

FIG LEAVES

Volume 17 Issue 10

October 2008

October FIG Meeting:

Tuesday Oct. 28, 7:00 PM
at the Vernon Manor

Voter Information Evening

Since this is an election year and we are living in a swing region, most of us have been saturated by the presidential coverage, but maybe haven't taken the chance to review all of the other candidates and issues that will be on the ballot when we vote, so come out to the October FIG meeting and join in a conversation.

Here's how the evening will work: As members enter, they will receive a ballot and have a chance to look up their Districts and write down their races - Computer terminals will be available. To begin the meeting, we will set some ground rules to guide discussion and then we will go through the different races all the way from President and Congressional Representatives to County Commissioner and Issue 6 (its the gambling issue if you need a hint). Issues in Kentucky and Ohio will be covered. For each candidate or issue, the conversation will start by sharing the background and position statements from League of Women Voters. Then members can share their knowledge or experience and provide a rationale for why they are supporting a candidate or position. The conversations will be respectful and lively and by the end of the evening you will walk out with a completed ballot that you can take with you to the polls as a reference when you vote!

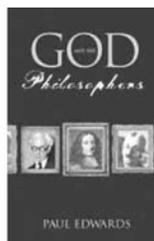
Already voted? - please join us to share your experience and join in the discussion. The more viewpoints, the richer the conversations. **Feel free to invite your friends to join us for the evening.**

FIG and its board do not endorse candidates or issues. This event is provided to help educate and inform our membership.

December Fig Meeting:

Tuesday, 16 Dec. 7 pm at the Vernon Manor

Tim Madigan will discuss the forthcoming volume, *God and the Philosophers*, by the well known philosopher Paul Edwards. The book is being published posthumously as professor Edwards died in December 2004. Tim Madigan is the editor of the book.



Inside

Page

September Meeting	2
Poem: Two Lines by Ed Kagen.	3
Things to do, Things to see	4
Science Book Club.....	4
In the News	5
Louisiana Enacts "Science Education" Act	9
Biology, Darwin & the Shoah.	10
<i>God In The White House: A History How Faith Shaped The Presidency From John F. Kennedy To George W. Bush</i> By Randall Balmer Book Review By Wolf Roder	11

George Maurer Is Recuperating

After two brief stays in Christ Hospital, George Maurer is at the Hyde Park Health Center recuperating from a fall at home. George broke three ribs and punctured one lung. His healing was complicated by the need to insert a drain to remove blood from the lung. He doesn't know how long his recovery will take.

Until he is stronger in a few days, you may send your good wishes to George via: <joelevee (at) gmail.com>

Events (note date/time changes)

October Meeting

Tuesday , Oct. 28, 2008, 7:00 PM
at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, OH

November Meeting

No Meeting -enjoy Thanksgiving!

December Potluck

No Potluck - Enjoy the holidays!

Dec. Mtg - Dec 28.



September Meeting

On Raising Ethical, Caring Kids without Religion

by Dale McGowan, PhD

Dale McGowan was not deterred even after several book publishers had rejected his idea for a book. His goal was too important to him. It was to write a book designed to help secular parents raise caring and ethical children without religion. Being a secular parent himself, he had searched the available literature on raising children and found it severely lacking from a secular perspective. That's when he decided to write a book specifically about secular parenting.

Dale is well qualified to write this book. He holds degrees in the arts and sciences and a doctorate from UC Berkeley and the University of Minnesota. In addition to a 15 year teaching career (he taught critical thinking), he was editor and featured essayist for the Family Issues section of the *Atheist Alliance Web Center*. He has gained the most valuable knowledge and experience from raising three children with his wife.

After several publishers' rejections Dale got some unexpected help. Books by Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, and Christopher Hitchens hit the best-seller lists promoting secularism. This finally got the publishers' attention and changed some minds about Dale's book. It was published as a collection of essays on parenting without religion in 2007. It is titled *Parenting Beyond Belief: On Raising Ethical, Caring Kids Without Religion* and has sold over 15,000 copies.

The book presents helpful reflections on child-rearing from some of today's most prominent freethinkers, including Richard Dawkins; Julia Sweeney; Penn Jillette; and Dan Barker. The Foreword is written by Michael Shermer and humor is provided in an essay by Mark Twain. One chapter by Amanda Metskas and August Brunsman is about Camp Quest. There are four essays by Dale himself, who says he was surprised how much consensus was reached by such a diverse group of authors. Approaches to parenting and teaching include encouraging critical thinking, dealing with death, exploring the meaning of life, appreciating the wonders of nature, and exposing children to religion without indoctrination.

Dale is a proponent of teaching comparative religion. He uses a good book (one that does not proselytize) of bible stories and a good book of mythology. Hearing these stories, children will learn to compare them and understand on their own that they are just stories. There is very little teaching involved.

