

FIG LEAVES

Volume 14 Issue 9

September 2005

September FIG Meeting: Tuesday, 27 September 7:00 PM

“What’s Going On in Humanism?”

When I asked **August Brunzman** to speak to FIG about what’s happening in the field of humanism, he replied: “I presume, of course, that you also want to know what’s going on with the atheists and freethinkers of other stripes as well, yes? I have lots to say about all of this.” August is in an excellent position to know what’s going on because as Executive Director of the Secular Student Alliance he is in regular contact with most freethought organizations in the country.

Moreover, just last month he presided over an SSA conference at which some key people in freethought spoke, including the new Executive Director of the American Humanist Association, Roy Speckhardt, and the first lobbyist for the Secular Coalition of America, Lori Lipman Brown. Our old friend Herb Silverman, who wears many hats, received the SSA’s Freethought Backbone Award.

With his work with the Secular Student Alliance since 2001, few have contributed more to bringing and keeping youth in the humanist movement than August Brunzman. With the retirement of Edwin and Helen Kagin, August has agreed to become the Executive Director of Camp Quest.

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Events

September Meeting

Tuesday, 27 September 7:00 PM
at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, Ohio

October Potluck

Tuesday 11 October 6:30 PM
At the home of

October Meeting

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

November Potluck

Tuesday 8 November 6:30 PM
At the home of



Nominations & Elections to the FIG Board of Directors



At our **August Picnic**, we convened a brief business meeting and elected the following FIG members below to fill the expiring terms and other vacancies.

Welcome aboard!

FIG Board,

Margaret O’Kain
Nurit Bowman
Wolf Roder
Shawn Jeffers
Kathy Lyons
Helen Kagin

These are continuing on the board:

Bill O’Kain
Joe Levee
George Maurer
Bryan Sellers
Phil Ferguson
Donna Loughry



THINGS TO DO.... THINGS TO SEE...



Dear Cincinnati-area friends of the National Center for Science Education (NCSE)

You might be interested in Thomas Ballieul's upcoming talk on "Evolution & God: Why Intelligent Design Isn't Science," part of the Voices of Justice Speaker Series at Northern Hills Fellowship (Unitarian Universalist) in Cincinnati, to be held Sunday, September 18, 2005, at 3:00 p.m.

Ballieul, a geologist, NCSE member, and speaker for Ohio Citizens for Science, will address such questions as:

- What is Intelligent Design?
- What is Evolution?
- Why is Intelligent Design being pushed as an alternative to Evolution and who is behind it?

Tom will discuss all this and why scientists, teachers, and citizens all over Ohio are working to maintain high science standards in Ohio schools. Tom will then end the talk with a Question & Answer period. Further discussion and conversation are welcome at a reception with snacks and light beverages immediately following the talk.

Admission is free and open to the public. Voluntary donations will be collected to be shared with the Ohio Citizens for Science.

Later in the week, the film *Ape To Man* will be presented, free of charge, Friday, September 23, at 6:30 p.m. *Ape To Man* recently aired on the History Channel to rave reviews from the science community. This is a wonderful educational opportunity to view and discuss this film.

For more information contact: Northern Hills Fellowship; 460 Fleming Road; Cincinnati OH 45231; (513) 931-6651; <http://www.uunhf.org>

Sincerely,

Glenn Branch, Deputy Director; National Center for Science Education, Inc.
420 40th Street, Suite 2; Oakland, CA 94609-2509
phone: 510-601-7203 ext. 305; fax: 510-601-7204
800-290-6006; branch@ncseweb.org; <http://www.ncseweb.org>

Eugenie C. Scott's *Evolution vs. Creationism* is now available:

<http://www.ncseweb.org/evc>

New Exorcism Film Highlights Deadly Rituals.

A new film about exorcism is set to be released on September 9. *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, starring Laura Linney and Campbell Scott, is about a priest accused of negligence resulting in the death of a nineteen-year-old woman during an exorcism. While demons, devils, and exorcisms are obviously great grist for horror films, *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* is interesting because it shows (however fictionally) the potentially dangerous consequences of exorcisms.

