

FIG LEAVES

Volume 13 Issue 9

September 2004

September Fig Meeting: Tuesday, 28 September 7:00 PM

National Underground Railroad Freedom Center

Steve DeVillez, Public Relations Coordinator at the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center will join us on Tuesday, September 28, at 7 PM to talk about the Freedom Center exhibits and programs.

Steve's slide presentation of the exhibits in the Freedom Center will illustrate the terrible conditions under which the slaves worked and lived. Pictures of the slave pen at the Center will show the pitiful holding conditions for them prior to being auctioned and hauled off to the cotton, sugar, and tobacco plantations.

For some of these slaves the Underground Railroad provided the opportunity and assistance to escape slavery and find freedom. Famous "conductors" included Harriet Tubman who escaped from the Eastern Shore of Maryland in 1849 but returned 19 times to rescue over 300 fellow slaves. John Parker of Ripley, Ohio, helped transport hundreds of slaves across the Ohio River by boat. Steve will tell us why Cincinnati became such an important hub for the Underground Railroad.

October FIG Meeting Tuesday 26, October

Frankenstein's Cat and other Biomedical Fantasies.

As a special Halloween treat Bill Jensen, Oesper Professor of Chemical Education and History of Chemistry at the University of Cincinnati, will discuss the myths surrounding Mary Shelley's classic horror novel, *Frankenstein*. How well does the present day myth created by Hollywood and assorted literary critics correspond to the actual content of Mary Shelley's original novel? Is the novel really a classic of English literature written by a brilliant teenage authoress or an overwritten potboiler? Is the novel really about science gone bad or is it a dig at theology and the responsibilities of God toward his creations? Are there lessons to be learned from the processes by which the novel has been mythologized and the formation of myths in general? These are but some of the issues that will be discussed.

A Question of God -- Dessert and Discussion!

On Wednesday, 15 September WCET will be showing a special entitled "A Question of God" based on a book by the same name reviewed in this issue (p. 15).

You are invited to meet at the home of Wolf Roder on Friday, 15 October from 7 PM to 9 PM to review and discuss this special and the questions raised. Coffee and Cookies will be provided.

Please RSVP at 513-961-7331 to let us know you are coming or for directions. See page 11 for a description of the WCET Program.

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Events - PLEASE NOTE SCHEDULE CHANGES

September Meeting

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

October Potluck

Tuesday 5, October 6:30 PM
At the home of Nurit Bowman

October Discussion

Friday, 15 October 7:00 PM
At the home of Wolf Roder

October Meeting

Tuesday, 26 October 7:00 PM
at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, Ohio

November Meeting

Tuesday 9 November 7:00 PM
at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, Ohio

November Potluck

Tuesday 16 November 6:30 PM
At the home of the O'Kains



November Meeting Tuesday 9 November

Your turn to talk to FIG members at our special November 9 meeting!

We think that a 9 November meeting— one week after the elections— is best for this kind of program because you can tell us how you feel about the results. But, we don't want this to be just a political session, we want you to tell us what else you think would interest us. It may be a poem you have written— or someone else has written. Or it may be about some important event in your life that you want to share with others. Or about a great movie we all should see.

The only limitation is that you speak for no more than 10 minutes so we give others a chance.

You need to let our Program Chair, Joe Levee, know by the date of the October program, Tuesday, 26 October, if you will be one of our speakers. Why tell him so far ahead of the November 9 program? Just in case we don't get enough speakers (hard to imagine in the FI Group), we can try to arrange an alternative program. The speakers will be chosen on a **first come** basis so the earlier you know you want to pontificate and tell Joe, the more likely it will be we shall have an open spot for you.

December Meeting - Sunday 12, December

We are pleased to announce that on Sunday, December 12, Ellen Johnson, President of American Atheists, will speak to FIG. The subject of her talk is to be determined.

ELLEN JOHNSON is President of American Atheists, and a leading spokesperson for Atheist civil liberties. She has presented testimony on behalf of the organization to numerous government agencies, including the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. Ms. Johnson also lead our historic "break through" meeting with officials of the White House Liaison Office.

A wife and mom with two children, Ms. Johnson is vitally concerned about the cultural issues affecting Atheist families of all description. She speaks on CIVIL RIGHTS FOR ATHEISTS: AN ACTION AGENDA.



Quote

Waiting for the Underground train, I stared at a huge poster of a woman in her underwear staring down at her own breasts. "Hello boys" she said. At the movies we witnessed sickening violence, except that this time we held tubs of popcorn between our legs and the gunfire and screams were broadcast in digital Dolby. We had escaped a place where evil stared right at you from the sockets of a child's skull on a battlefield, only to arrive in London, where office workers led lives of such tedium and plenty that they had to entertain themselves with all the fucking and killing on the big screen. So, here then was the prosperous, democratic, and civilized Western world. A place of washing machines, reality TV, Armani, frequent-flier miles, mortgages. And this is what the Africans are supposed to hope for, if they're lucky.

— Aidan Hartley, *The Zanzibar Chest* (2003) p. 393

Unquote



FIG Leaves - Editors welcome thoughtful articles, letters, reviews, reports, anecdotes, and cartoons. Submit in Electronic format via the internet - figleaves@fuse.net ; on disk or typewritten via mail to Editor, FIG Leaves, P.O. Box 19034, Cincinnati, OH 45219. Contributions received before the first Friday of the month will be considered for publication that month. All material printed in FIG Leaves may be reproduced in similar publications of non-profit groups which grant FIG Leaves reciprocal reprinting rights as long as proper credit is clearly attributed to FIG Leaves and the authors and do not necessarily reflect opinions of the editor or the Free Inquiry Group, Inc., its board, or officers.

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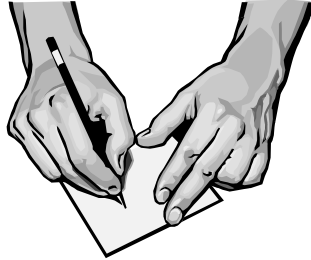
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We request contributions above membership dues. Contributions are tax deductible.