Death is one of the hardest topics to discuss with children, especially since it is not until the age of 8 to 10 that they start to personalize or internalize the reality that it happens to everyone, including their pet and themselves. Dale takes a very naturalistic approach, noting that our upcoming lack of existence is no different than the lack of existence before we were born. He stresses that life is precious. Dale talks to his own children about the many thousands of contingent events which had



Dale McGowan



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

fignote @ fuse.net;

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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One year: \$25

Family: \$35

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

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



to happen in just the right way for their existence to occur.

The wonders of nature is a favorite topic for Dale. Religious wonder he has always found rather “flat and hollow.” Wonder can be experienced without religion by contemplating the vastness of our universe and the miracle of our existence. As Dale puts it, “We inhabit a universe made of a curved fabric woven of space and time in which hydrogen, given the proper conditions, eventually evolves into Yo Yo Ma.”

Dale encourages his children to ask questions, especially about religion and morality. He often reframes their questions to help them to think in different ways. This encourages critical thinking. He doesn't automatically deny religion, but gives the kids the information and skills to figure the question for themselves. Instead of saying that an action is “wrong,” he encourages them to imagine and understand what the consequences of their actions would be. If the consequences are bad then that is what makes the action wrong, not just being against the rules or because, “I said so!”

Dale posits that the three main qualities to instill in children are; being able to think well, having a good self image, and being based in reality. These qualities make it less likely that a child will be influenced by superstition, but will have the skills to be an autonomous adult, and be a life long learner.

Dale has a new book to be released in February. It is entitled *Raising Freethinkers* and examines 100 questions from parents who have visited his website; <<http://parentingbeyondbelief.com/>>. It offers solutions to some of the unique challenges posed by secular parenting and includes 100 activities for parents and children. No doubt it will be as insightful, informative, and delightful as Parenting Beyond Belief.



Dale McGowan & Family

It should also be as entertaining as Dale's seminars and lectures.

– Reported by John Welty



TWO LINES

The future waits in one of two great lines, two endless human queues
And each of us is in one line—there is no other line to choose.

Our journey as human creatures has fashioned these two lines
With very different features following very different signs.

Through kingdoms and through ages these lines unbroken run
One line snaking into darkness; one line straining for the sun.

One line holds shining visions of what humankind can be
When at last we make decisions free of myth and tyranny.

Our race, our creeds, our sex, and the religions we proclaim
In this line yield to human needs we cannot always name.

Some careless few within this line may hurt you and make you cry
But villains in the other line will kill you to watch you die.

Those marching in that other line seek to control not to achieve
By trying to deceive our minds with lies that they believe.

Prizing money over friendship, and power over human need
They do not work for kinship but only for their greed.

Anyone can leave their line, whenever they see fit
If perhaps they change their mind, from facts, or acts or wit.

No one must stay within a line where rules are learned by rote
That dictate how we all must live, and breed, and love, and vote.

In the coming great election, one line will finally decide
If our future takes direction from the bright or evil side.

Set aside all pious passion of who you are and where you have been
What now must be in fashion is “Which line are you in?”

How will you answer to the future when a new world starts to dawn
How will you tell your children which side of history you were on?

There are but two great questions to be raised when life must end,
“How did you use your roads and days?” And “Which line were you in?”

By Edwin Kagin

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If you make money on this, I want some of it. ek





THINGS TO DO....

THINGS TO SEE...



Media Events/Programs

The Humanist Perspective

Show times on Time-Warner Cable:

Note Channel and Time changes:

September 6, 2008 thru September 5, 2009.

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

Channel 24: Friday 12:30 pm.

Programs:

14-18 Oct: *America's War on Sex, Part 1,*
with Marty Klein

21-24 Oct: *America's War on Sex, Part 2,*
with Marty Klein

28-31 Oct: *America's War on Sex, Part 3,*
with Marty Klein

4-7 Nov: *A New Leader,* with Ronald A. Lindsay

11-14 Nov: *Future Bioethics,* with Ronald A. Lindsay

The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup

When: Monday, Oct. 20 at 7:00PM - 10:00 PM

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

Meetup Description

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 Cincinnati Atheists Meetup

When: Tuesday, 21 October 2008; 7:30 PM

Where: Cincinnati Museum Center at Union Terminal 1301 Western Ave.; Cincinnati OH 45203; (513) 287-7000

Meetup Description

7:30 - 10:00 PM,

Lecture: New Ways of Looking at Dinosaur Evolution
Held at the Museum in Reakirt Auditorium

Presented by: Dr. Michael J. Benton

These are exciting times for dinosaur experts - new dinosaur species are being announced at the rate of two a month, many of them from exotic parts of the world, and new methods enable palaeontologists to explore the life and times of these giant beasts with ever-greater audacity. Dr. Michael Benton will explore what we know about the evolution of dinosaurs, their origin, rise to pre-eminence and eventual extinction.