As the film opens across the country, a Romanian priest stands accused of just such a crime in real-life.

To Read More about this film visit: www.csicop.org and <http://www.csicop.org/specialarticles/exorcist-rituals.html>



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

figleaves@fuse.net;

or on disk or typewritten via mail to Editor, FIG Leaves, P.O. Box 19034, Cincinnati, OH 45219. Contributions received before the first Friday of the month will be considered for publication that month.

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



Things to do, Things to See (cont.)

Available August 23rd from Microcinema DVD:

The God who wasn't there

A Film Beyond Belief, \$24.98 (includes PPR), UPC: 837101074865, Copyright: 2005. Running Time: 62 minutes plus 259 minutes of extras

Bowling for Columbine did it to the gun culture. *Super Size Me* did it to fast food. Now *The God Who Wasn't There* does it to religion. Holding modern Christianity up to a bright spotlight, this bold new film demands answers to the questions few dare to ask. Your guide through the world of Christendom is former fundamentalist Brian Flemming, who unflinchingly examines believers and the origins of their beliefs. He gets help from such luminaries as esteemed folklorist Alan Dundes (Holy Writ as Oral Lit), Jesus Seminar fellow Robert M. Price (Deconstructing Jesus) and neuroscientist Sam Harris (The End of Faith). Along with Brian, you will discover:

- The early founders of Christianity seem wholly unaware of the idea of a human Jesus
- The Jesus passed down to us in the gospels bears a striking resemblance to other ancient heros and the figureheads of pagan savior cults
- Contemporary Christians are largely ignorant of the origins of their religion
- Christianity is as obsessed with blood and violence now as it was in the First century
- Fundamentalism is as strong today as it ever has been, with an alarming 44% of Americans believing Jesus will return to Earth within the next 50 years
- And God simply isn't there.

Brian Flemming also explores his own experiences within fundamentalist Christianity at a cult-like school that taught him how and what to believe. Ultimately, he confronts the man in charge of educating the school's 1800 students, and this superintendent's inability to justify what he teaches is revealing and distressing.

Dazzling motion graphics and a sweeping soundtrack by DJ Madson, David Byrne, Thievery Corporation, Zap Mama and Le Tigre help tell this tale of one person's journey from the darkness of first-century thinking to the enlightenment of reason. Hold on to your faith. It's in for a bumpy ride. More details:

http://www.microcinema.com/programResult.php?program_id=407 ☞

Creationism and ABC News.

Earlier this year, we asked a rhetorical question, "Is ABC News nuts?" There is new information. Last night, ABC Evening News took viewers to the Museum of Earth History in Eureka Springs, Ark. Disputes are different in the Bible world. Genesis says a pair of every kind of animal was taken on board Noah's Ark and in a world that's only 10,000 years old, that must include dinosaurs. Or it may be that the reporter, Jake Tapper, went to school in Kansas. "Religious views of creation that challenge accepted science are gaining support across the country," he told viewers, "The Kansas Board of Education this week tentatively endorsed new standards allowing more criticism of evolution in explaining the origins of life." As further proof, ABC showed President Bush delivering his "intelligent design should be taught in schools" remarks. To balance the President, science had AAAS CEO Alan Leshner, "I have no problem with people talking about religion as religion or belief as belief." Hmmm. "It's dangerous to talk about religious belief as if it were science." So what was ABC's conclusion? "Science is increasingly on the defensive."

– *What's New*, Robert L. Park, 12 August 2005

Quote
 • If men are so wicked with religion, what would they
 • be without it? Benjamin Franklin

Unquote.....