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Letters To The Editor



12 August 2004

Greetings,

Along with all the nonsense currently spread around about the USA being a Christian nation, I have a thought for its advocates. The Gospels tell us Jesus chased the money changers out of The Temple, and is oft quoted about the difficulty of the wealthy entering heaven. Why, then, is "In God We Trust" on our currency? Is money the symbol of Yahweh, Jesus' god? Is it not more likely that money is symbolic of Mammon? Christians have either made a big mistake or are confessing that they are hypocrites, verbally exalting one god, Yahweh, while really worshiping another, Mammon. Would this observation help get god off our currency? Let's try it.

As one reads in the Gospels, Jesus was no friend of the government. He did not single out the Roman rulers and their Jewish collaborators for special blessing. Is it then not a bit blasphemous for people who say they are his followers to use "God" for purely political purposes, as in pledges of allegiance? It does help, doesn't it, to call attention to contradictions in the argument of one's opponents.

Laurence G. Wolf
Cincinnati

Quote.....

Whence Ethics?
Ethical axioms are found and tested not very differently from the axioms of science. Truth is what stands the test of experience... For pure logic all axioms are arbitrary, including the axioms of ethics. But they are by no means arbitrary from a psychological and genetic point of view. They are derived from our inborn tendencies to avoid pain and annihilation, and from the accumulated emotional reaction of individuals to the behavior of their neighbors... It is the privilege of man's moral genius... to advance ethical axioms which are so comprehensive and so well founded that men will accept them as grounded in the vast mass of their individual emotional experiences.

— Albert Einstein, *Out of My Later Years*

.....Unquote

Rosa Williams <rosanina@mindspring.com> posted the following to alt.atheism (from Humanist Quest of Milwaukee Newsletter, February 2001)

A Typical alt.atheism Day (From A to Z)

- A notes that Atheists disbelieve god,
B the Believer thinks that rather odd.
 - C would Convert everyone to his Creed;
D thinks that man is by Disbelief freed.
 - E thinks that creatures Evolved into man,
F clings to Faith about how we began.
 - G says in God only Good things can dwell;
H asks why Holy texts doom some to Hell.
 - I has Ideals from the humanist view;
J is Judgmental, and thinks them untrue.
 - K is convinced to believe is to Know;
L uses Logic to prove it's not so.
 - M has a Mission to witness to all -
N points out Nobody answers the call.
 - O wants Original points to be made;
P hopes that Preaching will somehow Persuade.
 - Q has a Question on Quantum events;
R his own Rational Reasons presents.
 - S explains Science, and Skeptical ways;
T still prefers what Theology says.
 - U says the whole Universe is divine;
V wants that Verified or will decline.
 - W would still burn any Witches she finds...
X likes to parody closed Xtian minds.
 - Y cites Yaweh to explain things unknown;
Z still replies: Zero proof has been shown.
- April (Poetic License soon to be revoked)



Choosing Death

July 14, 2004, *The New York Times*, By NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF

PORTLAND, Ore.

John Ashcroft and other members of the Christian right have desperately tried to eviscerate Oregon's Death With Dignity law, on the ground that it undermines the sanctity of life. They should come here and talk to people like Florence Tauber.

Mrs. Tauber's husband, Al, was a business consultant who jogged, lifted weights and seemed destined to live forever. Then a doctor told him he had chronic lymphatic leukemia, and the Taubers' world shattered. The leukemia left him so weak that he couldn't even hold a book, and he became utterly demoralized. "I don't want to go through this," Mrs. Tauber remembers him telling her. "I don't want you to see me lose my mind."

So Mr. Tauber obtained a lethal dose of medicine under the Oregon law, after getting statements from two doctors that he had less than six months to live. "It was a very difficult decision for me," Mrs. Tauber said. "But he made it easier by saying he was giving me the best of himself and not leaving me with ugly memories of him diminishing." Last year, Mr. Tauber said his farewells and drank the medicine.

"He died in his own bed, with his son on one side holding him, and me on the other, and his last words were, 'Thank you,'" Mrs. Tauber said. "He went the way he wanted to go. We held him until he passed, which was just a few minutes. He fell asleep in our arms."

My hunch is that the right to die will become a hotter issue over the next decade or two as baby boomers confront their own mortality. Boomers have transformed every stage of life they've passed through, and they will surely transform our way of death as well.

That's what Oregon is now pioneering. I'm an Oregonian myself, and like most people here I was ambivalent when the law was first proposed as a ballot measure in 1994. Opponents argued that the terminally ill would feel pressure to commit suicide so they wouldn't be a burden to family members.

That seemed a reasonable argument at the time, but such abuses do not appear to have occurred. Oregonians seem increasingly content with the experiment - partly because of its limited scale. The most recent figures, from February 2003, showed that at least 171 people had hastened their

deaths since the law took effect in 1997 (although many with terminal illnesses start the process by getting a lethal prescription so they have the option if they want it). All in all, the Oregon law has provided the world with a model for how to offer dying people a real choice about how they should bid farewell to the world.

George Eighmey, executive director of Compassion in Dying of Oregon, which works with the terminally ill, said that the main reason people sought lethal prescriptions was not the fear of pain, but the fear of losing their autonomy. Many invite friends and family members to a final going-away party, as Socrates did when he drank the hemlock. One man had 60 friends attend his death. The Death With Dignity law is part of a broader - and welcome - reinterpretation of the role of medicine. "It was a two-by-four over the head of the medical profession," Mr. Eighmey said of the Death With Dignity law. "Wake up! Curative care may be what you perceive should be done under the Hippocratic oath, but comfort care is what people want. Doctors for so long thought "My only responsibility is to cure, so let's get going with chemotherapy, radiation treatment and, oh, by the way, you'll be miserable, you'll lose your hair, you'll be constipated, but you'll extend your life by two months."

Mr. Ashcroft and other critics have so far lost in their efforts, in the courts and in Congress, to block the Oregon law. But instead of moving on and letting Oregon proceed with its path breaking experiment, the Justice Department asked a federal appeals court on Monday for a new hearing. The Oregon law deserves to be upheld. It forces us to examine the question of what is special about human life. The answer, I think, is the autonomy and dignity inherent in our individuality - in making hard decisions for ourselves and determining our own destinies. Oregon honors that vision of what is sacred about life. As Mrs. Tauber said: "When people who are very strong lose their powers and abilities that make them who they are, they don't want to live like that. Why torture them?"