A book signing will follow the lecture.

Dr. Michael J. Benton is Professor of Vertebrate Palaeontology at the University of Bristol, and leader of one of the largest and most dynamic research groups in palaeontology in Europe. He has studied dinosaur origins and evolution for the past thirty years and is especially interested in innovative methods. Dr. Benton has been awarded numerous medals and prizes, and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 2008. Dr. Benton received a B.S. in Zoology from the University of Aberdeen and a Ph.D. from the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Free and open to the public.

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

SCIENCE BOOK CLUB 2008 Schedule - all meetings will be held on the 3rd Sunday of each month at the downtown Cincinnati Public Library in Room 3A at 2:30 PM.

Oct. 19 Pauline Smolin: *In Search of Memory: the Emergence of a New Science of the Mind* by Eric Kandel

Nov 16 Gary Weiss: *What we believe but cannot prove: today's leading thinkers on science in the age of certainty* ed. by John Brockman

Dec 21 Randy Weaver: *Into the cool energy flow, thermodynamics, and life* by Eric D. Schneider

Jan 18, 2009 - Dr. Richard Bozian: *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* by Antonio Damasio





A Documentary Film: *The Stoning of Soraya M.*

At the Toronto International Film Festival this September, the debut of Cyrus Nowrasteh's film *The Stoning of Soraya M.*, based on a true story, confronted the audience with all the gruesome and horrifying details of a barbarian ritual that is

still being executed in today's Iran.

Officially there is no stoning in Iran. The head of judiciary, Ayatollah Mohmoud Hashemi-Shahrudi, under pressure of an international protest, ordered a moratorium on stoning in 2002. But still there have been several people stoned to death since then. In July 2007, the case of Jafar Kiani, stoned to death in Qazvin (north east Iran), caused an international outcry. In May 2006, Abbas H and Mahbubeh A were stoned to death in Mashhad (north east Iran). In 2007, the Islamic Supreme Court of Iran upheld several death sentences by stoning. In January 2008, Amnesty International called for Iran to abolish execution by stoning. At that time at least nine people, sentenced to death by stoning, were waiting for their execution. Strong protest from Iran and abroad during the next months pressed for the sentences to be commuted - but it is not yet clear if the victims are really saved. Meantime the National Council of Resistance of Iran and human rights organisations report about the cases of Gilan Mohammadi, a 30-year-old woman, and the Afghan national, Gholamali Eskandari, both sentenced to death by stoning and awaiting their sentences to be carried out in Isfahan prison in central Iran.

The stoning of Soraya M happened some twenty years ago and was described in 1990 by the French-Iranian journalist Freidoune Sahejan in his book of the same title. It is the story of a mother of nine children, who is wrongly accused of adultery by her husband Ali, because he wants to get rid of her to marry a younger woman. Suddenly the innocent and helpless Soraya is an outcast, stripped of basic human rights, marked like a sacrificial animal. She is to become the object of a gory and blood thirsty ritual that unites the conspiring male community in destruction of the evil that she is claimed to represent. The film rolls slowly from detail to detail: stones are collected - not too big, as they should not kill fast, her body is ritually washed, wrapped in a white

shroud and carried on a stretcher to the stoning ground. Her hands are tied behind her back. She is buried up to the armpits - and the macabre ritual unfolds. Her two sons are forced to abjure her and join the stone throwers.

The film is made by people who have personal experience with the fear of fundamentalism in power. Director Cyrus Nowrasteh is an Iranian-American whose family had to flee Iran after the revolution. When lead actress Shohreh Aghdashloo, another Iranian-American, once spoke to a reporter in the USA about torture victims in Iran, Iranian police arrested her brother and kept him in prison for a year.

- *Rationalist International Bulletin* no. 178 (27 September 2008)

CFI Office of Public Policy Objects To Proposed HHS Regulation

By Ronald A. Lindsay

In a bold move in the waning days of the Bush administration, the Secretary of Health and Human Services has issued a proposed regulation that would greatly expand the ability of health care workers to refuse to provide services because of their religious beliefs. This regulation could have a serious adverse impact on patient care. The thin rationale for the proposed regulation, known as the "Provider Conscience Regulation," is that supposedly there is confusion about the requirements of federal law and some individuals might be reluctant to enter the health care professions because they fear they would be forced to perform procedures to which they object. In announcing its proposed rule, HHS supplied no empirical data to support these assertions.