Presidential Wannabees get "that old time religion"

Senator John McCain made it clear last week that he too can read polls. In an interview with the *Arizona Daily Star*, McCain said "all points of view" should be available to students studying the origins of mankind. We were unable to reach Senator McCain for clarification, but by "all" we think he means just evolution and intelligent design. Or maybe he hopes to corner the votes of those who worship "the giant frog from whose mouth the river of life flowed." McCain's appeal to evolution deniers came just four days after Senator Frist made a pitch to the scientifically challenged.

The respected Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found that 64% of Americans favor teaching creationism along with evolution in public schools. A scary 38% want to *replace* evolution with creationism. The tiny glimmer of hope for civilization was the number of inconsistencies in the responses, suggesting confusion over the meaning of the terms. There is room for education.

-- *What's New*, Robert L. Park, 2 September 2005



Once Again, how many unbelievers?

The *Washington Post National Weekly Edition* (5 - 11 September 2005, p. 31) published a listing of the distribution of faith groups in the U. S. military. This is not a survey or estimate, but a census of some 1.4 million active duty personnel. The *Post* credits the

Pentagon's Defense Manpower Data Center and the Navy Chaplain Corps as sources.

It is likely the Military reflects the Nation as a whole. So it is to be expected that 21.5 percent are Roman Catholics, and 69.0 percent all other Christians, for a total Christian population of 90.5 percent. This matches roughly what we know from various survey results. That 8.2 percent claim "no religious affiliation" is also confirmed by surveys. The question is, who are these "none" persons? Can we assume all or most are unbelievers? Or, do they represent a believing group who are merely at odds with established churches, or don't want to be bothered by preacher or congregation?

We are justified in rejecting the "nones" as unbelievers, because in this census the military lists "atheists" specifically and separately, comprising a mere 0.3 percent of the military. Your editor contends this represents a much more realistic figure of the explicitly secular, who accept no "god" or other supernatural "ghost in the universe." The number of atheists, incidentally, exceeds the number of Muslim or the number of Jews in the military. The total proportion of non-Christian religions, which in addition includes Hindu, Wicca, and Buddhists, make up some 1.0 percent of the total.

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Christian Schools bring suit against the University of California System

by David Rosenzweig, *Los Angeles Times*, 27 August 2005

Civil rights action says the system's admissions policy discriminates against students who are taught creationism and religious viewpoints. Amid the growing national debate over the mixing of religion and science in America's classrooms, University of California admissions officials have been accused in a federal civil rights lawsuit of discriminating against high schools that teach creationism and other conservative Christian viewpoints.

The suit was filed in Los Angeles federal court Thursday

by the Assn. of Christian Schools International, which represents more than 800 religious schools in the state, and by the Calvary Chapel Christian School in Murrieta, which has an enrollment of more than a thousand. Under a policy implemented with little fanfare a year ago, UC admissions authorities have refused to certify high school science courses that use textbooks challenging Darwin's theory of evolution, the suit says. Other courses rejected by UC officials include *Christianity's Influence in American History*, *Christianity and Morality in American Literature* and *Special Providence: American Government*.

The ten-campus UC system requires applicants to complete a variety of courses, including science, mathematics, history, literature and the arts. But in letters to Calvary Chapel, university officials said some of the school's Christian-oriented courses were too narrow to be acceptable. According to the lawsuit, UC's board of admissions also advised the school that it would not approve biology and science courses that relied primarily on textbooks published by Bob Jones University Press and A Beka Books, two Christian publishers. Instead, the board instructed the schools to "submit for UC approval a secular science curriculum with a text and course outline that addresses course content/knowledge generally accepted in the scientific community."

"It appears that the UC system is attempting to secularize Christian schools and prevent them from teaching from a world Christian view," said Patrick H. Tyler, a lawyer with Advocates for Faith and Freedom, which is assisting the plaintiffs. Wendell E. Bird, an Atlanta attorney who represents the Assn. of Christian Schools, said California was the only state in the nation that had taken such actions against Christian schools. Bird said the schools have no objection to teaching evolution alongside creationism but consider the UC regulations a violation of their rights. "And a threat to one religion is a threat to all," he added.

