

FIG LEAVES

Volume 18 Issue 3

March 2009

March FIG Meeting:

Sunday, 22 March 2009
at the Museum Center

1:30 pm to Carpool at Vernon Manor or
2:00 pm at the Museum Center

RACE: Are We So Different? A Special Exhibit at the Cincinnati Museum Center

FIG will take a field trip to the Cincinnati Museum Center to view the *RACE: Are We Really So Different* Exhibit. Curated by the American Anthropological Exhibit, the show explores the social construction of race and how race has played a role in historical interactions. Current science tells us all humans share a common ancestry and the differences we see among people are natural variations, the results of migration, marriage and adaptation to different environments. How does this fit with the idea of race? Looking through the eyes of history, science and lived experience, the *RACE Project* explains differences among people and reveals the reality – and unreality – of race. The story of race is complex and may challenge how we think about race and human variation, about the differences and similarities among people.

Tour Begins at 2pm. The tour will be 1 hour with a brief discussion to follow. Either meet us at the Cincinnati Museum Center at 2pm or if you take the Carpool Option, where FIG pays for parking, meet at Vernon Manor at 1:30pm. Tickets \$5 per person.

FIG members and Guests must RSVP by Wednesday, March 18 to Shawn Jeffers at <smj145@gmail.com> or phone: 513-404-8191.



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For a \$1 off coupon for the RACE exhibit go to:
www.cincynorth.com/cincinnati-coupons/51/cincinnati-museum-center-at-union-terminal/.

Print the coupon out on your printer and bring it with you.

Events----(Note Date Changes)

March Meeting

Sunday, Mar. 22, 2009,
Carpool-1:30 PM Vernon Manor
2:00 PM at the Museum Center

April Meeting

Tuesday, Apr. 28, 2009, 7:00 PM
at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, OH



February Meeting

Evolution Since Darwin:

A Beagle's Eye View of the Galapagos Finches

By Ken Petren, Department of Biology, University of Cincinnati



Ken Petren

Ken Petren's talk centered on the differences between the varieties of finches of the Galapagos Islands, sometimes called Darwin's finches, and what those differences tell us about evolution and biological diversity. As an evolutionary ecologist it is Ken's job to classify and study specimens, some collected by Darwin on the voyage of the Beagle in 1835, and living populations of finches in the wild. Ken's conclusions are that these finches are evolving but not always in the ways that scientists have thought.

It is much easier to study the species on a group of islands than it would be on the mainland. There is a much smaller number of species to study due to their isolation from other populations. This isolation has caused creatures that have migrated from the mainland to adapt to their new environments in order to survive, thus evolving into new species.

The land iguana migrated from Costa Rico and evolved to take advantage of a niche in the ecosystem that allows it to survive by eating submerged algae. Now it is classified as a marine iguana, which does not feed on the land at all. The flightless cormorant is flightless because after migrating to Galapagos it no longer needed to fly to survive.

Here Ken showed the many varieties of the finch's beaks that are specifically adapted to the type of food they eat. Some beaks are large for eating large seeds. Smaller beaks are sufficient for eating a smaller type of seed. Still others are long and slender for getting insects out of crevices. These traits have developed over the last three million years, with most of the changes taking place in the last 1.6 million years. This is relatively quick evolutionary change.

Peter and Rosemary Grant have been studying habits of the Galapagos finches for the last thirty years and have revealed some surprising facts about them in Jonathon Weiner's book, *The Beak of the Finch*. It seems that the finches hybridize, or mate between species on occasion, so it can be very difficult to identify species by sight or even genetically. They sometimes imitate the call of another species to steal their mates. The finches are very opportunistic, utilizing every niche in the ecosystem. There are finches that suck the blood from the wounds of booby chicks, some that roll eggs until they break and can be eaten, and even some that use a stick as a tool to extract insects from wood.

Scientists are studying the genetics of Darwin's finches. The actual specimens that Darwin collected are deteriorating, which makes it difficult to obtain good genetic material to study. Complicating matters is the fact that Darwin neglected to document which specimen came from which island. He and others had to reconstruct the voyage to determine which islands were represented by the two dozen or so specimens that he collected. This may seem like a huge, rookie mistake by scientists today but we have to remember that in Darwin's day species were thought to be immutable. Therefore it didn't matter to him initially which specimen came from which island. It wasn't until the specimens were being studied in England that the differences in beak size ⇒



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:

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



and shape were found to be remarkably unique from island to island. Scientists are now discovering that there is a lot of movement from island to island. There is evidence that this dispersal, gene flow, and mutations are non-random. It seems that the finches are choosing their mates and habitats. The large genetic exchange points to selection by choice. One surprising finding was that genetic differences are sometimes greater among populations than they are among species. Sometimes a population leaves an island only to return after living and adapting on other islands, making it possible to have two forms on the same island since the initial species hasn't changed.