Quote
• The antithesis of hatred is trust and confidence. The
• problem at present is that the rest of the world has no trust
• in America, no confidence in American willingness or
• ability to use its immense power responsibly or indeed to
• define the use of its power for anything except selfish
• motives, to recognise the common good as anything other
• than its own self-interest.
• — Ziauddin Sardar and Merryl Wyn Davies,
• *Why do people hate America?* (2002) p. 206
•
Unquote



**Without Wheat —
Communion Not Holy**

(Associated Press, August 2004)

An eight year old girl who suffers from a rare digestive disease and cannot eat any wheat or other grain containing gluten has had her first Holy Communion declared invalid because the wafer contained no wheat, violating Roman Catholic doctrine. Now, Haley Waldman’s mother is pushing the Diocese of Trenton and the Vatican to make an exception, saying the girl’s illness should not exclude her from the sacrament, which commemorates the Last Supper of Jesus the Christ before his crucifixion. The mother believes a rice Communion wafer ought to suffice. “How can rice corrupt the tradition of the Last Supper? It’s just another grain,” said Elizabeth Pelly-Waldman.

Church doctrine holds that Communion wafers, like the bread served at the Last Supper, must have at least some unleavened wheat. Church leaders are reluctant to change anything about the sacrament. “This is not a issue to be determined at the diocesan or parish level but has already been decided for the Roman Catholic Church throughout the world by Vatican authority,” Trenton Bishop John M. Smith said in a statement last week.

Haley was diagnosed with *celiac sprue* disease when she was five. People with this illness have a genetic intolerance of gluten, a food protein contained in wheat and other grains, but not in rice. When consumed by *celiac* sufferers, gluten damages the lining of the small intestine, blocking nutrient absorption and leading to vitamin deficiencies, bone-thinning and sometimes gastrointestinal cancer.

The diocese has told Haley’s mother that the girl can receive a low-gluten wafer, or just drink wine at Communion, but that anything without gluten does not qualify. Pelly-Waldman rejected the offer, saying her child could be harmed by even a small amount of the substance. Haley’s Communion controversy isn’t the first. In 2001, the family of a five-year-old Massachusetts girl with the disease left the Catholic church after being denied permission to use a rice wafer.

The church has similar rules for Communion wine. For alcoholics, the church allows a substitute for wine under some circumstances, however the drink must still be fermented from grapes and contain some alcohol. Grape juice is not a valid substitute.

Pelly-Waldman is seeking help from the Pope and has written to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome, challenging the church’s policy. “This is a church rule, not God’s will, and it can easily be adjusted to meet the needs of the people, while staying true to the traditions of our faith,” Pelly-Waldman wrote in her letter.

Belief and Dissent Conference

Paul Kurtz, founder and chair of the Council for Secular Humanism, will be the featured speaker at the Belief and Dissent 2004 conference in Independence, Ohio, on Saturday, 25 September 2004. Independence is a suburb on the south side of Cleveland.

The event will be hosted by the Free Inquirers of Northeastern Ohio (FINO), which is affiliated with the Council for Secular Humanism.

Other conference speakers include Joe Nickell of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, D.J. Grothe and David Koepsell of the Council, and Bruce Latimer, Executive Director of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. Latimer’s luncheon address is titled: “The Case For Unintelligent Design.”

The conference will take place at the Clarion Hotel South at I-77 and Rockside Road, and will run from 9 am-4 pm. Early bird registration is \$40 per person, which includes a buffet lunch. After 14 September the cost will rise to \$45 per person. The village of Independence is south of Cleveland, and Rockside road is the last exist before I-77 crosses I-400.

To register or to ask for more information about the conference, contact FINO President Brent Bowen at (330) 664-0787 or by e-mail at BBowen1005@aol.com.

Quote

• **Meaning of the Universe**

• Stubborn as human beings tend to be about most
• things, they outdo themselves when it comes to imputing
• purpose to a universe which their most precise and
• exacting thinking reveals as altogether without purpose or
• design. Usually, the conviction that the universe *is*
• purposeful is embedded in and supported by a tissue of
• myth, legend, and supposition that constitutes a religion.

• -- Norman Levitt, *Prometheus Bedeviled* (1999) p. 62

..... **Unquote**



Atheist Prayer

A fair number of governmental bodies have a minister say a prayer at the start of official meetings -- an invocation. When criticized by those who favor a true separation of church and state, they often insist that the invocation is not really religious. So what happens when an *atheist* is invited to give an invocation? The officials sit in respectful silence, as they would insist an atheist should do when a Christian preacher gives the prayer, right? Yeah, sure.

The City Council in Tampa, Fla., insisted having ministers say a prayer at their meetings was not an unconstitutional religious act, proudly noting that they even let Jews say the invocation from time to time. So Atheists of Florida chairman Ed Golly called their bluff: he offered to have someone from his group say the invocation. Councilman John Dingfelder agreed to let an atheist take a turn. But when Michael R. Harvey arrived to say the invocation as scheduled, Councilman Kevin White tried to deny him a chance to speak. "We have never had people of an atheist group represent Americans," he said, "and I don't think it is appropriate in this setting." White walked out with fellow members Mary Alvarez and Rose Ferlita. Alvarez had previously gone on record that she "looked forward" to hearing the atheist's invocation. "It's a free country," she said then. Alvarez was the only one to support White's censorship attempt, but they were overruled by other council members. (AP) Quite a few readers, most particularly those who identified themselves as Christian, were interested to know what an atheist's invocation would be like. Here's the text, according to the *St. Petersburg Times*: →→→→→→→→→

Quote

Public opinion accomplishes with us what the Inquisition never was able to do. I have seen, I have known a multitude of young men who, after receiving a scientific education, thought they had discovered that the Christian religion was not true. Carried away by the fire of youth, they began to maintain this opinion openly . . . Well! Some were obliged to leave the country, or to vegetate there miserably. The others, feeling that the struggle was unequal, were constrained to return, outwardly, into the ways of religion, or at least keep their mouths shut. The number of those thus beaten by public opinion is very considerable.