The proposed regulation effectively gives health care workers an absolute and broad right to refuse to provide or participate in any service to which they object. The regulation states that it will apply to "any activity with a reasonable connection to a procedure" to which the health care worker objects. The regulation itself indicates it could cover a worker who refuses to clean surgical instruments because they may be used in an operation that offends his "conscience." Moreover, the regulation makes no effort to balance the needs of the patient with the objections of the nurse, pharmacist, or technician. This places the regulation in stark contrast to other laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of religion, which do not permit workers to refuse to provide services if that refusal has significant adverse consequences for others. The regulation also would impose onerous reporting



and certification requirements on health care institutions—resulting in tens of millions of dollars in extra expenditures.

The proposed regulation would affect all those with health care needs, but would have an especially severe impact on women and their reproductive rights, especially in light of the recent trend by pharmacists and others to refuse provide emergency contraception based on the erroneous and scientifically unsupported belief that this means of preventing pregnancy results in an abortion. Because the regulation provides no definition of “abortion,” the “conscience” of the objecting health care worker can define it as s/he sees fit.

The Office of Public Policy for the Center for Inquiry has vigorously opposed the Provider Conscience regulation since it was first announced, and has helped to organize public opposition to implementation of the regulation. On September 25, 2008, the OPP submitted official comments analyzing and criticizing the proposed regulation. The OPP’s comments, for example, pointed out that there was no factual record to support the proposed regulation and the proposed regulation is inconsistent with existing federal law on employment discrimination.

A copy of the OPP’s comments may be found at: http://www.centerforinquiry.net/images/photos/CFI_HHS_word_final_comment1_2.pdf

Ronald A. Lindsay is Chief Executive Officer of the Center for Inquiry and Executive Director of the Council for Secular Humanism.

Dawkins’ Website Blocked In Turkey By Court Order.

If you are in Turkey and try to visit Richard Dawkins’ website <www.richarddawkins.net>, you will currently find nothing but the note: “The access to the site has been banned by court order”. Istanbul’s 2nd Criminal Court of Peace ordered the Turkish Telecom to block access to the highly popular website upon complaint by Adnan Oktar alias Harun Yahya who claims that the site contains insulting remarks about him and his work.

Harun Yahya is a messianic campaigner for an Islamic version of creationism, who tries to “expose” Darwin’s theory of evolution as the greatest fraud in the history of science. This bustling anti-science-zealot has enormous funds from unknown sources at his disposal. He tries to



spread his numerous books, articles and films against evolution in various languages through the Internet. In 2006, he produced a weighty and glossy opus of 800 pages with the name Atlas of Creation and sent 10,000 copies to scientists, journalists, media and schools all over Europe. One of the recipients was Prof. Richard Dawkins. The prominent evolution specialist described the book on his website as “preposterous” and noted he was at “a loss to reconcile the expensive and glossy production values of this book with the “breathtaking inanity” of the content. (Richard Dawkins, *Venomous-Snakes-Slippery-Eels-and-Harun-Yahya*). Oktar filed a lawsuit for the damages of mental anguish in the amount of 8000 TL (about 4000 Euro) against the Oxford professor.

Earlier, Adnan Oktar tried and failed to ban the Turkish version of Richard Dawkins’ famous book *The God Delusion*. The Turkish publisher was sued and acquitted. Oktar’s claim that the book was blasphemous was rejected by the court. The book became a best-seller in Turkey. Dawkins’ book *The Ancestor’s Tale* - written before, but in Turkey published after *The God Delusion* - was released and sold out in a single day.

After the enforcement of a new Internet law in May 2008, Internet censorship is rampant in Turkey. More than 850 sites have already been blocked. Sites can be banned for various reasons: if their content is deemed to be harmful to children, to encourage use of drugs, gambling, prostitution, pornography or suicide, to support the Kurdish cause or to contain insults against Kamal Atatürk, the founder of Turkey. The video sharing site Youtube for example is banned in Turkey for four months already for containing videos allegedly insulting to the memory of Atatürk. For Adnan Oktar and his associates, the new censorship law is a “heaven-sent” opportunity. Besides Richard Dawkins’ website, they managed to get Google Groups and WordPress.com blocked with the claim that some groups and blogs on these sites contained libelous material.

Oktar is currently appealing a three-year prison sentence imposed for creating an illegal organisation for personal gain.

- Rationalist International Bulletin no. 178 (27 September 2008)





Another Talk About Faith.

Almost a year ago we discussed different meanings of the word “faith.” Dictionaries list at least two meanings: total confidence based on scientific evidence, and spiritual conviction regardless of the evidence. In science, refuting an accepted belief is celebrated as an advance in knowledge; in religion it is condemned as heresy.

Operationally, the scientific and religious uses of faith are thus exactly opposite. We used the Templeton Prize to illustrate this problem.

Three months ago, however, John Templeton died, prompting an editorial in *Nature* on the “Templeton Legacy.” Noting that Templeton had poured more than \$1.5 billion into “research at the interface of science and spirituality,” *Nature* concluded that concerns of scientists over conflating science and religion are “unwarranted.” Translation: money is money. To quote John Templeton, “So we are encouraging people to start using the same methods of science that have been so productive in other areas, in order to discover spiritual realities.” An atom smasher maybe? I have no doubt “spiritual realities” will be discovered, as long as the Templeton Prize remains larger than the Nobel.