Ken described the rapid decline of the Galapagos since humans have started living and visiting there. Over 120,000 people live on the islands now, even though some islands are still unoccupied. There are 140,000 visitors each year. One of the endearing qualities of the animals there may contribute to their downfall. Ken stated that Galapagos is special to him because the animals are curious and unafraid of humans. You can get close to study them. Good for humans, bad for the animals. Humans have introduced new species, including parasites and pathogens which are harmful to the animals. A lot of population extinction related to humans has occurred since Darwin's time. Most of the populations from Darwin's day are gone. One species of finch is severely endangered today.

The evolution of species and the biodiversity of the Galapagos islands is much more complicated than we may have imagined. Just because the standard model of evolution is not being followed does not mean it is not evolution. Natural selections and local adaptations are taking place. More study needs to be done to determine the origin and interaction of species there and the effect that human presence and climate change has on the animals and islands of Galapagos.

Going back to Darwin's mistake of not documenting his specimens properly, Ken concluded his presentation. He wondered what errors we may be making now of which we are totally unaware. We think we know what is going on in relation to speciation, but are there other possibilities that we haven't even considered? That is the nature of science: to be uncertain: always testing, collecting evidence, arriving at conclusions, and being willing to change those conclusions upon the presentation of new, contradictory ☘ evidence.

– By John Welte

Two Critics of Capitalism

The Chronicles of Favilla, *Les Echos*, (6 February 2009)

In the face of the scale of the crisis, it is tempting to revisit the great authors to understand its roots. Marx's return to grace, after 30 years of disqualification due to the collapse of Soviet socialism, cannot be otherwise explained. But rather than hunting for ideas in the middle of the 19th century, we could do well to concentrate on two more recent, and in many respects far more illuminating, works. The two authors, Joseph Schumpeter and Karl Polanyi, followed parallel paths, as they both came from central Europe before emigrating to the United States. Their major works came out at the same time: "Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy" in 1942, "The Great Transformation," two years later.

People are very familiar with Schumpeter's thesis that capitalism's dynamic is due more to the entrepreneurial spirit than to the mechanical effects of the accumulation of capital as described by classic theory. One often omits to recall that he had a pessimistic vision of that dynamic, predicting that it would be progressively paralyzed by the organizational constraints of the system, notably by bureaucracy. At first sight, this analysis proves more apt to explain the failure of socialism than the present crisis. However, if one replaces "bureaucracy" with "financial system" in the Schumpeterian thesis, one rediscovers how fragile any creative process is and how it may be threatened by an external cell that cancerizes it.

One is also faced with a cancerization of the initial system in Polanyi, but this one is of a different sort. The sociologist explains that the irresistible tendency in capitalism is for the economy to colonize society to turn it into a market society. Progressively, nothing at all escapes the monetary evaluation of human activity. The economy rises from its bed to swamp all spheres of human life. In an original synthesis of social democracy and self-managing utopianism, he deduced from this observation that civil society must organize itself to return the economy to its bed and thus preserve large sectors from any influence of monetary speculation.

In these two cases, the angle of the attack against capitalism is sociological, not economic. Schumpeter wants to preserve the spirit of creativity, and Polanyi, the spirit of conviviality. In other words, the fundamental problem would be more cultural than economic. And what if they were right? ☘

Translation: *Truthout* French language editor Leslie Thatcher



THINGS TO DO....

THINGS TO SEE...



The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup

When: Monday, Mar 16 at 7:00PM - 10:00 PM

Where: Joseph-Beth Booksellers
2692 Madison Rd. Rookwood Pavillion
Cincinnati OH 45207; 513-396-8966

Meetup Description

Regular monthly gatherings are held on the 3rd Mondays from 7:00 - 10:00 PM. New people join every month, and we all wear name tags (no quizzes). Check the Message Board for current hot topics.

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. Do please use our Message Board feature to connect with fellow group members.

To contact us:

http://atheists.meetup.com/90/calendar/9182020/?a=cv1c_grp

Media Events/Programs

The Humanist Perspective

Show times on Time-Warner Cable:

Channel 15: Tuesday 3:30 am and Saturday 7:30 pm

Channel 24: Friday 12:30 pm.

Programs:

10-13 March: *What Scientific Examination tells us about Religion,*
with R. Joseph Hoffmann

17-20 March: *Media Mythmakers,*
with Benjamin Radford

24-27 March: TBA

30 Mar- 3 April: TBA

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 at the downtown Cincinnati Public Library except June 21 (Father's Day). **Room 3A** at 2:30 pm. unless otherwise stated.