The Vice-President of Maryland's College of St. Mary, a Priest, to Alexis de Toqueville

Unquote

An invocation is an appeal for guidance from a supernatural power, but it is not only that. It is also a call, a petition, to positive action on behalf of and for a diverse citizenry. On behalf of Atheists of Florida, I would like to express our gratitude in being invited to deliver today's invocation.

We are committed to the separation of state and church as defined by the United States Constitution. It is the core value of that remarkable and visionary document to protect the human-derived rights of all people in the continuous struggle for equal opportunities to pursue a safe and decent quality of life.

When an invocation takes on the form of public prayer, it is also a violation of the very principles upon which our country and Constitution were founded. Although we are dismayed that the practice of public prayer by governing bodies charged with representing all citizens still continues in violation of the Constitution, we also recognize that this practice has become deeply embedded in the national psyche.

Elected and appointed leaders who wish to seek the guidance of a deity can do so in private, as is their right. But not in the public arena where the establishment of religion is an assured end-result.

History -- that ever-unfolding, ever-flourishing story of human civilization -- teaches us that the rights and accomplishments of humanity are the results of its past struggles, and that the road less traveled is many times the highest path to human progress. We therefore invoke this council and all of our leaders to be guided and inspired by the invaluable lessons of history, the honest insights of science, the guileless wisdom of logic, and the heart and soul of our shared humanity -- compassion and tolerance.

So rather than clasping your hands, bowing your heads and closing your eyes, open your arms to that which truly makes us strong -- our diversity. Raise your heads and open your eyes to recognize and fully understand the problems before you and know that ultimately, solutions to human problems can come only from human beings.

--Michael R. Harvey

Quote

Collective stupidity has often been the norm in the long and sorry history of human progress, and perhaps the soundest argument for the existence of God is the fact that the human race has survived in spite of itself.

-- James Lee Burke, *In the Moon of Red Ponies* (2004) p. 179

Unquote



Iran: Keeping up “public morality” The short life and cruel death of Atefeh Rajabi

When she was executed on 15 August 2004, Atefeh Rajabi was only 16 years old. She was hanged from a crane in the main square of the small town Neka in Mazandaran province and kept dangling high above the shocked and weeping crowd for 45 minutes. Her crime was “an act incompatible with chastity”, says the judgement of the local court which had been confirmed by the Supreme Court. It is claimed that she had sexual contact with an elder man. Most likely she was raped, but the court was not interested in these details. Atefeh, who had no access to a lawyer, tried to defend herself, but that made things worse for her. She “undressed in court” (removed her headscarf) and she had a “sharp tongue”, said the judge, one Haji Razaie, and sentenced her to death. He got so agitated that he put personally the noose around the young girl’s neck. When the case went to the Supreme Court, he traveled to Tehran to convince the SC judges to uphold his decision, it is heard. They did so. Iran’s judiciary is ruled by Islamic fundamentalists. After Atefeh’s execution, judge Haji Razaie received a letter of congratulation for his “firm approach” from the governor of Mazandaran.

An unnamed Iranian journalist of *Iran Focus* talked to some of Atefeh’s class mates, friends, relatives and neighbors to shed light on the gruesome fate of the young girl. They described Atefeh as intelligent, lively, but rebellious. She lived in extreme poverty. Her father, an unemployed drug addict, vanished before she was born. Her mother died when she was a very small child and left her an orphan in the care of her old grandparents, who were already in their seventies at that time. She became a victim of violence and exploitation by relatives and by local officials. At least one of her relatives used to rape her, but she did not dare to accuse him, as she knew that nobody would support her. When she was 16, she had already been five times convicted for immoral behavior. Every time she got 100 lashes and was taken to prison for some days, where she was abused by the Islamic moral police. She was terrified about those prison days. Behshahr prison in Neka is the hell, she told a close friend.

Child execution in Iran has been branded by Amnesty International and other human rights organizations since years. Under this pressure, the old parliament tabled a bill in 2003 to raise the minimum age for execution to 18 years. But the bill was rejected by the all-powerful Guardian Council. According to Amnesty International, there are 10 documented cases of child execution since 1990. In 2004, the case of Atefeh Rajabi is already the third known case (among 108 known executions in total). These numbers may be only the tip of the iceberg.

The fundamentalist clerics in Iran’s judiciary are not the only ones sentencing minors to death. So does, for example, the judiciary of the USA.

-- *Rationalist International Bulletin* #131
(7 September 2004)

Quote.....
● **President Bush**
● Instead of shrub we might call
● him: a facinorous and flagitious
● fabulist fandangling fulsome
● fallacies and flapdoodle
● — cf: Peter Bowker, *The Superior Person’s Book of Words*
● (1979)
.....**Unquote**



Photo courtesy of Ed Kagin
Museum of the Creation Science (under construction)
See also www.answersingenesis.org



Not Political Science but Science Politicized.

by Reece Rushing, 9 July 2004

When the Bush administration has a political objective, it doesn't let science get in its way. Yesterday, the Union of Concerned Scientists released a report documenting a host of new examples in which Bush officials have inappropriately interfered with scientific judgment to support the president's predetermined agenda. Among other things, the administration has sought to ensure the political fealty of scientific advisory committees; suppressed information on environmental damage from mountaintop mining; and doctored data to downplay risks to endangered species.

These findings build on the record documented by UCS in an earlier report released in February. In conjunction with that report, UCS unveiled a statement signed by 62 distinguished scientists, including 20 Nobel laureates, blasting the administration's politicization of science (a problem also highlighted in a recent report by the Center for American Progress and OMB Watch). Since then, 4,000 scientists have added their names to the statement, including 28 more Nobel laureates.

There is plenty of reason for this growing concern. Consider the administration's handling of scientific advisory committees. In April, the president's science adviser, John H. Marburger III, issued a rebuttal to the February UCS report, saying "the accusation of a litmus test that must be met before someone can serve on an advisory panel is preposterous." However, the new UCS report casts significant doubt on this assertion. For instance, Sharon Smith, chair of the University of Miami's marine biology department, informed UCS that she was summarily rejected for a position on the U.S. Arctic Research Commission "after she gave a less-than-enthusiastic answer in response to a question from the White House personnel office about whether she supported President Bush."