Creationism: It often seems that creationism is a peculiarly American affliction, but in the UK last month it infected, of all places, the Royal Society. Michael Reiss, the Royal Society’s director of education, appeared to endorse the teaching of creationism - worse, Reiss, a biologist, is also an ordained priest in the Church of England. This outraged Richard Roberts, 1993 Nobel prize for gene splicing; he was joined by Harry Kroto, 1996 Nobel prize in Chemistry, and John Sulston, 2002 Nobel prize in Medicine, in demanding that Reiss step down or be fired. Reiss resigned, and there is now discussion of a rules change to make sure clergy cannot fill such positions. That won’t rule me out. For those who of us who are neither Nobelists nor billionaires, however, what are our options?

Write a book: The circulation of *Nature* is larger than that of *What’s New* by Bob Park - by a few orders of magnitude. Moreover, I am highly unlikely to be chosen for the Templeton Prize. In desperation, I wrote a book, *Superstition: Belief in the Age of Science*. Published by Princeton University Press, the book explains why superstitious convictions persist long after they are shown



to be ill-founded. Like everything else on our planet, the explanation involves evolution, and the book discusses the continuing evolution of *Homo sapiens*. The book is reviewed in the October issue of *Nature Physics* by Michael Shermer, publisher of *Skeptic* magazine and author of *Why People Believe Weird Things*.

- *What’s New* by Robert L. Park, 3 October 2008

Should There Be A Religious Test For Scientists?

Last week we reported that Michael Reiss, education director of the Royal Society and an ordained priest in the Church of England, was pressured to step down. He was quoted, incorrectly I’m told, as favoring teaching of intelligent design. Several readers said Reiss was unfairly dealt with; one asked if I favored a religious test in my department. Maybe. We have a number of deeply religious faculty members; they interpret sacred texts that conflict with scientific fact metaphorically. It’s not my taste, but I don’t have a problem with it. I would, however, vote against appointment of a physicist who believes the world is 6,000 years old.

- *What’s New* by Robert L. Park, 10 October 2008

Remind Me, Why Did We Build The International Space Station?

Established by Congress on July 29, 1958, NASA is finding its 50th year to be a tough one. The rickety space shuttle fleet is due to be retired in 2010 for safety and cost reasons. For five years, that will leave no way for the US to ferry astronauts to the ISS. No problem, shrugs the White House Office of Management and Budget, just hire the Russians to do it for us. Oops, differences with Russia over North Korea and Iran led to a trade embargo with Russia. NASA got an exemption to the embargo allowing it to buy Soyuz rides. Of course, that was before relations with Russia turned sour over Georgia. So, to keep the ISS alive we should make nice to Russia? Name one thing we’ve learned from the ISS?

A modest space proposal. In a perfect launch Thursday night, China sent three taikonauts on a mission that will include China’s first spacewalk. Their next goal is a space station. As in Apollo, the primary objective is political; they aim to reach the Moon before the US can return. But China also attaches great importance to space exploration for military and commercial purposes. While the benefits of a space program are undeniable, there is





no evidence that dragging Homo sapiens along has been anything but a burden to the first two space-faring nations. I therefore propose once again that in the interests of world peace we simply give the ISS to China. Let China pay the space station bills. After all, every Yuan spent in space is a Yuan not spent on earthly adventures.

- *What's New* by Robert Park, 26 September 2008



Panic Now: "All We Have To Fear" Is Four More Months.

As we prepare to spend a trillion dollars we don't have to bail out his administration, George II emerged from isolation yesterday to offer his version of Franklin Roosevelt's famous 1933 speech to the nation in the depths of the great depression: "The American people are concerned about the situation in our financial markets and our economy," Bush lamented. "And I share their concerns." Feel better now?

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 19 September 2008

The "Gathering Storm" Is Now Raging

Norm Augustine wrote a powerful editorial in yesterday's issue of *Science*. Retired as CEO of Lockheed, Augustine chaired the NAS committee that three years ago issued *the Gathering Storm*, a report that called for doubling the investment in math, physical sciences and engineering. However, funds to implement the Gathering Storm recommendations were lost in an orgy of congressional earmarking of projects for local districts. Where, Augustine asks, were the voices of those who understood the consequences? More than half the increase in the U.S. gross domestic product is attributable to advances in science and technology. It is ironic that his editorial appeared even as the U.S. economy is teetering on the edge of total collapse.

Would the candidates settle for a pop-quiz?