UC had not yet been served with the suit, so spokeswoman Ravi Poorsina said she could not comment on its details. But she said the university had a sound legal right to set course requirements for incoming students. "What we're doing is really for the benefit of the students," she said. "These requirements were established after careful study by faculty and staff to ensure that students who come here are fully prepared with broad knowledge and the critical thinking skills necessary to succeed." Although private schools have the right to teach what they want, she said, students from





In the News (cont.)

those institutions can gain admittance to UC schools by completing the necessary course requirements at community colleges if they choose. Those students can also request admission solely on the basis of their SAT scores, she said. But according to the lawsuit, the odds are heavily stacked against students seeking admission through that route. The suit also accuses the university system of employing a double standard by routinely approving courses that teach the viewpoints of other religions, such as Islam, Judaism and Buddhism.

The lawsuit mentions five Calvary Chapel students, identified only by their initials, all with outstanding academic and extracurricular records, who it contends will not qualify for admission because of the university's course requirements. The suit accuses the UC Board of Regents and five university officials of violating the plaintiffs' rights to freedom of speech and religion, and of displaying hostility toward Christianity. It seeks an injunction against the university system's practices.

So now you know, – or some people know exactly what god intended!

Monday, 29 Aug 05, 12:32 PM (EDT)

Coming ashore Gulf Coast - satellite image looks like 6-week fetus

The image of the hurricane with its eye already ashore at 12:32 PM Monday, August 29 looks like a fetus (unborn human baby) facing to the left (west) in the womb, in the early weeks of gestation (approx. 6 weeks). Even the orange color of the image is reminiscent of a commonly used pro-life picture of early prenatal development (see sign with picture of 8-week pre-born human child below). In this picture, and in another picture in today's on-line edition of *USA Today*, this hurricane looks like an unborn human child.

Louisiana has 10 child-murder-by-abortion centers - FIVE are in New Orleans God's message: REPENT AMERICA !

Just as God did with a similar satellite picture of Hurricane Ivan in 2004, He is showing us, in this and many, many, many other ways, our abomination of child-murder-by-abortion. When will we stop murdering 3,000 plus babies in America per day !? (just by surgical abortion alone).

Report: There are NO abortion centers open in New Orleans !!!

It has been reported from the director of a Christian retreat center which is accommodating several hundred refugees, from the devastation in New Orleans and elsewhere, caused by the Act of God named Hurricane Katrina, that the child-murder-by-abortion centers in New Orleans are all shut down !!! The bloody city of New Orleans (Ezekiel 22: 2-4) had five operating child-killing centers. As sad as it is to see the heart aching loss of life and the suffering of people in New Orleans, we can only give praise to God for sparing the lives of the innocent unborn who have been murdered by the tens of thousands in New Orleans and the rest of the state of Louisiana, year-after-year-after-year, despite prophetic warnings from men of God.

– from a very fundagelical website,
– where they think King Bush is too liberal

What kind of monster do these folks worship? (Ed.)

The Center for Inquiry announces a new program: CFI Communities

The following is an excerpt from an announcement in the Secular Humanist Online News for September, 2005

The Center for Inquiry is pleased to announce the development of a new program designed to advance critical inquiry, humanism, and a naturalistic worldview on the grassroots level. *CFI Communities* are groups of rationalists, skeptics, and humanists which sponsor local events, activism, lectures and educational programs. The Communities draw upon volunteers and Center for Inquiry Friends and supporters who are enthusiastic about our agenda and wish to take part in our movement. . . .

In July, dozens of CFI Community leaders from around the United States convened at the first "Convocation of Centers and Communities for Inquiry," as Paul Kurtz named it. The weekend conference included sessions on grassroots organizing, event planning, campus outreach, social services, and the use of CFI's Web and messaging services.

Editor's note: The Center for Inquiry does not invite groups like FIG to become "CFI Communities." This is because we have allied ourselves with the American Humanist Association and American Atheists and well as with CFI's Council for Secular Humanism. We have been told that groups like FIG will continue to receive the support of CFI and CSH, but at a lower level than that received by the CFI Communities.