Feb 15 - *Emotions Revealed, Second Edition: Recognizing Faces and Feelings to Improve Communication and Emotional Life* by Paul Ekman

March 15 - *The Drunkard's Walk: How Randomness Rules Our Lives* by Leonard Mlodinow

April 19 - **in Room 3B** *Alex & Me: How a Scientist and a Parrot Discovered a Hidden World of Animal Intelligence--and Formed a Deep Bond in the Process* by Irene Pepperberg

May 17 - **in Room 3B** *The Unnatural History of the Sea* by Callum Roberts

June 14 - **in Room 3B or 28** - *Commonsense Rebellion: Taking Back Your Life from Drugs, Shrinks, Corporations, and a World Gone Crazy* by Bruce E. Levine

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 - book not yet selected

Dec 20 - one of a number of books on the relation/conflict between science and religion





Final Exit Network

For Immediate Release; 26 February 2009

Chicago, IL C Yesterday agents of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation arrested volunteers from Final Exit Network and charged them with assisting a suicide. The charges are related to the death of John Celmer.

Mr. Celmer was a member of Final Exit Network and a case in the Network's Exit Guide Program.

Jerry Dincin, President of Final Exit Network, said, "We believe Ted Goodwin, Larry Egbert, Nick Sheridan and Claire Blehr are innocent and will be exonerated. Final Exit Network works within the laws by providing counseling and training and support." The Exit Guide Program serves people who are suffering from an intolerable medical condition which has become more than they can bear.

"Final Exit Network does not 'assist' suicide in any way, nor do we encourage individuals to hasten their deaths," Dincin adds. Members who avail themselves of the Exit Guide Program must be capable of performing every required function without assistance of any type. At any time during the process a member can change his or her mind.

Final Exit Network has thousands of members. The Network's revenues come exclusively from memberships and donations. Contrary to the widely published news reports the Network *never* charges for its Exit Guide services. The \$50 fee so widely reported is the annual fee members pay to support the mission.

"Final Exit Network is a leader in the fight for the last human right," said Dincin. Final Exit Network is a four-year-old volunteer-run nonprofit organization. More information is available here on this website or by calling 847-607-0711.

Contact: Jerry Dincin, President Email: president@finalexitnetwork.org

IHEU President Expresses Concern Over Euthanasia Arrests In Us

The debate over voluntary euthanasia in the United States has been thrust back into the headlines by the arrest of four people by authorities in the state of Georgia. Four members of the Final Exit Network were arrested on

Feb. 25 and charged with assisting in a suicide and other offenses, including violating Georgia's RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations) Act. The RICO charges, based on a law against organized crime and usually associated with the Mafia, could result in sentences of up to 20 years imprisonment.

"I am extremely concerned by the arrest of these persons who are dedicated to supporting people's right to a dignified death," said Sonja Eggerickx, president of the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU). "I met with one of the arrested men, Ted Goodwin, at the IHEU World Humanist Congress in Washington, DC, last summer. He was a very compassionate man, who clearly cared deeply about helping to end unnecessary suffering. These draconian charges raise new doubts about the outdated, and conflicting, laws on euthanasia in the US."

The IHEU has long called for national and state laws to allow a competent person, who is incurably ill and suffering, to obtain a dignified, humane death if they so choose. This option, in the form of doctor-assisted euthanasia, is already legal in the US states of Oregon and Washington, as well as in some other countries, including Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland.

The four people arrested were: Thomas "Ted" Goodwin, 63, and Claire Blehr, 76, both of Georgia; and Dr. Lawrence D. Egbert, 81, and Nicholas Alec Sheridan, 60, both of Baltimore, Maryland. Mr Goodwin and Dr. Egbert are the president and medical director, respectively, of the Final Exit Network.-----You can donate to the defense fund in this case by visiting <www.finalexit-libertyfund.org> or mailing to the fund c/o ERGO, 24829 Norris Lane, Junction City, OR 97448.

ERGO is the Euthanasia Research & Guidance Organization, founded by Derek Humphry, the author of *Final Exit* and founder of the Hemlock Society.

Humans Evolved In A Savage World.

The oldest remains of *Homo sapiens* have been dated at about 160,000 years ago. Hunter gatherers, they could talk, but we have no way of knowing what they said. It would be 150,000 years before the invention of writing. We have changed little from the earliest *Homo sapiens* and almost not at all since the birth of civilization; instead, we changed the world. That may explain why barely half the population believes we evolved



over time as opposed to being created in our present form.

The talking ape often tells lies. This morning I fed “polygraph” into the search engine on the *WN* archives, and got 42 hits going back to 1988. I said back then: “the polygraph can’t tell a lie from the sex act,” which is still literally true. Other countries also have liars and machines that lie about liars. Today in *Science* there is a news story by Adrian Cho involving a 2007 paper in *The International Journal of Speech, Language and the Law*, about a voice-analysis technique used by local governments in the UK to weed out welfare cheats. Two Swedish phoneticians reported the machine lies. If I was on welfare, I would be stressed whether I lied or not. The Israeli maker of the voice analyzer threatened to sue the journal, which obligingly yanked the paper.

The CIA’s better methods. You will recall that the most infamous double agent, Aldrich Ames, passed dozens of polygraph tests. Since then the agency has refined its lie detection methods. The new technology is called “waterboarding” and is said to take stress to the limit. Unfortunately, the quality of intelligence from the CIA remains a national disaster. Yesterday, Leon Panetta the former Democratic Congressman and White House Chief of Staff under Bill Clinton was confirmed by the Senate to head the CIA. Concerns were raised about his lack of intelligence experience. Is that a problem? Just give Panetta a big broom.

- *What’s New* by Robert L. Park, 13 February 2009

----- **Compounding a Supreme Error.**

The establishment clause of the First Amendment sets the U.S. apart from every other country in the world. It is an American gift. The town of Pleasant Grove, Utah, however, has a monument to the Ten Commandments in the city park in obvious violation of the establishment clause. The problem is that in 2005, the Supreme Court had declined to require Texas to remove a Ten Commandments monument from the grounds of the state capitol. This prompted Pleasant Grove to erect its own Ten Commandments monument. But then a group called Summum proposed to erect a similar monument bearing its Seven Aphorisms; the city refused. Summum may be a wacky religion, but after all, this is Utah. The case reached the U.S. Supreme Court, which on Wednesday unanimously



agreed with the city that religious displays on government property are “government speech” and under control of local government. It seems all but certain that there will be more Ten Commandment cases.

- *What’s New* by Robert L. Park, 27 February 2009

----- **Plans Have Not Gone Well With Climate Observation.**

First there was the Bush Administration’s shameful cancellation of the Deep Space Climate Observatory (DSCOVR) launch in 2000. The only fingerprints on that cancellation belong to Dick Cheney. This satellite would by now have settled the critical issue of the role of solar variation in global warming. Then, on Tuesday, the \$278 million Orbital Carbon Observatory, designed to measure greenhouse gas emissions, crashed shortly after launch. The good news is that the Omnibus Appropriations Bill that passed on Wednesday provides \$9 million for NASA to refurbish DSCOVR, which has been shut up in a Greenbelt, MD warehouse for 9 years.

- *What’s New* by Robert L. Park, 27 February 2009

----- **Michael Shermer Interview**

On Our Website: www.freeinquirygroup.org

An interview by Michael Shermer of Georgia Purdom, PhD; Research Scientist at Answers in Genesis Creationist Museum in Petersburg, KY. Michael Shermer has a long background in fundamentalist religion, he is the publisher of *The Skeptic* magazine and founder of the Sceptic Society, he holds a doctorate in psychology. His website is www.sceptic.com.

Georgia Purdom has earned a doctorate in molecular genetics from The Ohio State University. She has taught at Nazarene College for six years, and now is a full time researcher at AiG. Their website is www.answersingenesis.org. Dr Purdom comments about her studies: “. . . Darwinism, evolution, it never entered the picture. It wasn’t even a major part of the class I took . . .”

The interview ranges over several topics, from evolution to Jesus Christ. It provides considerable insight into the thinking of a highly trained creation scientist. Because it is six pages long, it is too large for *FigLeaves*. It can be found in the news section of our website, www.freeinquirygroup.org as a pdf.



This Was Written About Ten Years Ago, Has Anything Changed?

There seems to be a revival of the question whether religion and a belief in god are compatible with the methods and findings of science. At least the New York Times and Newsweek took up the question on the same date, and Patrick Glynn published an entire book on the subject. To me it all seems a slight breeze in a teacup, not even a tempest. Some of this argument is related to a recent finding, published in *Nature*, that some forty percent of scientists continue to believe in god, while the majority are unbelievers. This survey, in fact, was a reassessment of a similar inquiry eighty years earlier, and found no change in the proportion of scientist unbelievers.

Stephen Jay Gould, a professor of just about everything at Harvard, has come out with a new book in which he argues that religion and science are separate *magisteria*, that is different learned subjects, and never the twain shall meet. Eugenie Scott, the director of the anti-Creationist National Center for Science Education seem to agree that religion and science are different subjects which are not commensurate, they deal with different ideas and facts, and may well each be true in their own way.

I beg to differ. There are some aspects of religion which science has shown quite decisively and finally not to be true, creationism for instance, and even Gould and Scott would agree to that. We do need to be clear, however, what has and what has not been disproven. No scientific result is ever utterly and completely final, all insights are subject to later correction, emendation, extension, or even reversal in the light of later discoveries. In that sense all rational unbelievers are agnostics — we are willing to be shown we may be mistaken, and perhaps god(s) may exist. If someone were to come tomorrow to prove that God, indeed, created the world with his word 6002 years, 69 days, and 15 hours ago in such a way as to convince all the scientists of whatever culture, I think we too would believe it. The likelihood of that Genesis tale to be proven true is comparable to the probability of finding Santa Claus at the North Pole or the Easter Bunny in your backyard. In other words, there are some propositions geology, astronomy, and history which have been fairly decisively and finally shown to be false. We do not expect the earth to be proven flat, or the creation of the world

in the recent past.

We need to distinguish between religion and religion. Some religious claims are mere fairy tales which we have left behind and do not expect to revive. Zeus and the gods do not dwell on Mt. Olympus. The world was not created recently and there is no evidence of a world wide flood. It is highly unlikely that a man Jesus was the special son of God or redeemed mankind, nor did he return in short order as he promised. In short, to modern science the Bible stories have no more reality than the epics of Homer, or Wotan, Thor and the other gods which gave names to our weekdays. The same can be said for the Quran, the Baghavad-Gita, the Book or Mormon, and all the other holy books of the many and diverse religions of the world.

The scientific world view and the rational assessment of history have pretty well disproved the gods proposed by most or all of the world's religions. The rational mind is simply not impressed by sprinkling with holy water, blessed candles, graven images, or mumbled prayers. Given the lack of any reasonable religious proposition, I call myself an atheist. Although I'm willing to confess I may be wrong, and tomorrow's news may show me so, I don't really think anyone is going to find god any more than we'll find Santa Claus and his reindeer. Which leaves a number of major unanswered questions:

1. Why is there a universe at all, why is there something rather than nothing
2. Why have human beings developed a conscience.
3. Why do we return repeatedly and in all societies to the idea of gods, the

supernatural, or something out there?

4. Why do mathematics work? Why can humans think up a geometric construct, which later turns out as a major way in which the world is constructed?

5. Why is there evolution at all. Why did living things evolve after a billion years of earth history. Why did multi-celled living things evolve after four billion years of earth history, and humans with self-consciousness after 590 million years of multi-celled beings?

All of these questions may be the wrong questions, that is senseless question which do not or can not have an answer. But, if a scientist believes in a god, it has something to do with these questions, and the god is nature itself, or the force that makes mathematics work, or some power behind evolution of stars and life.

Sources: -
Sharon Begley, "Science finds God" *Newsweek* (20 July 1998) pp. 46-51
Patrick Glynn, *God: The Evidence, The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason in a Postsecular World* (Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing, 1997). Reviewed in *FIGLeaves* for July 1998.
George Johnson, "Science and Religion: Bridging the Great Divide" *New York Times* (30 June 1998)
Edward J. Larson and Larry Witham, "Scientists are still keeping the faith." *Nature* 386 (3 April 1997) 435-436.
James H. Leuba, *The Belief in God and Immortality: A Psychological, Anthropological, and Statistical Study*. (Chicago: Open Court Pub. Co. 1921) reprint of the 1916 edition.
Kenneth L. Woodward, "How the Heavens Go" *Newsweek* (20 July 1998) p. 52
[Editor] "Belief or unbelief?" *Cincinnati Skeptic* 5 (June 1996) p. 6
Kendrick Frazier, "NAS Scientists Highly Skeptical About ESP and PK, Survey Reveals." *Skeptical Inquirer* 16 (Spring 1992) 229-233.
Rodney Stark, Laurence R. Iannaccone, and Roger Finke, "Religion, Science, and Rationality." *American Economic Review* 86 (May 1996) 433-437.



The Flat Earth Society

“We’re On The Level!”

We have come to believe the concept of a spherical or round earth has been formulated merely to give a few so-called “thinkers” or “intellectuals” something to do, or pretend to do. There is little doubt the round-earth idea is based on “myth and ignorance” and the fallacies of globularist reasoning are striking:

1. We know Columbus is supposed to have proved the roundness of the earth. Yet, we also know that he sought to reach India by sailing west, but we must not forget that he failed miserably to find India, or for that matter any part of Asia.
2. If, as globularists contend, the earth is a sphere there can be no up or down. So what give them the right to place North America above South America, or Australia “down under?” Why don’t they leave cartography to those who know what they are doing.
3. These “thinkers” contend that the earth rotates about an *imaginary* axis between the *poles*.” The absurdity of this claim is self-evident. No doubt their cars have imaginary axes as well.
4. The original globularist theory has been modified so many times, that for all *they* know, the earth changes shape with the seasons! They went from a round earth to a pear shaped earth to a *slightly flattened* at the poles earth. The latter probably stems for a guilty conscience.
5. The whole issue gives them licence to speculate *at nauseam* as to what lies at the *center* of the earth. As children they probably dissected soft balls and now expect the same layers in the earth.

Can as much as one person in a hundred give a rational proof for that supposedly global shape which is so deeply imbedded in the popular imagination? (Geographers and similar “scientists” excepted.) The answer must be in the negative. Imagine if you dare, half the world living upside down, millions of people being whirled around at 1,000 mph – flashing through solar space at 67,000 mph and on top of that through galactic space at some 600,000 mph, not to mention all that spinning. No wonder that modern man is so disoriented and confused! If we cannot be certain the immense earth beneath our feet is essentially flat, absolutely immobile and at the very bottom of the universe, what then can one be certain about?

Aims of the Flat Earth Society:

1. To restore man’s and woman’s confidence in the validity of his own perceptions. For more than fifteen hundred years man has been blinded by metaphysics and coerced into denying the plain evidence of his senses. The Flat Earth Society stands for renewed faith in the veracity of sense experience.
2. To combat the fallacious deification of the sphere which, ever since Galileo dramatized the heresies of Copernicus, has thwarted Western thought.
3. To spearhead man’s and woman’s escape from his metaphysical and geometrical prison by asserting unequivocally that all science, like all philosophy and all religion is essentially sacramental and, therefore, all reality, as man verbalizes it, is ultimately metaphorical.

Source: Christine Garwood, *Flat Earth: The History of an Infamous Idea* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2007) pp. 285 -290 (modified excerpts)



Ezekiel’s Crazy Bread

{ A recipe from the Bible,
Ezekiel 4:9-15)

Ezekiel the priest was quite insane.
Such crazy things conceived within his brain.
Creatures with four mugs, half man, half beast.
Each face with dreadful eyes, seven at least.
And wings so huge they made a mighty roar,
Loins up, loins down, horrendous fire and more.
Ezekiel loved his god, and he was lead
To follow well god’s recipe for bread.
Use human dung, with barley, wheat and beans.
All Jews must eat this bread, though foul it seems
“Please, god, don’t make us use that human dung-”
“You know that I’ve each day your praises sung.”
“I cannot stomach human dung these days!”
God said, “You may use cow dung.” Begging pays.
Now, why did god force them to eat such bread?
“To punish their iniquity,” he said.
The Bible god is sure a mean old cuss!
His regulations cruel and numerous!

Dorothy B. Thompson



A Letter To The President Elect

January 13, 2009

Dear President-Elect Barack Obama:

In light of your campaign promise to bring the nation together in a spirit of change we need, we, the undersigned nontheist organizations, urge you to take this opportunity to signify that discrimination against atheists, agnostics, humanists, and other nontheists will not be condoned.

Thus we write to urge you to decline the title and role of honorary president of the Boy Scouts of America. The BSA has acted vigorously in recent years to expel atheist and agnostic members and employees. This policy expresses the Declaration of Religious Principle, Bylaws of Boy Scouts of America, art. IX, ' 1, cl. 1:

The Boy Scouts of America maintains that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing an obligation to God. In the first part of the Scout Oath or Promise the member declares, "On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law." The recognition of God as the ruling and leading power in the universe and the grateful acknowledgment of His favors and blessings are necessary to the best type of citizenship and are wholesome precepts in the education of the growing members.

The BSA has elected to set itself apart as a private organization that may discriminate in ways contrary to the laws and practices required of local, state, and federal authorities. Accepting the title and role of honorary president of the Boy Scouts of America would thus send the message that institutional discrimination against people who don't happen to believe in a god is acceptable.

Many presidents of the United States have taken on the title of honorary president of the Boy Scouts of America. However, this tradition was established when discrimination against nontheists was, unfortunately, socially acceptable. Given that nontheists now make up a sizeable minority of the American population--having more numbers than Mormons, Buddhists, Hindus, and Jews combined--the BSA is clearly out of touch with the spirit of pluralism, tolerance, and inclusiveness that compose today's American values. By contrast, in 1993 the Girl Scouts of the United States of America adopted more inclusive policies.

Therefore, please decline the title and role of honor-

ary president of the Boy Scouts of America until such time as the organization reforms its bylaws and practices to be non-discriminatory.

Yours in unity,

American Atheists American Ethical Union American Humanist Association Atheist Alliance International-Atheist Nexus Camp Quest Center for Atheism Center for Inquiry Center for Naturalism Council for Secular Humanism Freedom From Religion Foundation-FreeThoughtAction HUUmanists Institute for Humanist Studies International Federation for Secular & Humanistic Judaism Military Association of Atheists and Free-thinkers Secular Coalition for America Secular Student Alliance Society for Humanistic Judaism ☸



One of the childhood homes of Barack Obama, where he lived with his mother, S. Ann Dunham.

Barack Obama's new home.

PRESIDENT OBAMA:

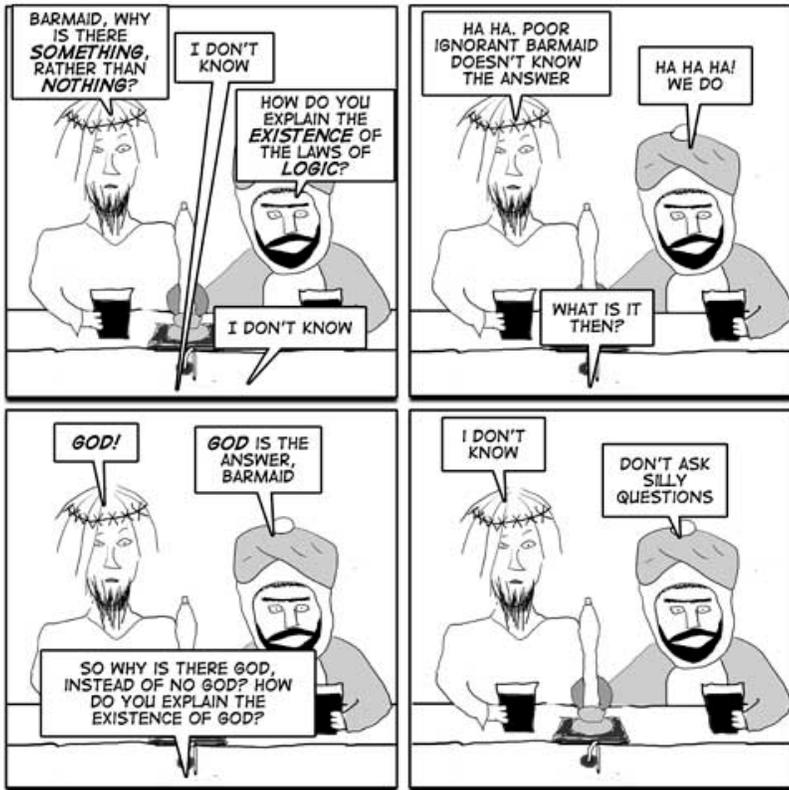


"I was not raised in a religious household. . . . Without the help of religious texts or outside authorities, [my mother] worked mightily to instill in me the values that many Americans learn in Sunday school: honesty, empathy, discipline, delayed gratification, and hard work. She raged at poverty and injustice. Most of all, she possessed an abiding sense of wonder, a reverence for life and its precious, transitory nature. . . ."

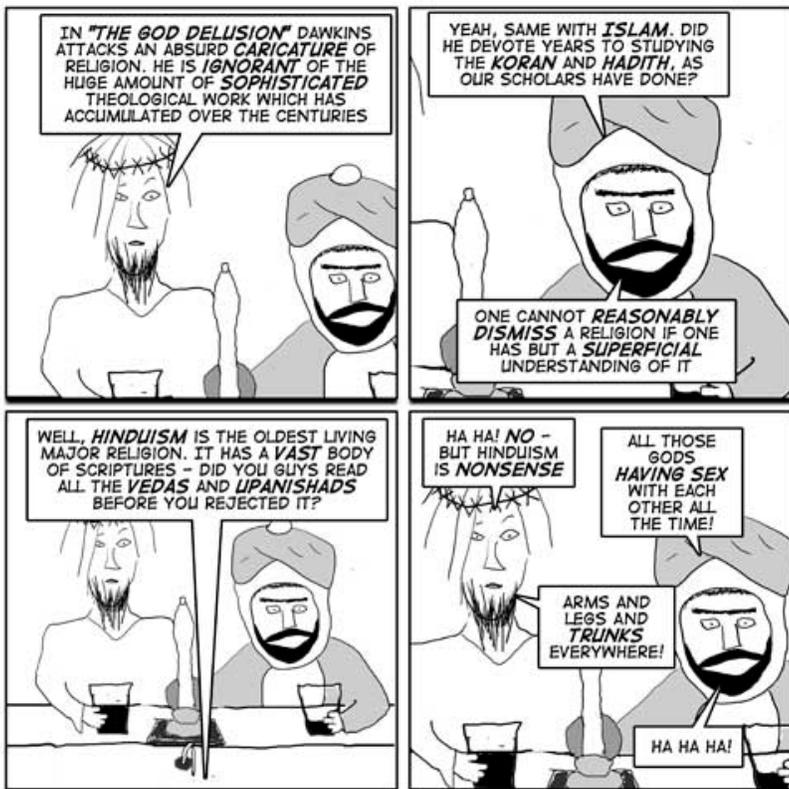
"Given the increasing diversity of America's population, the dangers of sectarianism have never been greater. Whatever we once were, we are no longer just a Christian nation; we are also a Jewish nation, a Muslim nation, a Buddhist nation, a Hindu nation, and a nation of nonbelievers."

—Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope*

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What God Did!



In the beginning, God covered the earth with broccoli, cauliflower and spinach, with green and yellow and red vegetables of all kinds, so Man and Woman would live long and healthy lives. Then, using God's bountiful gifts, Satan created Ben and Jerry's and Krispy Kreme. And Satan said: "You want hot fudge with that?"

And Man said: "Yes!"

And Woman said: "I'll have one, too...with sprinkles." And lo they gained ten pounds. And God created the healthful yogurt that Woman might keep the figure that Man found so fair. And Satan brought forth white flour from the wheat, and sugar from the cane, and combined them. And Woman went from a size two to size fourteen.

So God said: "Try my fresh green garden salad." And Satan presented crumbled Bleu Cheese dressing and garlic toast on the side. And Man and Woman unfastened their belts following the repast.

God then said: "I have sent you heart-healthy vegetables and olive oil in which to cook them." And Satan brought forth deep-fried coconut shrimp butter-dipped lobster chunks, and chicken-fried steak so big it needed its own platter. And Man's cholesterol went through the roof. Then God brought forth the potato, naturally low in fat and brimming with potassium and good nutrition. Then Satan peeled off the healthful skin, sliced the starchy center into chips and deep-fried them in animal fats adding copious quantities of salt. And Man packed on more pounds.

God then brought forth running shoes so that his children might lose those extra pounds. And Satan introduced cable TV with remote control so Man would not have to toil changing the channels. And Man and Woman laughed and cried before the flickering light and started wearing stretchy lycra jogging suits. God then gave lean beef so that Man might consume fewer calories and still satisfy his appetite.

And Satan created McDonald's and the 99-cent double cheeseburger. Then Satan said: "You want fries with that?" And Man replied: "Yes! And super size 'em!" And Satan said: "It is good." And Man and Woman went into cardiac arrest.

God sighed...and created quadruple by-pass surgery.

Satan chuckled and created HMOs.





*Challenging Nature: The Clash Of Science
And Spirituality At The New Frontiers Of Life*
by Lee M. Silver
(New York: HarperCollins Pub. 2006)

Richard Dawkins in *The God Delusion* doesn't bother to show why god is not, he merely finds him extremely improbable. It's Victor Stenger in *God: The Failed Hypothesis* who confirms that god is incompatible with the science of physics. The arguments of physics have been either accepted, – Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, – or, are frankly incomprehensible to *hoi polloi* and thus their religious implication ignored. Lee Silver shows the modern insights of biology make the Christian god impossible. The biological arguments run head on into the idiocy of the creationists, the anti-GM crowd, the souls of embryos believers, the afraid of cloning folks, the organic farming nuts, and other such uninformed would-be-thinkers.

Silver is a molecular biologist, a scientist familiar with DNA, genes, and the research on the functioning and nature of the brain. There is no soul, no spirit, no ghost in the reality of biology, there is no *homunculus* living inside your head, and Silver will tell you how love, sex, and animal spirits work. To true believers in god and the human spirit, Silver will appear an arrogant know-it-all, but in the world of science, and this includes the biological science of the human mind, only facts and evidence persuade. And Silver is very good at explaining just what the facts, the present state of knowledge, are.

The biologist examines the nature of human beings by extensive consideration of freaks of nature, particularly conjoined twins and split brain adult patients. In these cases we can count human body parts, heads, legs, brains, and hearts. But, how many souls if any. Pretty soon Silver is attacked and demonized by an extremely conservative columnist. "Instead, in his emotionally laden script aimed at demonizing human embryo research, he trapped me into playing the bit role of an immoral modern-day Dr. Frankenstein." (p. 168) and "Repugnance is the emotional expression of deep wisdom, beyond reason's power fully

to articulate it. ... Shallow are the souls [of scientists] that have forgotten how to shudder." (p. 169, quoting Leon R. Kass and James Q. Wilson.) The trouble of course is that neither repugnance, nor emotion, nor deep wisdom will get us an understanding of the human brain and body. Many of the critics feel cocksure certain that full attempts to understand how living creatures work are doomed to fail. On the left there is a tendency to equate bio-science research with profit grasping pharmaceutical and agro-chemical corporations. On the conservative and religious right the tendency is to invoke god's authority, and pronounce life, mind and soul as irreducibly complex and mysterious.

In the world of the biological scientist there is no reason why something "natural" would be better or healthier than something else. In fact, in science there is no such concept as natural, for whatever exists, exists in nature. There is absolutely no reason why organically grown plants and animals are better or different than those grown with "artificial" fertilizer or chemical compounds. Before a chemical can enter the rootlets of a plant, it must be broken down into simple molecules or radicals. And these don't know or remember if they derived from dead plants or compressed air in a factory. In fact, organic farming was first propounded by the Austrian religious writer and mystic Rudolf Steiner in 1924 (p. 228). Steiner was a follower of theosophy and editor of the scientific works of Johann Wolfgang Goethe, but lacked all knowledge of modern science or any experience in agriculture.

As bio-technology becomes more sophisticated who should chose the actions to take. Do we expect the government and its Council on Bioethics to make the rules. Who, for instance, should determine the sex of your baby? God, the doctor, the parents, or let nature take its course? Most of us think people should not usurp the power of god or of mother nature acting as a post-Christian god substitute. But in fact, individual parents here, in India and China, go right ahead and do chose the sex of their babies. Religion, in the long run, does not win. If you want to understand the hard nosed position of modern biology without mysticism, this is the book to read. ☘

– Wolf Roder





April 2009 Potluck
Tuesday April 14, 2009



March Meeting
Sunday Mar. 22 2009, 2:00 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.