Unable to arrange a face-to-face debate between Obama and McCain on science issues, the dedicated team at Science Debate 2008 asked for written responses to 14 questions. The 35 pages of staff-written responses they got back served only to make it clear why a face-to-face debate was needed - it would have had a time limit. I would wager the candidates didn't even have time to read their responses. Maybe it should have been multiple-choice questions, or even true-false. We thank the organizers for seeing it through, but the answers didn't "restore science and innovation to America's political dialogue" as we all had hoped.

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 19 September 2008

Freedom For Religion Sunday:

Who in the name of god? Conservative Christian ministers are planning to take to their pulpits Sunday and publicly endorse a candidate for President. They hope to provoke a challenge to the law that bars those religious organizations that accept tax-deductible contributions from involvement in political campaigns. Who do they think they are, God?

- *What's New* by Robert Park, 26 September 2008

Do take a look at the "Defend Science" website! Scientists Try To Stand Up For Evolution.

Excerpts from a statement warning that science in the U.S. "is under attack as never before," appeared as an ad in major newspapers this week. The statement www.defendscience.org has 2300 signatories including 14 Nobel laureates. It is inconceivable to scientists that any rational person could deny the truth of evolution. Why run the ad this week, you may ask?

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 12 September 2008

.....

● *Quote* ●

● **On Design: He Thought Of Every Thing:** ●

● **Charles Darwin To American Botanist Asa Gray,** ●

● **1861** ●

● Your question what would convince me of De- ●

● sign is a poser. If I saw an angel come down to teach ●

● us good, & I was convinced, from others seeing him, ●

● that I was not mad, I shd. believe in design. — If I ●

● could be convinced thoroughly that life & mind was ●

● in an unknown way a function of other imponderable ●

● forces, I shd. be convinced. — If man was made of ●

● brass or iron & no way connected with any other ●

● organism which had ever lived, I shd perhaps be ●

● convinced. But this is childish writing. — ●

● I have lately been corresponding with Lyell, who, ●

● I think, adopts your idea of the stream of variation ●

● having been led or designed. I have asked him (& he ●

● says he will hereafter reflect & answer me) whether ●

● he believes that the shape of my nose was designed. ●

● If he does, I have nothing more to say. ●

● *Unquote* ●

●.....



Louisiana Enacts “Science Education” Act

By Sheldon F. Gottlieb

Recently, Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal signed into law *Louisiana Senate Bill 733* (the “Science Education Act”), which gives teachers the right to introduce into the classroom “supplemental textbooks and other instructional materials” about evolution, the origins of life, global warming, and human cloning. This material is not required to meet even the minimal standards of academic legitimacy set by scientifically respected agencies or be approved by the state’s Department of Education. By adopting this bill, the governor and state legislature, under the tutelage of the Discovery Institute of Seattle, Washington—the country’s leading think tank for intelligent design—undermining the state’s K-12 science standards and forcing religion into the public schools.

This legislation was enacted despite the advice and efforts of teachers and scientists in Louisiana. I myself appeared on the Jeff Crouere radio talk-show for almost an hour arguing against the passage of the Science Education Act. What this law permits is unconscionable. Allowing any material in the classroom that discredits empirically derived knowledge is inane. Pandering politicians have been allowed to abjure the First Amendment and destroy what Jefferson termed the “separation of church and state”—just to further the political agenda of the fundamentalist religious segment of society.

One cannot help but wonder whether this is Louisiana’s delayed response to the defeat it suffered in the Supreme Court in 1987 when it lost the *Edwards v. Aguillard* case, in which Louisiana’s “Creationism Act” was held to be unconstitutional. The Creationism Act prohibited the teaching of evolution in public schools except when it was accompanied by instruction in “creation science.” The Court also found that a comprehensive science education program is undermined when evolution cannot be taught except alongside creation science. It was in that case that Justice Scalia wrote a dissenting legal/political (not scientific) opinion in which he argued for the teaching of religion to be coequal to science in the public school system. He showed himself to be a scientific illiterate and supporter of religiously based anti-intellectualism.

Concern about the appointment of Supreme Court justices and their rulings in the future should not be limited to subjects such as the reproductive rights gained in *Roe v. Wade*. Science education is also at risk. Issues of science are supposed to be settled in the laboratory, not a court of law. However, since curricula development has a political

component associated with it, religious fanatics will strive to win in the political arena. That is why the fundamentalist Religious Right wants more justices like Anton Scalia and Clarence Thomas appointed to the Supreme Court.

The consequences will be severe if this comes to pass. The American and global economy is dependent on advances in science and technology. Any country that does not maintain a high standard of science education will be undermining its economy and world status by failing to have the necessary scientific and technological base required for its support. Also in the Christianizing of American politics, especially since the 1980s and rapidly escalating with President George W Bush’s “faith-based” agenda, there is the danger of the rise of the Christian Taliban. Unless the citizenry is vigilant, it will be upon them with virtually no way to undo it.