In the News (cont.)

Kaufman v. McCaughy; A Potential Trap for Secular Humanists

by David Koepsell

Recently, the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals ruled atheism to be a religion, “for legal purposes.”

The case involved James Kaufman, a prison inmate in Wisconsin, who attempted to form an atheist discussion group, citing his rights of free exercise of religion. Under state statutes, it is much easier to form a “religious” group in prison than some other group like a chess club. Kaufman’s attempt was eventually rejected by prison authorities, and he appealed. The seventh Circuit Court of Appeals recently ruled that the state erred by not considering Mr. Kaufman’s request to form a “religious” group because atheism, for legal purposes, was a “religion.”

This is part of a larger philosophical and strategic debate that has taken place among freethought groups for decades and poses a number of potential pitfalls down the road. The proper challenge should be to rules which give religions greater free speech protection than non-religious but philosophical speech. Justice O’Connor held that the rights of the non-religious should be equal to those of the religious. This is the right analysis.

The First Amendment has been historically misapplied as giving greater deference to religious speech than to other forms of expression. The approach taken by Kaufman and others, who wish to raise the status of non-religion to religion threatens our fundamental values first by elevating our lack of belief to the status of belief. There is an important epistemological difference. Rational belief requires evidence of some kind. We are non-believers because there is insufficient evidence to the contrary. Our lack of faith is qualitatively different than a faith, and by making the two positions epistemologically equivalent, we undermine arguments all across the board for scientific, evidence-based positions on a range of subjects, including those in favor of evolution.

This is the trap that is being set by fundamentalists, who for the moment are crowing about how “unfair” it is to give atheists the privileges of religions, but who will, the next moment, use this to help to undermine science teaching in the public schools.

The Council for Secular Humanism has long held that our position is qualitatively different from those of religions and that our worldview must always be evidence based, free from unsupported dogmas and beliefs, and supportive of free inquiry into every area of otherwise cherished belief. We must now watch and wait to see where the courts go with this potentially thorny trap.

CFI Granted Representation at the United Nations

The Center for Inquiry, devoted to science, reason, and free inquiry in all areas of human interest, has been granted “special consultative status” as a non-governmental organization or NGO under the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

This entitles the Center for Inquiry to designate official representatives to the United Nations headquarters in New York and United Nations offices in Geneva and Vienna. The Center for Inquiry can participate in conferences and briefings open to NGOs, and generally present the scientific, skeptical, and secular humanist perspective to the international community.

The Center for Inquiry maintains offices in Amherst, N.Y., New York City, Los Angeles, Tampa, and “Communities for Inquiry” in fourteen other cities in North America. It also has branches in Germany, France, Spain, Poland, Russia, Peru, Argentina, Egypt, Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, India, Nepal, and is in the process of establishing a Center in China.

The New York City office of the Center for Inquiry, headquartered at Rockefeller Center, will coordinate UN activities. To learn more about the role of NGOs at the United Nations visit <http://www.un.org/esa/coordination/ngo/>

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Creationism at the White House

Tuesday, August 2, 2005

President Bush said Monday he believes schools should discuss “intelligent design” alongside evolution when teaching students about the creation of life. During a round-table interview with reporters from five Texas newspapers, Bush declined to go into detail on his personal views of the origin of life. But he said students should learn about both theories, Knight Ridder Newspapers reported.

“I think that part of education is to expose people to different schools of thought,” Bush said. “You’re asking me whether or not people ought to be exposed to different ideas, the answer is yes.” The theory of intelligent design says life on earth is too complex to have developed through evolution, implying that a higher power must have had a hand in creation. Christian conservatives? a substantial part of Bush’s voting base? have been pushing for the teaching of intelligent design in public schools. Scientists have rejected the theory as an attempt to force religion into science education.

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In the News (cont.)

At the White House, intelligent design was the subject of a weekly Bible study class several years ago when Charles W. Colson, the founder and chairman of Prison Fellowship Ministries, spoke to the group. Mr. Colson has also written a book, "The Good Life," in which a chapter on intelligent design features Michael Gerson, an evangelical Christian who is an assistant to the president for policy and strategic planning.

"It's part of the buzz of the city among Christians," Mr. Colson said in a telephone interview on Tuesday about intelligent design. "It wouldn't surprise me that it got to George Bush. He reads, he picks stuff up, he talks to people. And he's pretty serious about his own Christian beliefs."

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Ignorance Is Bliss; Sometimes It's Policy

By Eugene Robinson, *Washington Post* (online), 5 August 2005; p. A15

The ranch at Crawford hardly compares with the Forbidden City, but George W. Bush has something in common with the Ming emperors of China: He seems determined to make his great nation less ambitious and more ignorant. He wouldn't see it that way, of course, but the emperors didn't see it that way either. And I don't know how else to explain policies and pronouncements that make the quest for knowledge conditional on politics. That is a prescription for decline.

In the early 1400s the Ming emperor Zhu Di made China into the world's leading maritime nation, sending huge fleets on missions of trade and exploration as far as the Swahili coast of Africa. It should have been just a matter of a few years before Chinese sailors discovered the Americas. But Zhu Di's successors, influenced by court politics, called home the fleets and forbade them to sail again, forfeiting the riches of the New World -- and five centuries of global domination -- to an underdeveloped backwater called Europe.

I guess it's a general rule of political dynasties, in China as well as in Texas, that the blood thins with successive generations. Examples? Well, there's the way Bush insists on hamstringing American scientists who are trying to explore the potential medical benefits of therapies involving embryonic stem cells. You are excused if your eyes glaze over at the mention of the words "stem cells," but it's enough to know that Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, in a rare display of backbone, has challenged the president over his suffocating restrictions on federal funding for stem cell research -- and also that the fight is akin to arguing over what kind of lock to put on the barn door while the horse frolics in the next county.

While our leaders disagree, stem cell technology is being developed and advanced in laboratories all around the world, especially in Asia. South Korean researchers have arguably pushed farther than anyone else. At the moment it's still a long shot that embryonic stem cells will prove to be a panacea, but if they do it's increasingly likely that the key discoveries will be made elsewhere -- not in the United States.

And there's no real reason for Bush's position except politics. All that Frist and other reasonable people want is to be able to experiment on surplus embryos from fertility clinics, embryos that otherwise will be destroyed. But the radical pro-life lobby won't be reasonable, so Bush does his best to keep the United States on the sidelines of what is, at the moment, the most exciting field of medical research.

Then there's this administration's almost comical insistence that the firm scientific consensus on global climate change is some kind of mass hallucination. "What global warming?" they ask, as mean temperatures rise, Arctic ice melts, tropical diseases march north and hurricanes rake poor Florida in swarms. The much-maligned Kyoto treaty isn't the point. Treaty or no treaty, it looks as if sooner or later the world is going to have to find a way to prosper without spewing so much heat-trapping carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Other nations are busy trying to develop technology and coping mechanisms to prepare for that day. When it comes, we'll be at or near the back of the line. Maybe we'll line up all our obsolete SUVs along the coast to try to hold back the rising sea.

To round out the trifecta, the other day Bush reiterated his support for teaching "intelligent design" in America's schools along with evolution, as a way of exposing students to different points of view. This really borders on madness. Intelligent design isn't a scientific theory at all; it's a matter of faith -- Creationism 2.0.-- Faith is a different kind of truth. Charles Darwin's landmark discovery of evolution, with a few minor modifications and additions over the years, has proved to be one of the sturdiest and most unassailable scientific theories of all time. To the extent that science can say anything is true, evolution is scientifically true. Done. Settled. As Walter Cronkite used to say, "That's the way it is."

To teach American children in science class that intelligent design is an alternative explanation of how birds, anteaters and people came to be birds, anteaters and people is simply to make American children less well educated than children elsewhere. By all rights, we ought to remember the Ming dynasty for discovering America; instead, we think of gorgeous pottery but not much else. China's current leaders seem determined not to make the same mistake. -- eugenerobinson@washpost.com





The “coin-gate” scandal caused the release of a lot of e-mails, including a batch about the Ohio Science Education Standards. These e-mails confirm almost everything those of us fighting against the anti-evolution, pro Intelligent Design Creationism aspects of the standards suspected. It also makes it clear that had the Taft administration just left the Ohio Board of Education (OBE) alone the pro-creationism aspects of the standards would *not* have passed. Instead the Taft administration was working hard behind the scenes to promote Intelligent Design Creationism (IDC) and the vacuous anti-evolution claims that go along with it. Those of us in Ohio Citizens for Science strongly suspected somebody near the top was pushing the IDC cause.

– Steve Edinger

Taft moved behind scenes to manage evolution debate

By Catherine Candisky, *The Columbus Dispatch*, 16 August 2005 .

As the debate over teaching about evolution flares again across the nation, newly released memos show how Gov. Bob Taft’s office struggled to manage the issue three years ago. The behind-the-scenes maneuvering doesn’t match public statements made by the Taft administration at the time.

One e-mail shows that even as the administration was denying reports that it was pressuring the State Board of Education, Taft’s then-Chief of Staff Brian K. Hicks was directing an aide to line up board members’ support for Taft’s position - allowing “intelligent design” to be taught alongside evolution in Ohio’s science curriculum.

Intelligent design says that a higher, unnamed intelligence must have played a role in the development of living things. In November 2002, after the board unanimously approved its intent to adopt science standards and just weeks before its final vote, Hicks wrote Elizabeth Ross, then Taft’s education liaison: “You should call (Carl) Wick, (Jim) Craig and (Sam) Schloemer and let them know that the Gov. strongly supports the science standards that passed with a 17-0 vote. He does not want to see changes to the proposal and hopes that these members will not support any changes to the standards.

“Let me know if I need to call anyone . . . we don’t want this thing to unravel.” A few hours earlier, Ross had informed Hicks that the board’s leading advocate for intelligent design had called and was livid about an attempt to return to evolution-only standards.

Patricia Princehouse, an evolutionary biologist at Case Western Reserve University, said the e-mails among Taft staffers prove what was long suspected by her and others opposed to including intelligent design in the standards - that the administration was in regular contact with key board members and tried to influence the board’s vote.

Taft spokesman Orest Holubec denied the charge. “I would argue there is a

difference between informing members of the governor’s position and pressuring members of the board,” he said. The e-mails show the administration was keeping a keen eye on the issue and striving to avoid negative publicity while under enormous pressure from conservatives. “Let’s get this evolving monkey off our back,” Hicks wrote to a policy adviser in March 2002, two months into a yearlong battle that already was drawing national attention. “I do believe the religious right is angry,” Ross warned Hicks a few months later after conservatives complained that Taft and the board were ignoring “the will of the people.”

Throughout the debate, the governor, who was facing reelection that year, declined to publicly state his view on the matter. A spokesman then said Taft was waiting for a board recommendation. But the e-mails show a three-page set of prepared remarks by Taft stating his beliefs, which were similar to recent comments from President Bush, who said, “Both sides ought to be properly taught . . . so people can understand what the debate is about.”

Hicks circulated the three page draft statement in March 2002, but Taft never delivered it. The reason is unclear. “It is entirely appropriate to indicate the existence of alternative viewpoints that challenge prevailing bodies of knowledge,” Taft’s draft read. “However, teachers need

to be clear when a viewpoint is scientifically based and when it is not.”

Holubec said the statement is insignificant. “It is important to note that it is staff work and not something the governor released.”

Ultimately, the board took a stance similar to that espoused by Taft. **It adopted science standards that recommend students be taught evolution as well as a critical analysis of the theory. