

# FIG LEAVES

Volume 15 Issue 3

March 2006

## March FIG Meeting: Tuesday, 28 March 7:00 PM

### Expanding and Defending the Secular Universe.

Conrad Goeringer of American Atheists

Terrorists, head scarves, Futurama, tolerance, Starbucks & MTV, Pentagon Maps, Clashing Civilizations, Creative Classes Rising and, oh my! How does this all fit together? Conrad will tell us in the course of an illustrated presentation about what Atheists, Humanists and other nonbelievers need to understand in order to survive and create the future...

Conrad is Senior Staff writer for American Atheist Magazine and a popular member of their Speaker's Bureau. When he accompanied American Atheist President Ellen Johnson here in December 2004, he impressed the FIG Board members with his energy and wit. He is writing a book about Frances Farmer, the famous 30s and 40s actress, to tell about her activities as an atheist and activist for working people and for victims of the Spanish Civil War.

#### The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup Group

**What:** The Cincinnati Atheists March Meetup

**When:** Tuesday, March 21 at 8:00PM

**Where:** Joseph-Beth Booksellers

2692 Madison Rd. Rookwood Pavillion

Cincinnati OH 45207

513-396-8966

**To see who's coming and to see more event details:**

[http://atheists.meetup.com/90/events/4859868/t/rem\\_ve](http://atheists.meetup.com/90/events/4859868/t/rem_ve)

#### Your FIG Membership!

We would like to thank of the old and new members of FIG who have renewed their membership in the group! Special thanks go to all and any who have made a donation in addition to their membership!

AND

Please, would all others renew for 2006 immediately, forthwith, instantly, presto and right away, in other words soon.

Thank you.

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### Events

(Watch the dates!)

#### March Meeting

Tuesday, 28 March 2006  
7:00 PM at the Vernon Manor  
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, Ohio

#### April Potluck

Tuesday, 11 April 2006  
6:30 PM at the home of

#### April Meeting

Tuesday, 25 April 2006  
7:00 PM at the Vernon Manor  
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, Ohio

#### May Potluck

Tuesday, 09 May 2006  
6:30 PM at the home of



## February Meeting...

### A Darwinian Menagerie

Dr. Gene Kritsky, Professor of Biology, College of Mt. St. Joseph



This was Dr. Kritsky's third talk to this group in a celebration of Darwin's life and work (1809-1882). He has for years been collecting information which may or may not lead to a book about Darwin. This time he wanted to talk about the animals that influenced Darwin. Today these animals are appreciated for their importance to biology and for their significance to science. Darwin's interpretation created this prominence.

There are 15 animal groups in this mixture. We must start where he started, with beetles. Darwin was very fond of beetles. In fact his first contribution to science came from this interest. In a book by Samuel

Stephens published in 1829 called *A Manual of British Coleoptera*, there are several references to C. Darwin, Esq. Darwin was just 20 years old when his name first appeared in print. His love of beetles is amazing. When he was a student at Christ College, at Cambridge, he hired a carpenter to build a display case for his beetle collection. He spent the equivalent of \$30,000 in today's economy to get this built.

On the voyage of the *Beagle*, Darwin encountered many animal groups and the first one of any importance that illustrates the Darwinian process, namely, the ability to make observation and then predictions, involves the Falkland fox. This is the animal Darwin encountered when visiting the Falkland Islands. There is a place Fitzroy, named after the Captain of the *beagle*; and *Beagle Sound* named after the ship, because indeed the Falklands were mapped by the crew of the *Beagle*. Darwin was quite intrigued by this fox, it was different from the foxes he had seen on the mainland of South America, as far as color and size and it was extremely tame. He observed sailors luring the fox with meat on a stick and when the fox came over to them, they would jab it with a knife. Darwin then made a prediction that if the population of humans increased on the islands that this fox would become extinct. That indeed came to pass. That was one of his first predictions that came true.

While he was on the coast of South America he had occasion to collect several fossils.



Ancient Fox

He collected fossil rhinoceros teeth and he collected this type of animal called the glyptodon (here Dr. Kritsky projected a slide of the glyptodon fossil onto the screen). This animal is related to the modern day armadillo. Darwin was amazed by this and it later became important to his way of thinking about descent. Darwin realized we can find fossils of this animal only on the continents where we also find modern, living representatives of this type of armadillo. To him this illustrated a process of what he called the



**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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# FIG LEAVES



succession of types, that you would find fossil forms only in an area where we find descendants. Thus, you would find fossils of marsupials in Australia. That is not unexpected to us, but in Darwin's day it was new.



