end of the theological spectrum, God's spokespeople hastened to stuff their fingers in the dike even as the floodwaters of doubt washed over it. Of course God exists seems to be the general consensus. And of course He is perfectly good. It's just that His jurisdiction doesn't extend to tectonic plates. Or maybe it does and He tosses us an occasional grenade like this just to see how quickly we can mobilize to clean up the damage. Besides, as the Catholic priests like to remind us, "He's a mystery," - though that's never stopped them from pronouncing His views on abortion with absolute certainty.

- Barbara Ehrenreich *This Land is their Land* p. 229



Challenge to the Church

by Walter Hurt

In the heart of the seven hilled city
 You long sat superbly enthroned,
 A courtesan queen, without pity,
 While all of humanity groaned
 Beneath the red rod that you wielded
 In the name of the crucified Lord,
 And the cross that your holy shame shielded
 Served well as the hilt of a sword.

You slew and waxed glad in the slaughter;
 You bowed down the proud and erect;
 You ravaged; and bloody the water
 In which you baptized your elect.
 Yea, crowned in this City Eternal,
 You governed with crime and with curse,
 With teachings and tortures infernal
 That hell was ashamed to rehearse.

Your consort, whose tongue was your trumpet,
 Your awful anathema hurled
 Till strife that was born of a strumpet
 Had wrecked all the peace of the world.
 Where Jupiter once reigned with Juno
 Less cruel than Jesus you came
 And offered the body of Bruno,
 To feed to the greed of the flame.

The tiger would know more of mercy
 Than you at sanguinolent shrine;
 And vice, like the voice of a Circe,
 Your votaries turned into swine.
 Your priests than the beasts more rapacious
 You sent forth to pillage the poor,
 And their acts shamed the prowlers predaceous
 Whose hounds are the jungle and moor.

And you, tiger queen, sat in splendor,
 While, powerless to hinder or help,
 The tortured world saw you grow tender
 Alone at the whine of your whelp.
 But recently all the world feared you
 To the uttermost dwellings of men;
 Now here in your fastness we beard you
 And camp at the door of your den.

No longer the Vatican voices
 Its rulings for all of the race,
 For Reason now reigns and rejoices
 In liberty's glory and grace.
 No longer your hot anger scorches
 Its victims in dungeons of gloom,
 For Truth with its uplifted torches
 Is lighting the fires of your doom.

Your temporal power long broken,
 Your spiritual sway now is o'er;
 We come and we bring you a token
 As death leaves his sign at the door.
 Within your own walls we defy you,
 And make of your mission a mock;
 Your followers speak to deny you,
 As Peter at crow of the cock.

Whatever the present presages,
 Or the past and its pages relate,
 Not all of the tears of the ages
 Extinguished the fires of your hate.
 We know this, and, knowing, we never
 Our heels shall remove from your head
 Till priestcraft has vanished forever
 And all superstition is dead.

There's a story about this poem. Walter Hurt gave a copy to J. B. Wilson to read at the foot of the statue of Giardano Bruno in the Eternal City. The occasion was the First International Freethought Congress convened in Rome on 21 September 1904, to which Wilson was the only American delegate. The Congress program was to end with a great parade to the statue of Bruno and to that of patriot and freethinker Garibaldi. However, the Pope issued a letter protesting the Congress presence and desecration of the city, which was of course widely printed and publicised. The consequent agitation resulted in heated discussion, but fear of violence led to calling off the parade. Wilson did get an opportunity to read the poem at the Bruno monument in the presence of a few English friends.

— Source: J. B. Wilson, **A Trip to Rome**
 (Lexington, KY: James E. Hughes Pub. 1905)

Walter Hurt is the author of these books:
Eugene V. Debs: an introduction (1900)
Free Thought's Most Picturesque Personality (1906)
 [Charles Chilton Moore]
The Scarlet Shadow: story of the great Colorado conspiracy (1907)
 [Big Bill Heywood and the Cripple Creek strike]
Truth About The Jews, told by a gentile. (1922)



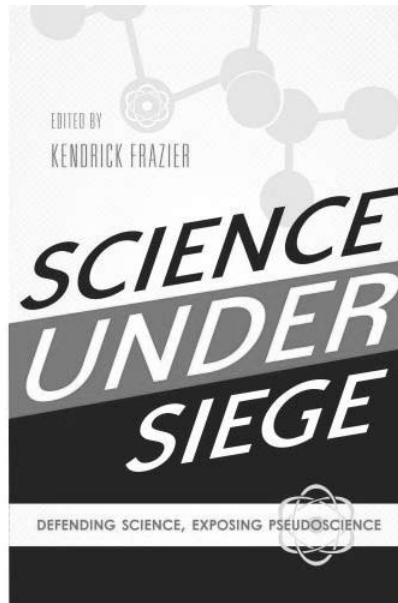
BOOK REVIEW

Science under Siege
by Kendrick Frazier (ed.)

A new book has just come out that will be of interest to skeptics everywhere. *Science Under Siege: Defending Science, Exposing Pseudoscience*. Edited by Kendrick Frazier, it is a collection of some of the best writing from *Skeptical Inquirer* from the last few years:

Some of the gems it contains:

- Carl Sagan’s last Q & A on science and skeptical inquiry.
- A paean to the wonder and awe of real science by Sagan’s wife, Ann Druyan.
- An article explaining Ray Hyman’s Categorical Directive: “before we try to explain something, we should make sure it actually happened.”
- John E. Jones, III’s eloquent decision in the Dover “Intelligent Design” case.
- An article on AIDS denialism by Nicoli Nattrass, who is director of an AIDS research unit in South Africa and can testify to the incalculable harm denialism has caused her compatriots.
- Common myths about evolution and how to refute them.
- The anti-vaccination movement (by Steven Novella).
- Ray Hyman investigates a girl who claims to have x-ray vision.
- Benjamin Radford finds natural explanations and succeeds in reassuring the frightened inhabitants of an allegedly haunted house, and Joe Nickel infiltrates Camp Chesterfield in disguise to show how so-called psychics deliberately lie and trick their customers.
- The Patent Office myth (that a director quit



because there was nothing more to discover) is put to rest once and for all (but can be predicted to rise again).

- Philosopher Mario Bunge illuminates the philosophy behind pseudoscience, helping define what it is and helping us understand how to think about it.
- Bruce Flamm destroys what little is left of the fraudulent Columbia University study about prayer and in vitro fertilization.
- Other subjects include energy medicine, health claims for magnets, bogus oxygen therapies, and the now defunct PEAR study of psychic power over machines.
- Martin Gardner covers vacuum energy.

Other articles address global warming, a proposal to reduce the cost of energy, and thoughtful essays on how science can contribute to political decisions and even ethical discussions and is essential to the democratic process. There is even a skeptical look at the reaction to 9/11 - with a rebuttal by Steven Pinker and his later revised rebuttal after he changed his mind! Overblown fears (Halloween candy from a stranger never ever hurt a child), animal rights terrorism, and more. My favorite anecdote from the book is Massimo Polidoro’s account of accompanying magician James Randi on a live TV show as he tried to replicate a psychic’s magic trick of re-

producing a drawing that was in a sealed envelope. They used controls that they had not applied to the psychic and that prevented the kind of tricks the psychic used. It looked like Randi had been backed into a corner with no way out, but he calmly improvised new methods of deception on the spot and proceeded to astound everyone. It’s a great story.

Highly recommended. Thought-provoking ideas, good writing, and a handy reference.

- Review by Harriet Hall, from *JREF Swift* for 19 June 2009





August Potluck
Sunday August 30, 2009 2:00 PM



July Meeting
Sunday June 26, 2009 3:00-5:00 PM



FIG Leaves
P.O. Box 53174
Cincinnati, OH 45253

FIG

Our Purpose

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 fignotes at (@) gofigger.org, or visit our web site at gofigger.org or freeinquirygroup.org.