Likewise, two recently appointed members of the National Advisory Council for Human Genome Research – Richard Myers of Stanford University and George Weinstock of Baylor College of Medicine – report that White House representatives asked inappropriate questions about their political views. Myers was initially denied a spot on the committee, apparently because he refused to discuss his opinion of President Bush, but was ultimately approved after a senior scientist at the National Institutes of Health (where the committee is housed) intervened on his behalf. Weinstock told

UCS that his answers regarding President Bush must have been "innocuous enough to be palatable," adding, "There is no doubt in my mind that these questions represented a political litmus test." Perhaps most dramatic, Gerald T. Keusch, who oversaw advisory committee appointments at a branch of NIH, recently reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that the Bush administration approved only seven of his 26 advisory-board nominations over three years. In one case, Bush officials explained to Keusch that they had rejected Torsten Wiesel, a Nobel laureate in medicine, "because he had signed too many full-page letters in the *New York Times* critical of President Bush."

The administration has also shown no reluctance to shape scientific findings in service to its political agenda. In one case, Deputy Interior Secretary J. Stephen Griles, a former lobbyist for the mining industry, directed agency scientists and staff to drop any consideration of alternatives that could minimize environmental damage from mountaintop mining, which the administration was seeking to boost. "We were flabbergasted and outraged," one high-ranking staff scientist at the Fish and Wildlife Service told UCS.

Bush officials also intervened on a host of endangered species issues, according to the UCS report. Just this past May, the administration proposed a new

policy – spearheaded by former timber-industry lawyer Mark Rutzick, a special adviser at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration – to add hatchery-raised salmon to the count of wild salmon, which could affect whether the Coho salmon is listed as endangered. A distinguished scientific advisory panel counseled against this action, but the administration suppressed its findings. "The members of the panel were told to either strip out our recommendations or see our report end up in a drawer," according to the panel's lead scientist, Robert Paine, a renowned ecologist at the University of Washington. The administration has similarly inflated the numbers of the endangered Florida panther to avoid triggering corrective action under the Endangered Species Act; suppressed information on the economic benefits of restoring the endangered bull trout in the Pacific Northwest; and misrepresented scientific findings to avoid listing the "tristate" trumpeter swan as an endangered species.

This willingness to subvert science puts public health and the environment at risk. When science is stifled, policy makers and the public are denied crucial information to address problems in a timely way. The Bush administration has it backwards: science should inform policy judgments, not the other way around.

-- Reece Rushing is associate director for regulatory policy at the Center for American Progress.



The Bible accepts slavery as a given.



And the Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships, by the way whereof I spake unto thee, Thou shalt see it no more again: and there ye shall be sold unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen, and no man shall buy you. -- Deut. xxviii, 68.

Watson Heston, *Old Testament Stories Comically Illustrated: The Stories being Humorously Told and Hard Facts Given Concerning the Origin and Authenticity of the Old Testament.* (New York: The Truth Seeker Company, 1892)

• A Lost Chapter of the Book of Genesis

Adam was hanging around the garden of Eden feeling very lonely. So, God asked him, "What's wrong with you?" Adam said he didn't have anyone to talk to. God said that He was going to make Adam a companion and that it would be a woman.

He said, "This pretty lady will gather food for you, she will cook for you, and when you discover clothing, she will wash it for you. She will always agree with every decision you make and she will not nag you, and will always be the first to admit she was wrong when you've had a disagreement. She will praise you! She will bear your children. And never ask you to get up in the middle of the night to take care of them.

"She will *never* have a headache and will freely give you love and passion whenever you need it." Adam asked God, "What will a woman like this cost?" God replied, "An arm and a leg." Then Adam asked, "What can I get for a rib?" Of course the rest is history.

— contributed by Charles Hughes via internet

• In our time it is no more likely that a religious person will live a moral life than that an irreligious person will. In fact it may be that the advocates of the unchangeable doctrine, the censors, the guardians of the sacred texts, the intolerantly righteous, of whatever tradition, are in spirit as well as action less God fearing than the average secular individual in a modern constitutional democracy who has quietly accepted and installed in himself or herself the best ethical teachings of religious traditions. In this view, the moral authority is not God who is prayed to, pleaded with, portrayed, textualized, or given voice, choir, or sacrament, but God who is imperceptible, if not dubious, *except for our evolved moral sense of ourselves.*

— E. L. Doctorow, *Reporting the Universe* (2003), p. 113



Reason's Heathens

by Paul McLeary, 6 July 2004

Writing intellectual history is a tricky gig. Too often, ideology and hindsight have blinded writers to the facts on the ground, turning history into little more than a self-serving dialectic. Take any of the competing "isms" that have dragged the humanities into an archipelago of quibbling camps over the past century and a half, and you'll find more than enough evidence of this technique.

Conversely, simple regurgitation of the past is just as lacking if you're in the business of mining history for nuggets of larger truths. Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit in their new book, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of its Enemies*, largely have managed to avoid these common pitfalls as they build a layered, cross-cultural critique of the roots of anti-Western bias that has arisen over the last several centuries.

Occidentalism is the name the authors give to a brand of nativist chauvinism that stereotypes the West and its liberal market ideals as essentially weak, soulless and corrupt. If the term sounds a little familiar, that's because it owes much to the late Edward Said's 1979 masterpiece *Orientalism*, which held that Western scholars had produced a false description of Arabs and Islamic culture in order to assert Western cultural dominance against the Oriental "other." The authors deftly cast Said's gaze back upon the Orient, however, proving that crude stereotypes can flow both ways. They wisely refrain from trying to refute this pervasive anti-Westernism, in the process situating our current struggle with radical Islam as a new wrinkle in an old story.

The common bogeyman for anti-Western movements is Enlightenment reason itself. In essence, "the West" is shorthand for the secular, pluralistic, consumerist cosmopolitanism the Enlightenment made possible.

But the authors point out that the revolt against the West is itself a Western product that has been exported abroad and cloaked in local prejudices. The German Romantics of the 19th Century complained of a "machine culture" in which higher values were squashed under the desires of the lazy, trivial bourgeois, while the Russian intellectual class of the same era sought solace in their mystical brand of Eastern Orthodox Catholicism, rejecting Western Europe's Reformation. Both saw disease and decadence in modernism and industrialization, and in the case of the German Romantics, laid the intellectual foundation for Hitler's

perverse glorification of the pure "Volk."