Louis Agassiz (1807-1873) was quite upset about the rise of Darwin's reputation. He argued that all the blind animals in caves would be related to each other, because the Creator had

created them as a group. In contrast Darwin postulated the cave animals would be related to the animals living in the area surrounding each cave. In about 1880 a group of Louis Agassiz' students decided to test this idea at Wyandotte Caves in southern Indiana. Their cave specimens proved that Darwin was right. The blind crayfish were more closely related to the crayfish surrounding the caves than they are to other blind crayfish.

Among the animals from the voyage, is the discovery of the two rheas. Darwin refers to them as South American ostriches, which we now know as *Rheas*. The smaller one is known as *Rhea darwini* and is named in Darwin's honor. He was aware of two types of Rheas, a big one and a little one. The little one always occurred in more southerly latitudes. He collected some of the northern ones and watched the gauchos take some down with the bolos. He was always on the lookout for the smaller rhea because he realized this type of rhea gradually changed into a different species as one went from north to south. For Darwin, that gradual replacement in morphology and species replacement was graphic evidence of geographic speciation.



One of the members of the expedition shot a large bird. As Darwin was dining on the catch from the hunt, the description by the hunter made him realize he was eating the bird that he had been searching for. Thereupon he rushed to the galley and managed to recover the head and some feathers. He brought it back from the voyage and it now rests in the British Museum. This became an important example for the biogeographic evidence of the origin of species.

One can't talk about Darwin's Menagerie without

mentioning the Galapagos animals. The giant tortoises are intriguing. There are probably some tortoises there today who were living when Darwin visited the islands as they live to be 200-300 years old. Darwin learned from a conversation with the governor that every island has its own tortoise. It wasn't something he discovered through comparison but was told that by the governor.

When we think about the Galapagos Islands, we always think of the finches. Dr. Kritsky projected slides of four finches upon the screen. He identified them as the large ground finch, the medium tree finch and the small tree finch from Santa Cruz, also the warbler finch from Hood Island. Darwin himself didn't really get into the finches. He collected them but he didn't have the foresight to write down where he caught them. It was only on their way to Tahiti that he realized he had a gap in his knowledge. Identification was thanks to his assistant Syms Covington who recorded every finch he himself shot and where they had come from. Darwin was also concerned with mockingbirds. Dr. Kritsky projected slides showing the mocking bird from Genovese and the

mockingbird from Hood. Darwin noted three species of mockingbirds on the Galapagos islands, as well as the Galapagos dove, beautiful with orange-red feet.

From his observations in the Galapagos Darwin became convinced a single creation of individual species was mistaken. That these birds could leave the Ark, wander across Turkey and cross oceans to settle in these Galapagos Islands appeared impossible. So years before he published his *Origin of Species* he had begun to doubt the idea of a single creation.

Darwin had a keen interest in honey bees. He kept beehives at Down House. His library held Thomas Beiner's book, the *Manual of American Beekeeping*, and he corresponded with the British beekeeper who introduced an Italian strain of bees. Darwin's interest in bees illustrates how he thought about evidence. In *The Origin of Species* he talks about



bees' comb making behavior and how perfect it is. He immediately was attacked by design creationists questioning



how this behavior could be so perfect. Darwin then collected honey combs from all around England. He measured the thickness of cell walls and he discovered that these were thicker at the edges of the frame than in the center. So eventually he concluded the bees don't do an exemplary job of making honey. It is adequate but it is not perfect.

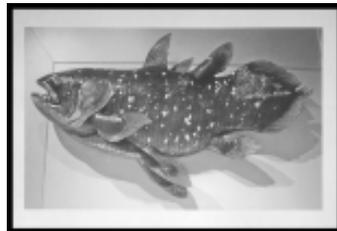
He also examined variation among bees. Bumblebees make honey pots, some species make a pot-like comb and



others a true honey-comb, For Darwin it meant you have transitions and he concluded it is impossible to draw a clear line of demarcation between individual variation, varieties, sub-species, species, and genera.

Transition implies a process and the process is what we now call evolution.

Darwin spent six years on studying barnacles. At the time, experts thought they might be mollusks. But Darwin showed that they were closer to arthropods. This study helped him understand what is meant by species. At the time there were two separate and conflicting ideas circulating: 1) that species were distinct and unchanging creations and 2) Darwin's idea that species were dynamic and changing over time.



Darwin turned his attention to a study of the animals of ancient Egypt. He went to the British museum to meet with the curator of Egyptology. His primary purpose was to review Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829) on the transmission of acquired characteristics. Earlier Georges Cuvier (1769-1832) had refuted Lamarck's theory. He had brought back some specimens of mummified ibises from Egypt. If Lamarck's theory were correct he reasoned there should be some changes in ibis heredity, but found none. When Darwin looked at this evidence he came to a different conclusion. Not enough time had passed for changes to become evident, he reasoned.. The earth was older than the 6000 years allowed by the Bible.