The role of the Discovery Institute in enacting Louisiana’s law is interesting for two reasons. First is because the Discovery Institute declined to testify in the *Dover v. Kitzmiller et al.* case—the first major constitutional test of intelligent design. District Judge John E. Jones III ruled against the Dover Area School District by stating that “ID cannot uncouple itself from its creationist, and thus religious, antecedents.” With respect to whether intelligent design is science, Judge Jones wrote that ID “is not science and cannot be adjudged a valid, accepted scientific theory as it has failed to publish in peer-reviewed journals, engage in research and testing, and gain acceptance in the scientific community.” Second, despite this major constitutional defeat, the Institute is still the prime mover in promoting similar legislation in other states.

The failure of the Institute to participate in the *Dover v. Kitzmiller et al.* case could cause one to conclude that the Institute’s administration and scientists did not want to disgrace themselves in public. That way, they could continue to promote public ignorance and raise money to support their antisocial and anti-intellectual agenda.

Should the Discovery Institute be successful in its endeavors of forcing religion into science education and, by extension, all public education, the United States will have entered the slippery slope of becoming a Third World nation in science and technology. Citizen rights may also suffer. But, Americans should have no fear—they may then be poor, but they will have become a more religious nation.

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Biology, Darwin, And The Shoah: A Comment

I think there is too much “excusing Darwin” going on in the reviews of the movie *Expelled* as well as elsewhere in the writings of freethinkers and atheists. Let’s start with some present day quotes:

In the 1800s, however, many Christians began to argue that the only reason Jews still even existed was because they were members of an inferior race inherently blind to the true religion. After the massive trauma of the war (WW I), Christian racial anti-Semitism became far more popular as a way of “explaining” the many social and economic problems of the era. (From: William Sierichs, “The Christian Soil of the Holocaust” *Freethought Today* [FfRF] August 2008, p. 14)

The alleged association between Darwinism and Nazism is harped on for what seems like hours, and it is quite simply an outrage. We are supposed to believe that Hitler was influenced by Darwin. Hitler was ignorant and bonkers enough for his hideous mind to have imbibed some sort of garbled misunderstanding of Darwin (along with his very ungarbled understanding of the anti-semitism of Martin Luther, and of his own never-renounced Roman Catholic religion) but it is hardly Darwin’s fault if he did. (From: <http://richarddawkins.net/article,2394,Lying-for-Jesus>, Richard-Dawkins)

Most despicably, Stein, a Jew, invokes the Holocaust, making the Hitler-was-a-Darwinist argument, (From: blogs.orlandosentinel.com)

It is true that the Nazis did occasionally adapt a warped version of social Darwinism proffered by the 19th-century German biologist Ernst Haeckel in a “survival of the fittest races” mode. But this rationale was only in the service of justifying the anti-Semitism that had been inculcated into European culture centuries before. (From Shermer’s review of “*Expelled*”)

It is true that anti-Semitism has been inculcated into European culture for centuries by the Christian churches, Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox and all. Hatred of Jews grows right out of the New Testament, notably the Gospel of John. That makes it true that the Holocaust grew out of the soil of Christian Europe; a Christian Europe in which the Germans found many murderous helpers in all nations they conquered.

Yet for those hundreds of years before the Nazis any Jew could escape persecution by allowing himself to be baptized, i.e. converting to Christianity. Karl Marx, or more precisely his

father, the great German poet Heinrich Heine, the composer Felix Mendelssohn, and the British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli are merely among the most prominent who opted for this escape.

In Hitler’s Reich this was not an option. The Germans treated Jews strictly as a biological race, and in fact did not accept past conversions to Christianity as exempting a former Jewish person from persecution and murder. Indeed persecution extended to the children and grandchildren of converts. The writer Peter Wyden (*Stella*, 1992) and the historian Peter Gay (*My German question: growing up in Nazi Berlin*, 1998) describe in their autobiographical writings how secular young people for the first time learned they were Jews because the State defined them as such.

There is little evidence that Hitler learned his racism at his mother’s knee or in the Church where he served as altar boy. As far as we know he picked his racist ideas from the daily press, from discussion, and from pamphlets in Vienna, where he lived from 1906 to 1913, that is from age 17 to 24. We know this because he said so himself in *Mein Kampf*, and from the two biographies which deal with this question specifically: Friedrich Heer, *Der Glaube des Adolf Hitler: Anatomie einer politischen Religiosität* (1968) and Brigitte Hamann, *Hitler's Wien: die Lehrjahre eines Diktators* (1996). (translated as: *Hitler's Vienna: a dictator's apprenticeship*, Oxford U. P. 1999)

What Hitler learned was the accepted wisdom of the time, that races differed, and could be divided into superior and inferior. Darwin himself subscribed to such racial distinctions. This was a time when Darwinian biological thinking had become wide spread, it was also a period when race, – that is biological subspecies, – and linguistic or ethnic groups were not clearly distinguished. The conviction that non-white races were inferior was used as an excuse for oppression and conquest. It was the age of “separate and equal” and the final Indian wars in the US, the European scramble for African colonies, of Eugenics Congresses attended by prominent leaders. (E.g. Churchill, Sanger, Shaw, Wells, Zola, and supported by the Rockefeller and Carnegie foundations.)