To practice wholesale character assassination against an entire worldview (which the West's wildly successful brand of democratic capitalism certainly is), says as much about the hunter as the hunted. "To diminish an entire society or a civilization to a mass of soulless, decadent, money-grubbing, rootless, faithless, unfeeling parasites," the authors write, "is a form of intellectual destruction." Indeed it is, and it is precisely such charges that have been leveled against the West since its ascension as an exporter of ideas—primarily its ideas about free will and the distribution of capital—when Europe set out to colonize the world.

Symbolism is key here, particularly the idea of the city. Purveyors of "national or ethnic spiritual attacks on Western rationalism" embrace the lame stereotype of the crude bourgeois lifestyle that favors the city over the country, wealth over art, entertainment over spirituality and comfort over adventure. Whether it be Dostoevsky's obsession with the concept of a national soul (an idea that gained tragic currency among later fascist movements), Mao's cultural revolution, or Wahhabism's violent cultural artifice, the city's materialism and workaday lifestyle are seen as all that is wrong with the West.

If you stuck a microphone in front of his smirk, our president might say that Occidentalists "hate freedom," but it's not freedom they're fighting. Rather, it's what Marx called the "commodity fetishism" of capitalism. The West, according to the Occidentalists' script, is obsessed with the spectacle of consumption for its own sake, and is populated by "the settled bourgeois, whose existence is the antithesis of the self-sacrificing hero . . . who must be crushed to make way for a world of pure faith." But this pure faith often is a chimera that harkens back to a time and place that never existed.

The good news? Up to this point these movements have largely failed in galvanizing large-scale public support without violently seizing control of the means of production themselves. Does this subvert their claim to legitimacy? According to a cosmopolitan democratic reading, most certainly. But the beauty of liberal democracy, warts and all, is that it is willing to accept all the charges leveled against it, rather than simply shouting down its critics as its rivals do.

-- Source: *In These Times* <www.inthesetimes.com>

Quote
• Our enemies are innovative and resourceful, and so
• are we. They never stop thinking about new ways to harm
• our country and our people, and neither do we.
•
— George W. Bush, *Newsweek* (16 Aug. 2004)p. 21
.....**Unquote**



The WCET program on Wednesday 15 September 2004 from 9 pm to 11 pm

All over the world, people are asking the same questions: Why is there so much pain and suffering in the world? What does it mean to be happy? Is there such a thing as evil? Does God really exist? This September, through the brilliant minds and personal struggles of two of the most influential thinkers of the 20th century, PBS presents an emotional and intellectual journey into the meaning of life.

The Question of God: Clive Staples Lewis and Sigmund Freud with Dr. Armand Nicholi, a two-part program airing on PBS Wednesdays, September 15-22, 2004, explores, in accessible and dramatic style, issues that preoccupy all thinking people today: What is happiness? How do we find meaning and purpose in our lives? How do we reconcile conflicting claims of love and sexuality? How do we cope with the problem of suffering and the inevitability of death? Based on a popular Harvard course taught by Dr. Armand M. Nicholi, author of the book *The Question of God*, the series illustrates the lives and insights of Sigmund Freud, a lifelong critic of religious belief, and C.S. Lewis, a celebrated Oxford don, literary critic and perhaps this century's most influential and popular proponent of faith based on reason.

Part one of *The Question of God* presents the early stories of C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) and Sigmund Freud (1856-1938), two men with different ideas of human existence. In childhood, each embraced the religion of his family, but the early death of Lewis' mother and the horrors he witnessed in World War I tested his faith. In middle age, Lewis found his once-passionate atheism troubling, and began searching for faith again. Freud, studying medicine in the age of Darwin, found he had no use for a creator. As he developed his theory of psychoanalysis, he came to see belief in God as just another human fantasy. To grapple with the questions raised by the lives and ideas of Freud and Lewis, Dr. Armand Nicholi leads a panel of seven men and women in a wide-ranging discussion of some of the fundamental questions. What influences us to embrace or reject religious belief? Is the scientific method, as Freud wrote, the only path to the truth? Does the human longing for God, as Lewis wrote, actually prove that God exists? Do miracles actually happen?

As Freud and Lewis entered middle age, their divergent beliefs about the existence of God were fixed. But tragedy would test each man's convictions. For Freud, it was the terror of the Third Reich and the death of a beloved daughter.

For Lewis, the brief happiness of new romance in his fifties turned to ashes with the untimely death of his wife, igniting the greatest spiritual crisis of his life. In the end, each man confronted his own death with his beliefs intact.

In the second part, Dr. Armand Nicholi and his panel continue their debate, exploring the implications of choosing a spiritual or secular worldview on the primary questions of life - of love, morality, suffering and death: From where do we get our concept of right and wrong - from the creator or from human experience? How do we square the existence of an omnipotent, all-loving God with the evidence of evil and suffering in the world? How do these starkly different worldviews help us resolve the riddle of death?

— from: <www.WCET.org>

Quote.....

The scientist said he 'absolutely' does not believe in God.

More than 200 students listened to Nobel laureate James Watson as he told them he is a "total believer in evolution" and feels the Bible is "just not right" in the face of science. "The easiest way to believe in the theory of *intelligent design* is to never go to school," he said. He also confessed that he does not believe in a soul or anything divine.

"So you don't believe in God?" one student asked.

"Oh, no. Absolutely not," the scientist answered. "The biggest advantage to believing in God is you don't have to understand anything, no physics, no biology," he added. "I wanted to understand."

The son of an Irish Catholic mother and Episcopalian father said he was not pressured to believe, because his father lost faith in college and his mother, in ill health, attended Mass only on Christmas and Easter. "So there wasn't much pressure," he said, "except for my Irish grandmother. So she was a bit unhappy. But I think the morality comes from human nature. I think we were born to care for one another. ... It gives people pleasure to help each other."