Darwin made mistakes. He thought whales might be descended from bear like carnivores. More recent fossil

discoveries have changed our thought on the descent of whales. Some whales and their fossils show vestigial structures of hind limbs that resemble large herbivores. So Darwin was wrong on whales, but he would probably not be upset at this discovery.

– Reported by George Maurer  
⌘

## warty bliggins the toad

by archy



i met a toad  
the other day by the name  
of warty bliggins  
he was sitting under  
a toadstool  
feeling contented  
he explained that when the cosmos  
was created  
that toadstool was especially  
planned for his personal  
shelter from sun and rain  
thought out and prepared  
for him

do not tell me  
said warty bliggins  
that there is not a purpose  
in the universe  
the thought is blasphemy

a little more  
conversation revealed  
that warty bliggins  
considers himself to be  
the center of the said  
universe  
the earth exists  
to grow toadstools for him  
to sit under  
the sun to give him light

by day and the moon  
and wheeling constellations  
to make beautiful  
the night for the sake of  
warty bliggins

to what act of yours  
do you impute  
this interest on the part  
of the creator  
of the universe  
i asked him  
why is it that you  
are so greatly favored  
ask rather  
said warty bliggins  
what the universe  
has done to deserve me

if i were a  
human being i would  
not laugh  
too complacently  
at poor warty bliggins  
for similar  
absurdities  
have only too often  
lodged in the cringles  
of the human cerebrum

Don Marquis (1878-1937)



## Letters To The Editor



To the Editor,

I learned of the local Free Inquiry Group from John Hoff last year, and enjoyed reading the monthly copies of FigLeaves he provided. I submitted my membership dues in November, and attended my first meeting last month.

John had provided me with a copy of Gould's "NOMA" paper prior to the meeting and I found it very interesting, though somewhat frustrating. I have read articles by prominent environmental scientists who take opposite sides in the debate about the relationship between our genome and human behavior (which would include religious beliefs). For example, Paul Ehrlich<sup>1</sup>, an eminent ecologist, argues that humans do not have enough genes to account for the complexity of our behavior, and ascribes it instead to parallel "cultural evolution." Edward O. Wilson<sup>2</sup>, on the other hand, flatly states that there is sufficient, convincing, evidence that our behavior is genetically based.

Before the January meeting I was looking forward to hearing Wolf's discussion of Gould's paper, and hoped that he would spend some time at the conclusion of his presentation to point out some prominent recent papers summarizing the status of research on the genetic basis for human behavior. Instead, however, his closing remarks dealt more with the will-worn subject of "proving that God doesn't exist."

Because it was my first meeting, I intended not to participate actively. I was just going to listen. Wolf's presentation was interesting and well done, but at the conclusion, I felt a strong urge to speak out against something I had seen so much in the copies of FigLeaves – namely "religion bashing." My remarks at the meeting were not meant to be contentious. They were intended, instead, as a "plea" to not waste time on that subject, but instead to say something positive, such as what has been done to relate human behavior, religion, and ethics to our genome and evolutionary development.

Last year, when I went through my first issue of FigLeaves, I was impressed with the "Fig Goals" listed on the back cover. Now, as a Fig member, at the end of each

meeting I would like to be able to say that the Group has made some progress in achieving them.

Cornelius I. Weber  
(513) 231-0593

(1) Paul R. Ehrlich, 2002, "Human natures, nature conservation, and environmental ethics." *Bioscience* 52(1):31-43

(2) Edward O. Wilson, 2002, *The Future of Life*. (Alfred A. Knopf)

### CSICOP's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Inauguration of the Center for Inquiry

We invite you to join us for the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) and the Inauguration of the Center for Inquiry building on Saturday, April 1st at the Center for Inquiry, in Amherst New York

#### Event Schedule

Friday, March 31 -**Reception**

7:00 – 7:30 pm - Paul Kurtz: Opening Remarks

Saturday, April 1 - **CSICOP: 30 Years and Beyond; 9:00am – 1:00pm**

Ray Hyman - Evaluating Parapsychological Claims: An Autobiographical Perspective

James Alcock - The Appeal of The Irrational in the Age of Technology

Amardeo Sarma - Alternative Medicine in Germany and Europe

Ken Frazier - The Skeptical Inquirer: Then, Now, and in the Future

Barry Beyerstein - Graphology: A Complete Write-off

#### Inauguration of the New Center for Inquiry Building; 2:00 – 5:00pm

Featuring: Eddie Tabash; Jan Loeb Eisler; David Koepsell; Barry Karr; Tom Flynn; John R. Shook

Mail: Center for Inquiry, 1310 Sweet Home Road, Amherst, NY 14228.