Indeed, anyone suggesting that all individuals and races are equal would have been laughed out of court in the last decade of the 19th and the first of the 20th centuries. The ideas Hitler promoted were not original, but deeply ingrained in the experience of his generation. The ideas of race as a biological fact were part of the symbolic system of European culture, manifest not only in Church but also in Schools, the Media, and in Politics. I think it is unrealistic to point to errors of “social Darwinism” and religious antijudaism, without acknowledging the role played by contemporary biological thinking in the heads of the Nazis.

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BOOK REVIEW

*God in the White House: A History
How Faith Shaped the Presidency from John
F. Kennedy to George W. Bush*
by Randall Balmer
(New York: Harper Collins, 2008)

In the 1960 election John F. Kennedy urged voters to ignore the faith of a candidate as irrelevant to political decision making. He was reacting to the suggestion a Catholic would have divided loyalties between Rome and this country. Four decades later prospective presidents have to profess faith in Jesus, and explain their religion in minute detail. How did a country, which is nominally secular get from there to here. Balmer tries to recount the historic puzzle hidden in this simple question.

Randall Balmer is a professor of religious history, and counts himself an evangelical protestant and a liberal in politics. He detests the religious right as misusing and misreading the intentions of the gospels. He has no question or quarrel with the reality that individual voters will act and advocate on the basis of their religious beliefs. We really can not do otherwise. Rather the question is, how did sectarian religious prescriptions enter the public square and become law of the land?

How much has really changed? In 1960 Kennedy was attacked by an organized committee of protestant leaders headed by Norman Vincent Peale and Donald Gill. This organization worked behind the scenes – while publicly protesting they would never tell people how to vote. Thus Kennedy could blunt the attack by forthrightly explaining he would not – under no circumstance – obey the hierarchy of the Roman Church. In other words, he said he really wasn't such a good Catholic. Also, at that time the hierarchy kept quiet, presumably because they wanted to see a Catholic elected as President. Compare this to the behavior towards Kerry in 2004, when members of the hierarchy threatened to excommunicate him. Or, compare it to the grilling given to Romney to explain his Mormon faith.

The real change, it seems to me, was the rise of the conservative Protestants as a political force and their

swing to the right. The American South has always been socially and religiously conservative, but for most of post-civil-war history the solid south voted Democrat waving the bloody shirt of defeat, while oppressing their Black people. It was the Black revolution and the end of legal racism that allowed the South to find its natural home on the right and in the Republican party.

Democrat Jimmy Carter was our first “born again” President, who openly used the language of sin and redemption, and was supported by Southern Protestants. Balmer suggests the voters saw him as a redeemer from the failings and corruption of the Nixon administration. But Carter was not a conservative who supported the social apprehensions of evangelical Protestantism, but rather a liberal who might tolerate same sex marriage, evolution, and other nightmares. At the end of Carter's four years the religious right embraced Reagan, who claimed “born again” status, but was probably our least religious president in modern times..

Religious Right support played a major role for the first time in the Reagan election . The fundies were disappointed rather quickly. Despite giving lip service to social issues of the Religious Right – anti gay, anti abortion, anti evolution, – Reagan on the whole simply ignored them. Still, the first Bush was able to inherit the mantle of Reagan, despite suspicion of this New Englander blue-blood Episcopalian. It did not last. Even winning the Gulf War did not save the first Bush Presidency, when a genuine, washed in the blood of the lamb, born again Southern Baptist presented himself as Presidential Candidate.

The evangelical Protestants who supported Bill Clinton lived to regret it. Clinton surely was no liberal, but he was no conservative flag waver either. By the end of his administration the Religious Right truly hated him. Anyone on the right, any Republican giving lip-service to religion was preferable. The Republicans, however, continued to support big business. Reagan started the dismemberment of the rules guiding our economy, and thus we got the S&L scandal. The second Bush pursued the same direction, giving us Enron and Co, and the housing speculation melt-down. The southern poor apparently can't see they are voting against their economic interests, or else prefer to pursue their social prejudices.

– Wolf Roder



November Potluck
 Tuesday Nov. 11, 6:30 PM
 No December Potluck



October Meeting
 Tuesday Oct. 28, 7:00 PM
 No November Meeting



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 figinfo@gofigger.org, or visit our web site at gofigger.org or freeinquirygroup.org.