— reported by JoAnne Viviano, ©*The Vindicator* (Youngstown, OH) 15 Nov. 2003

.....Unquote:





A very diverse place

John Nothing, an old lay preacher-friend of mine from days past in deepest Mississippi, sent me a letter not long ago. His letters are always interesting. I never know when I'll hear from John. He moves around a lot -- mostly in almost forgotten places where I myself never journeyed. This letter was sent from California a very diverse state.

Dear Wally,

As you know, we've been working real hard in our town to get prayer back in the schools. Finally, the school board approved a plan of teacher-led prayer with the children participating at their own option. Children not wishing to participate were to be allowed to stand out in the hallway during prayer time. We hoped someone would sue us so we could go all the way to the Supreme Court and get that old devil-inspired ruling reversed.

Naturally, we were all excited by the school board's action. As you know, our own little Billy (not so little, any more, though) is now in the second grade. Of course, Margaret and I explained to him no matter what the other kids did, he was going to stay in the classroom and participate.

After the first day of school, I asked him, "How did the prayer time go?"

"Fine."

"Did many kids go out into the hallway?"

"Two."

"Excellent. How did you like your teacher's prayer?"

"It was different, Dad. Real different from the way you pray."

"Oh? Like how?"

"She said, 'Hail, Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners...'"

The next day I talked with the principal. I politely explained I wasn't prejudiced against Catholics but I would appreciate Billy being transferred to a non-Catholic teacher. The principal said it would be done right away.

At supper that evening I asked Billy to say the blessings. He slipped out of his chair, sat cross-legged on the floor, closed his eyes, raised his hands palms up and began to hum.

You'd better believe I was at the principal's office at eight o'clock the next morning. "Look," I said. "I don't really know much about these Transcendental Meditationists, but I would feel a lot more comfortable if you could move Billy to a room where the teacher practices an older, more established

religion."

That afternoon I met Billy as soon as he walked in the door after school.

"I don't think you're going to like Mrs. Nakasone's prayer, either, Dad."

"Out with it."

"She kept calling on the 'Great Buddha...'"

The following morning I was waiting for the principal in the school parking lot. "Look, I don't want my son praying to the Eternal Spirit of whatever or to Buddha. I want him to have a teacher that prays in Jesus' name!"

"What about Bertha Smith?"

"Excellent."

I could hardly wait to hear about Mrs. Smith's prayer. I was standing on the front steps of the school when the final bell rang.

"Well?" I asked Billy as we walked towards the car.

"Okay."

"Okay what?"

"Mrs. Smith asked God to bless us and ended her prayer in Jesus' name, amen -- just like you."

I breathed a sigh of relief. "Now we're getting some place."

"She even taught us a verse of scripture about prayer," said Billy.

I beamed. "Wonderful. What was the verse?"

"Let's see: 'he mused for a moment' 'And behold, they began to pray; and they did pray unto Jesus, calling him their Lord and their God.'"

We had reached the car. "Fantastic," I said, reaching for the door handle. Then I paused. I couldn't place the scripture. "Billy, did Mrs. Smith say what book that verse was from?"

"Third Nephi, chapter 19, verse 18."

"Third what?"

"Nephi," he said, "It's in the Book of Mormon."

The school board doesn't meet for a month. I've given Billy very definite instructions that at prayer time each day he's to go out into the hallway. I plan to be at that board meeting. If they don't do something about this situation, I'll sue. I'll take it all the way to the Supreme Court if I have to. I don't need the schools or anybody else teaching my son about religion. We can take care of that ourselves at home and at church, thank you very much.

Your old buddy, John

-- Slightly adapted from *Positive Atheism Magazine*.
(January 2002)



Pictures from the Picnic.

A fun time was had by all with lots of good food, fun and great weather!



End of Life Choices Greater Cincinnati Chapter Meeting
Sunday, September 19, 2004, 3pm at Roselawn Lutheran Church

We are pleased to have as our speaker Professor S. Elizabeth Malloy from the faculty of the University of Cincinnati Law School. Professor Malloy's talk is entitled, "End of Life Choices and Health Care Law." Topics covered will include legal issues relating to physician aid in dying, the Living Will and Durable Power of Attorney and what to do if a hospital does not follow instructions therein, guidelines relating to how much help one can give a person who wants to hasten his or her death, and recent news items of interest.

We hope you can come. Please RSVP to me, Judy Snyderman, at 513-573-9787 or mmjudy@aol.com

Directions to the Roselawn Lutheran Church:

Take exit #9 (Paddock Road) off of Interstate 75. Coming from the North turn left off the exit ramp and cross over 75. Coming from the South turn right off the exit ramp. Immediately after crossing the entrance to north 75 turn left in front of the Fed-Ex building. You will be on Summit Road. Proceed to 1608 on the left. If you reach Reading Road you have gone too far. One can also get to Summit Road from Reading. Summit intersects Reading Road between the 7700 and 7800 blocks.

Website

Website News: gofigger.org Check it out!

Fig's Website has been revised and expanded. Most of the pages still exist but have been changed to load cleanly and quickly. The Chat and Bulletin pages have been removed but can be added back if needed. The first page will have announcements for the next meeting as well as any other announcements or birthdays that members bring to my attention.

The section on Humanist poetry now has some poems by Dorothy Thompson, a free thought poet.

The section for Humanist Books has over 10 book reviews waiting to be added to the website. This will be done in the next few weeks. If you have comments or requests, e-mail me at webnut@gofigger.org.

Check it out!



Book Note

Heretics: The Bloody History of the Christian Church
by W. Sumner Davis, foreword by Dorion Sagan

From Amazon website.

This kind of book is no longer relevant, May 26, 2004

Reviewer: A reader from Austin, Texas.

A parishioner gave me a copy of this book. She had many questions concerning its truth, which I will not speak to. I will say simply that there are some things that are better left unknown. We do not know, nor do we demand to understand the mysteries of our faith. It is enough to know that we are loved and comforted in our trials and our times of despair by the one God who loves us all. The history of our faith has not always been one of social responsibility, and there have been times in the distant past that not all of those representing God's church have performed their duties as well as they might have. We cannot, like Dr. Davis simply look back on these very different ages and decide on right and wrong. It is not for us to decide, for we do not know God's ultimate plan for us. Nor does Dr. Davis know it. He reports, with more than a little caustic style that the Christian church has a great many skeletons in its closet. I do not believe that there are any historical aspects of the Church, at least the Roman Church, that are hidden from anyone who wishes to know it's history. Yet why should modern Christians wish to relive the errors of those men so long ago? Faith is about moving forward, not backward. To dwell on the mistakes of mortal men of ages past does all a disservice. We must not become mired in the past, but look to the future. As a history book, which has a very narrow focus, this book is accurate in detail and scope. But for the faithful, it is a temptation better left to atheists and agnostics than to complicate the modern believer. I do not agree personally with the direction of this book: some things are better left unknown.

Comment by Editor---Thought you might like to see how a priest handles these questions.

Here are the times/channels for the autumn broadcasting of **The Humanist Perspective** on public access:

Mondays at 12:30pm on channel 8

Tuesdays at 8:30am on channel 24

from: Tim Kelly

Center for Inquiry's Premier Caribbean Cruise

Cruise the Eastern Caribbean with Secular Humanists and Skeptics onboard Holland America's Zaandam, 11-18 December 2004. The ship will sail out of Port Canaveral, Florida, visiting the British Virgin Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Bahamas.

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For additional information, contact <<http://centerforinquiry.net/cruise/>>, or phone 800-398-7571, or write e-mail <cruise@cfiflorida.org>



Quote

Road Rage

A driver on a busy street is tail-gated by a stressed out woman. Suddenly the light turns yellow just in front of him, and he stops hard, although he could have sailed through the yellow by accelerating.

The tail-gating woman has to slam on her brakes. She hits the roof, blasts her horn, and is seething with frustration. She also cusses a blue streak. Still in mid-rant, she hears a tap on her window and faces a serious police officer. He orders her to exist the car, and takes her to the station for booking and finger printing. Most of all the officer insists she prove ownership of her car.

After a couple of hours, the arresting officer apologizes, and she is set free. The officer explains: "I'm very sorry for this mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were screaming, blowing your horn, and flipping the guy off in front of you, and cursing him a blue streak in public. I also noticed the "Choose Life" license plate holder, the "What Would Jesus Do?" and "Follow me to Sunday School" bumper stickers, and the chrome plated Christian Fish emblem on the back of the car. So, naturally I had to assume you had stolen the car."

Unquote



BOOK REVIEW

Dessert and Discussion!

On Wednesday, 15 September WCET will be showing a special entitled “A Question of God” based on this book

You are invited to meet at the home of Wolf Roder on Friday, 15 October from 7 PM to 9 PM to review and discuss this special and the questions raised. Coffee and Cookies will be provided.

Please RSVP at 513-961-7331 to let us know you are coming or for directions.

The Question of God: C. S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex, and the Meaning of Life
by Dr. Armand M. Nicholi, Jr.
(New York: The Free Press, 2002)

This is a rather disappointing book. C. S. Lewis writings, to the extent I have read them, have always impressed me with their unsophisticated defense of a rather conventional religion. To choose Sigmund Freud as the spokesperson for the scientific, unbelievers viewpoint strikes me as exceedingly incredible. Only a medical psychiatrist could consider Freud a major scientist: (p.2)

Today historians rank Freud’s scientific contributions with those of Planck and Einstein. He appears on most lists of the greatest physicians in history. He was recently on the cover of *Time* (with Albert Einstein) for an issue dedicated to the greatest scientific minds of the century and ranked sixth in a book on the hundred most influential scientists.

Perhaps *Time* magazine still considers Freud a scientist, I think of him as the Vienna Quack, a judgement already made during his lifetime by contemporary fellow Viennese Karl Kraus, who considered the Freudian circle a religious cult rather than medical researchers.

The choice of Freud and Lewis tells us up front, that the debate will not touch on the objections to god raised by hard science. The questions posed by physics, chemistry, and biology which point to no supernatural brain, consciousness, or creator are simply not considered by Nicholi. Neither will

the debate feature the questions raised by history and archaeology about the reality of the Bible, the existence of a man Jesus in first century Palestine, or the truth value of the religious scriptures.

Lewis became a conventional Christian as an adult: “There is one God . . . Jesus Christ is His only Son.”(p. 39) Freud was a conventional atheist, who considered “the spiritual world view as distorting the picture of the real world in a delusional manner . . .”(p. 38) He described his views as scientific on the premise that all knowledge comes from research.

Nicholi informs us about the life and thought of the two protagonists. He tells us how each came to his beliefs, and what he has written about god, reality, and morals. In essence then, the argument is one from authority, and we are to decide on the basis of who has the better story. Nicholi is quite clearly a believer himself, which makes it difficult for him to lay out a valid atheist’s argument. As a Freudian [?] psychiatrist he does understand Freud though, I would think. At least he presents Freud’s argument against religion — a belief in god, Freud thought, is a neurosis or the projection of parental authority. Because Freud returned to religious questions throughout his life, and wrote extensively about the Apostle Paul, Nicholi makes him appear as someone who could not really shake his religious beliefs. At times he appears to describe Freud almost as a closet “Christian.” A rather unlikely argument since Freud was deeply imbued with Judaism.

At one point Lewis is impressed with the idea that “the historical authenticity of the Gospels was surprisingly sound.” (p. 84) and “They appeared to be simple eyewitness accounts of historical events,” which “were different from anything else in literature.”(p. 86) These judgements as best as I can tell date to about 1928, and are wildly at odds with modern insights. Freud is said to agree that “the truth of religious doctrines is dependent on an inner experience which bears witness to that truth,”(p. 78). But, he himself has not had these inner experiences.

I just don’t agree — what goes on in a human head, Lewis’, Freud’s, or my own, is not reliable evidence for the existence or non-existence of god. This book has some interesting discussion about the works of two modern thinkers, and a long argument about the source of ethics. But as an argument about the existence of god it is worthless.

— Wolf Roder



September Meeting: Tuesday, 28th 7:00 PM

November Meeting Tuesday, 9th 7:00 PM



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

FIG

The Free Inquiry Group, Inc. 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. Our members are mostly secular humanists. However, 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 figleaves@fuse.net, or leave a message at (513) 557-3836. Visit our web site at gofigger.org