Phone Registration: (716) 636-4869

Information: Barry Karr (716) 636-1425, ext. 217  
or: bkarr@centerforinquiry.net



**Joe Levee has resigned as Treasurer of the Center for Inquiry.** On March 10, 2006, Paul Kurtz, Chairman of the CFI Board, sent the following to Joe with copies to the members of the Board:

Dear Joe:

We regret very much your resignation from the Board. As you know, I talked to you at length on the telephone last night, but I wished to share with the Board some of the sentiments that I expressed to you. I gathered from our conversation that you are “plumb tuckered out” at the moment--but I know that you still have a vital mind and quite a strong kick! So hang in there.

We are grateful for your years of service to the Council for Secular Humanism, the Center for Inquiry, CSICOP, and the cause of reason and humanism. You joined the Board about fifteen years ago and you have worked valiantly as Treasurer during a good part of that period. Your years of experience in the accounting profession have been invaluable to us; and we have striven mightily to maintain the highest standards that you expected.

You also founded the Free Inquiry Group in Cincinnati and endeavored to attract a number of stalwart supporters in your area. Many members of our staff have visited and talked to the Cincinnati people and appreciated your gracious hospitality. You have been forward looking in your financial support, and your willingness to extend that to new ventures and individuals, particularly on the international level, is especially recognized.

The country has changed much in the last two decades as it moved to the Right. You have been a tower of strength in supporting our beloved cause-- as we stood against the tide--in defense of democracy, freedom, fairness, reason and humanist values. I have benefitted greatly from your wise counsel and advice over the years, your willingness to help out and pitch in, your tireless dedication to a better America and saner world.

Joe, we are grateful to you for your support. Our sincere thanks is inscribed in our hearts and minds. We trust that you will continue to share your wisdom and remain in touch always as one of the magnificent founding Friends of the Center for Inquiry.

My best personal wishes to Barbara.

Sincerely yours,

Paul Kurtz



**Church - State Separation Update**  
CSH Statement on Justice Alito and James Dobson

The Council for Secular Humanism is deeply concerned that Justice Alito has sent arch religious right wing broadcaster, James Dobson, a communication thanking Dobson for his help in securing Alito’s successful ascension to the Supreme Court. The Founders of the Bill of Rights were clear in their determination to make the United States an equal haven for all points of view on matters of religion, embracing both believers and non believers. James Dobson and his Focus on the Family organization stand for a society-wide imposition of Christian fundamentalism on the very fabric of our culture. If Justice Alito is just thanking Dobson for his help but intends to view all church/state matters objectively, that is one thing. If Justice Alito meant to communicate any ideological agreement with Dobson’s views on the nature of society, then we are all in grave danger. Only if a clear majority of the current Supreme Court continues the now 60 years of precedent, in requiring all branches of government to maintain strict neutrality in matters of religion, will the United States be able to retain its status as a modern 21st Century nation.

David Koepsell, Executive Director CSH

Tom Flynn, Editor, *Free Inquiry*

Edward Tabash, Chair, First Amendment Task Force

**Atheist receives prestigious Mahatma Gandhi award**

Lavanam, veteran Indian atheist leader, Director of the Atheist Centre at Vijayawada, India, and Honorary Associate of Rationalist International, received the coveted Mahatma Gandhi Award for this year. The award carries Indian Rupees 50,000 (\$ 1129), citation and a memento. The award has been instituted by the Maniklal Bhulakidas Gandhi Memorial Trust of Nagpur ten years ago. The Trust gives three awards every year - in memory of Mahatma Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan. This year’s Mahatma Gandhi Award is for Lavanam.

The word “Lavanam” means salt. The name was given to him by his father Gora, freedom fighter and Mahatma Gandhi’s colleague, as he was born during the Salt Satyagraha during India’s independence struggle. Lavanam is the elder son of Gora. He has traveled around the world several times and is the most powerful exponent of the philosophy of Positive Atheism founded by Gora.

– *Rationalist International Bulletin* # 152, 8 March 2006



## Missouri Resolution

As a native of this state, I am deeply troubled that our Legislature is considering a measure that would have the practical effect of declaring Christianity to be the official state religion. Missouri State Representatives David Sater and Barney Joe Fisher have sponsored a resolution which affirms the Christian history of the

state, and supports voluntary prayer in public schools and religious displays on public property. The Council for Secular Humanism and the First Amendment Task Force seek to preserve a benevolent separation of church and state in which both believers and non believers are equal before the law. We adhere to the true intent of our nation's Founders. We want no branch of government to betray any favoritism for any theological point of view.

The fight against religious fundamentalism is growing more intense each day. The remaking of the Supreme Court by the president and the fact that my home state's Legislature could even consider such a sectarian resolution, shows that we are on the verge of the worst struggle, ever, to preserve a modern, secular society.

Sincerely,  
DJ Grothe, National Field Director, Council for Inquiry

**Churches are honoring Charles Darwin.** Sunday was the 197th birthday of Charles Darwin. At 450 churches around the nation he was celebrated with sermons and programs that mingle biological evolution and faith. Something is happening. The public is getting an unprecedented exposure to evolution in books, museum exhibits, and news programs. Coming soon to a theater near you is *Flock of Dodos*. Film maker and marine biologist Randy Olsen has made a movie about evolution and intelligent design: <http://www.flockofdodos.com>. It has what fundamentalists all lack, a sense of humor. And we owe it all to the Discovery Institute and idiots delight.

– *What's New* Robert L. Park, 17 February 2006

**Glaciers in Greenland are melting rapidly.** New data from satellite imagery show the glaciers melting twice as fast as they were a decade ago, according to a report in today's *Science*. The study focused on the rate of glacial ice flow. Meanwhile, NASA's budget is focused on finishing the International Space Station, which everyone now seems to agree is pointless, and preparations for the Moon/Mars manned flight, which is equally pointless and won't happen anyway. NASA's Deep Space Climate Observatory, which was waiting to be launched and would have given unique insight into global warming, is terminated because it had Al Gore's Initials on it.

– *What's New* Robert L. Park, 17 February 2006

## Science Book Club - Schedule for 2006

Science book club as in past years plans on meeting at the Cincinnati Downtown Library on the 4th Sunday of each month at 2:30pm in Room 3A, except on the 3rd Sunday where conflicts with holidays occur as noted below and in May in Room 3B because of a room schedule conflict.

**Mar 26** - *Global Survival: The Challenge and its Implications for Thinking and Acting* ed. by Ervin Laszlo & Peter Seidel

**Apr.23** - a discussion on "Problem Solving (approaches and techniques)" from short articles

**May 21** (third Sunday in Room 3B) - *Fly: The Unsung Hero of Twentieth Century Science*: Martin Brookes

**June 25** - *Silent Sky: the incredible extinction of the passenger pigeon*: Allan Eckert

**July 23** - *Ohio Archaeology an illustrated chronicle of Ohio's ancient American Indian cultures*: Bradley T. Lepper

**Aug 27** - *On Intelligence* Jeff Hawkins

**Sept 24** - *Economics in Perspective, A Critical History*: John Kenneth Galbraith

**Oct 22** - *The "God" Part of the Brain*: Matthew Alper

**Nov 19** (third Sunday)- *Black Holes and Time Warps: Einstein's outrageous legacy*: Kip Thorne

**Dec 17** (third Sunday) - *Science of Aliens*: Clifford Pickover

– Bryan Sellers





Robert Park calls it the **Dover Effect**. Utah is one of the most conservative states in the nation, but on Monday, legislation favoring intelligent design lost. Alas, I'm sure the Discovery Institute will be able to find a new gimmick.  
 – *What's New*, 3 March 2006

*New York Times*, 28 February 2006  
**Anti-Darwin Bill Fails in Utah**  
 By KIRK JOHNSON

In a defeat for critics of Darwin, the Utah House of Representatives on Monday voted down a bill intended to challenge the theory of evolution in high school science classes.

The bill had been viewed nationally, by people on each side of the science education debate, as an important proposal because Utah is such a conservative state, with a Legislature dominated by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

But the bill died on a 46-to-28 vote in the Republican-controlled House after being amended by the majority whip, Stephen H. Urquhart, a Mormon who said he thought God did not have an argument with science. The amendment stripped out most of the bill's language, leaving only that the state board of education "shall establish curriculum requirements relating to scientific instruction."

Legislative officials said the bill was not likely to be revived before the scheduled adjournment of the Legislature on Wednesday. The Origins of Life bill, in its initial form, would have required teachers to issue a disclaimer to their students saying that not all scientists agree about evolution and the origin of species. It did not mention any alternative theory to Darwinism, but was viewed by some supporters and opponents as part of the drive to encourage the teaching of intelligent design, which says that life is too complicated to have evolved without an architect.

Some Mormon legislators opposed the bill because they agreed with Mr. Urquhart that science and religion should remain separate, others because they thought intelligent design was not in keeping with traditional Mormon belief.

Casey Luskin, a spokesman for the Discovery Institute, a research group based in Seattle that has promoted the ideas of intelligent design, called the vote "a loss for scientific education," but said it was a purely local Utah matter.

A spokesman for Americans United for Separation of Church and State, Joe Conn, said Utah's vote would resonate.



Also from Robert Parks:  
**Maybe scientific openness is "only a theory."**

Top NASA climate scientist James Hansen was under pressure to cool it on global warming. The pressure, we have since learned, was coming from 24-year old White House appointee George Deutsch, who had been an intern in the Bush-Cheney re-election campaign. Earlier, Deutsch had informed a NASA contractor that the word "theory" had to be added to every mention of the Big Bang. "This is more than a science issue," he declared, "it is a religious issue." On Friday, NASA chief Michael Griffin made it clear to all NASA employees that it's not the job of public affairs to "alter, filter or adjust" material from the technical staff. Wednesday, Deutsch resigned. What was he doing in a sensitive position in the first place? Although his job at NASA was a reward for work in the re-election campaign, he did have a journalism degree from Texas A&M, didn't he? Well, actually no. He lied about that. Deutsch was right about one thing: science issues can also be religious issues.

**And maybe god didn't make himself perfectly clear.** There is a rare split among evangelical Christians. A group of 86 evangelical leaders formed the Evangelical Climate Initiative to combat global warming <[www.christiansandclimate.org](http://www.christiansandclimate.org)>, even taking out a full-page ad in the NY Times. However, a number of evangelical heavy weights, including Jerry Falwell and James Dobson, oppose the initiative, and the National Association of Evangelicals has decided not to take a position. But what does God say? "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth," Genesis 1:28. Well, we've done it. We've subdued just about everything.

**Consider the plight of the polar bear.** Maybe they'll grow flippers when the arctic ocean melts. Environmental groups sued the government in December to add polar bears to the endangered species list; their habitat is fast being destroyed by global warming. According to the Washington Post, the Bush administration has agreed to study whether polar bears should be on the list. Coming just as the Evangelical Climate Initiative is announced, the reality of global warming now seems to be accepted by almost everyone except petroleum geologists.

– *What's New*, Robert L. Park, 10 February 2006



Editorial from *Science Magazine*  
17 February 2006:  
Vol. 311. no. 5763, p. 917

### The New Gag Rules

by Donald Kennedy, Editor in Chief

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) are among the most popular and scientifically sophisticated agencies in the U.S. government. Not only do they do good science, they do dramatic, risky, and even romantic things--capturing comet dust, sending surveyors to Mars, flying airplanes into hurricanes, and providing images of impending weather events. They are full of productive, respected scientists. We have published papers from groups at both agencies and have been proud to do so.

But these days, we're trying to figure out what is happening to serious science at NOAA and NASA. In this space a month ago, I described some of the research that supports a relationship between hurricane intensity and increased water temperatures. Two empirical studies, one published in *Science* and one in *Nature*, show that hurricane intensity has increased with oceanic surface temperatures over the past 30 years. The physics of hurricane intensity growth, worked out by Kerry Emanuel at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has clarified and explained the thermodynamic basis for these observations.

Yet a NOAA Web site\* denies any relationship between global climate change and hurricane strength. It attributes the latter instead to "tropical multidecadal signals" affecting climate variability. Emanuel has tested this relationship and presented convincing evidence against it in recent seminars. As for the many NOAA scientists who may agree with Emanuel, the U.S. Department of Commerce (the executive agency that NOAA is part of) has ordered them not to speak to reporters or present papers at meetings without departmental review and approval.

That's bad enough, but it turns out that things are even worse at NASA, where a striking front-page story by Andy Revkin in the *New York Times* (28 January 2006) details the agency's efforts to put a gag on James Hansen, director of the agency's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, after a talk he gave at a meeting of the American Geophysical Union in San Francisco in December 2005. His sin was that he pointed out

that the climate change signal is now so strong, 2005 having been the warmest year in the past century, that the voluntary measures proposed by the administration are likely to be inadequate.

Hansen was told that there would be "dire consequences" if such statements continued. *The Times* story identifies two NASA public affairs officials, Dean Acosta and George Deutsch, as responsible for delivering this news and insisting that Hansen's "supervisors" would have to stand

in for him at public appearances. Those will presumably take place in approvable venues and certainly not on National Public Radio (NPR). Deutsch is reported to have rejected a Hansen interview requested by NPR on the grounds that it was "the most liberal news outlet in the country."

For at least two reasons, this event may establish a new high-water mark for bureaucratic stupidity. First, Hansen's views on this general subject have long been widely available; he thinks climate change is due to anthropogenic sources, and he's discouraged that we're not doing more about it. For NASA to lock the stable door when this horse has been out on the range for years is just silly. Second, Hansen's history shows that he just won't be intimidated, and he has predictably told *The Times* that he will ignore the restrictions. The efforts by Acosta and Deutsch are reminiscent of the slapstick antics of Curley and Moe: a couple of guys stumbling off to gag someone who the audience knows will rip the gag right off.

These two incidents are part of a troublesome pattern to which the Bush administration has become addicted: Ignore evidence if it doesn't favor the preferred policy outcome. Above all, don't let the public get an idea that scientists inside government disagree with the party line. The new gag rules support the new Bush mantra, an interesting inversion of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's view on war: "You don't make policy with the science you have. You make policy with the science you *want*." But the late-breaking good news is that NASA Administrator Griffin has said that there will be no more of this nonsense, and Deutsch, the 24-year-old Bush appointee sent to muzzle Hansen, has left the agency abruptly after his résumé turned out to be falsified. A change of heart? Stay tuned.

10.1126/science.1125749

<http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/summary/311/5763/917?eaf>

\*[www.magazine.noaa.gov/stories/mag184.htm](http://www.magazine.noaa.gov/stories/mag184.htm)



An excerpt from Paul Kurtz's editorial to be featured in the upcoming April/May issue of *Free Inquiry* magazine.

## The Vatican and the Supreme Court

by: Paul Kurtz

Several years ago, religious conservatives criticized those who believed that in a pluralistic society, religious conviction should be a private, not a public, matter. They complained loudly that religion had been excluded from the public square. Well, they have had their way; for religion is now intruding into public discourse every day and in a big way. Some of this is no doubt due to President Bush's constant references to divine favor and the efforts of his administration to bridge the gap separating church from state.

I surely believe in freedom of expression; religious believers have as much right as anyone in society to express their views. The problem arises when a person's religious convictions have an impact on public policy—especially when legislators, government officials, or judges allow their private religious beliefs to determine how they set, implement, or interpret law and public policy. In the recent national debate about the qualifications of John Roberts and Samuel Alito for nomination to the Supreme Court, one might well ask whether their religious convictions should have been open for consideration. Is a Justice's faith a public or private matter?

Democrats were concerned whether Alito's replacing Justice Sandra Day O'Connor would swing the Court too far to the right. In addition, they were concerned whether either or both nominees would oppose abortion and the right of privacy. Roberts and Alito strove to avoid being pinned down concerning issues that they said would likely come before the Court. Justice Roberts suggested, however, that he thought that *Stare Decisis* [the principle of precedent] applied to *Roe v. Wade*, which he implied was "settled law" and would not be overturned; similarly for the right of privacy. We heard few such assurances from Judge Alito. The question for both nominees that perhaps should have been asked – and was not – was whether their Roman Catholic faith might trump their duty to interpret legal issues like these impartially.

John F. Kennedy undoubtedly took the proper position concerning religion during his campaign for the presidency, when he said that his personal religious convictions as a Roman Catholic were not relevant to discharging the duties of office. Perhaps this was a moot issue for him, in that he did not seem a particularly devout Roman Catholic. Mario Cuomo, former governor of New York State, reiterated JFK's position by saying that although he did not himself support abortion, as governor it was incumbent on him to enforce the laws, and abortion was legal in his state and in the nation. The question that we need to ask is, if religion is out in the public square, what do you do if you have a devout nominee to the Supreme Court? Which is his or her higher duty – to interpret the laws and the United States Constitution, or to fulfill the religious obligations of his or her church?

A Justice of the Supreme Court is

pledged to obey and enforce the Constitution of the United States, which derives its powers from "We the People" and has no theological foundation. Every federal justice takes a judicial oath under 28 USC 453 to "faithfully and impartially discharge and perform all of the duties incumbent upon me under the Constitutional laws of the United States," and not some foreign authority.

When Justices are asked to deliberate about laws that come before the Supreme Court, but are contrary to their deepest held religious convictions, should they not refuse themselves? There is a statute of long standing that governs these cases: 28 USC 455(a) states that, "Any justice, judge, or magistrate in the United States shall disqualify himself in any proceedings in which his impartiality might reasonably be questioned." There can be no justice without impartiality.

The Supreme Court has a majority of five Roman Catholics. These are Justices Scalia, Thomas, Roberts, Alito, and Kennedy—the first four of whom are not only conservative but also by all accounts devout. Should this be a concern to citizens in the United States?

If religion is a public matter, many have asked this question in the light of the fact that the Vatican is deeply opposed to abortion in any form, for it considers a human being to be a person "from the moment of conception." This view also drives Papal opposition to certain methods of contraception, sterilization, the use of pharmaceutical abortifacients, in vitro fertilization, sterilization, and stem-cell research. And it is worth noting that on similar grounds, Papal doctrine is very much opposed to euthanasia or assisted suicide.

A 2002 *Catholic News Service* story describes Justice Anthony Scalia's partici-

partation in a panel discussion on the death penalty. Asked why he favored capital punishment when the Catholic Church opposes it, Scalia replied, "This doctrine is not one that the Christian church has consistently maintained." Since the Pope's teaching against capital punishment in *Evangelium Vitae* was not given *ex cathedra*, Scalia said, he is not obligated as a Catholic to accept it but only to give it serious consideration. "I have given it careful and thoughtful consideration and rejected it," Scalia said. "I do not find the death penalty immoral. I am happy to reach that conclusion because I like my job and I'd rather not resign." (from *National Catholic Reporter*, February 8, 2002 by Michelle Martin). Scalia is no doubt correct about capital punishment, since *Evangelium Vitae's ex cathedra* pronouncement concerns the killing of innocent human beings, a class from which persons properly found guilty of capital crimes are arguably excluded.

So now the question is, how would Scalia – and other Catholic Justices who are equally devout – rule when issues such as abortion and euthanasia, which are prohibited *ex cathedra* by the pontiff, come before them? The Supreme Court has agreed to hear a case concerning late partial-birth abortions and no doubt other such cases will also be considered. Will they obey the law or will they recuse themselves? Will they resign? Or will they decide based on the law and their reason, even if this means allowing the Constitution of the United States to trump an *ex cathedra* teaching of their church? In today's America, where religious convictions are so openly expressed in the public square, such uncomfortable questions surely need to be asked, and answered.





BOOK REVIEW

The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America

by Frank Lambert (Princeton University Press, 2003)

In the present culture war religious spokesmen are apt to claim this country was founded as a "Christian nation" in which the government has an obligation to promote the blessings of religion without giving preference to any sect. Secular humanists are likely to retort, not so, the United States was established as a secular republic with a constitution which does not mention god at all. Government's role is negative, the absence of interference with the individual's free exercise of religion. All sides are searching for a "usable past," an historical interpretation with which to slay their opponents in the present. Guess what, both sides are right.

The original American settlements which were planted in the seventeenth century very definitely were Christian. The story of the Puritans who fled England to freely practice their religion is well known. They founded Massachusetts, and promptly denied all other settlers any freedom to practice their particular version of Protestant Christianity. In fact, most of the original colonies had an established religion; the Church of England in New York, Virginia and colonies to the south; Congregationalism in Massachusetts and Connecticut. Only Rhode Island and Pennsylvania allowed freedom of worship, though in the latter the Quakers dominated society and government. It was accepted as fact, that without a public religion to which all had to adhere, neither good order nor morality would be possible. All were required to pay taxes for the upkeep of established churches and pastors in every village.

Two major developments changed American society over the ensuing 150 years. The European Enlightenment made inroads among the American elite and aristocracy. The scientific achievements of Newton and Bacon showed that the universe and its working could be understood by human reason. The rational philosophy of Locke and Hume raised doubts about the received religious mythology. Many of the founding fathers of the eighteenth century were deists, who accepted there must be a creator of

nature's laws, but consigned Christian miracles to the scrapheap of history.

At the same time, especially in the thirties and forties of the eighteenth century wandering preachers exhorted a New Birth of faith, in which the individual, not the community would experience the outpouring of the spirit. The revivals characterizing this Great Awakening created a specifically American version of Protestantism, eventually becoming the Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian denominations. A medley of new churches, communities, and worships created a broad religious marketplace in which each preacher sought to garner in the sheep. At the same time the established churches protested the interference of outsiders, and "new" believers protested against paying taxes to support churches they did not intend to patronize.

The Great Awakening and the growth of independent, evangelical churches instituted in effect freedom of religion in which each believer could choose his church. In a thinly settled land with an ever expanding settlement frontier government authority was weak, thus unable and unwilling to enforce the established religion. The Constitution was assembled as a compromise, in which independent churches and the deist elite collaborated in a specifically American vision of religion. This was not anti-Christian, but gave every individual the liberty to chose whatever Protestant sect attracted him. Jews, Papists, or infidels were not included, and would not be expected to serve in positions of honor and responsibility.

Many citizens were appalled by and protested the omission of Christ from the constitution. Many wanted some religious presence in the public realm. They succeeded with legislation under the first two administrations. They secured tax exemptions for churches and their property; they installed chaplains in Congress and in the Armed Forces. The schools were to be non-denominational, which in practice meant Protestant, with Bible readings, prayers and the ten commandments from Protestant scriptures.

– Wolf Roder

Quote .....
The kindly god who lovingly fashioned each and every one of us and sprinkled the sky with shining stars for our delight – that god is, like Santa Claus, a myth of childhood, not anything a sane, undeluded adult could literally believe in.
– Daniel Dennett, Darwin's Dangerous Idea p. 18
..... Unquote:

March Potluck: Tuesday 14th 7:00 PM  
April Potluck: Tuesday 11th 6:30 PM

March Meeting: Tuesday 28th 7:00 PM



FIG Leaves  
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# 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 [figinfo@gofigger.org](mailto:figinfo@gofigger.org), or leave a message at (513) 557-3836. Visit our web site at [gofigger.org](http://gofigger.org).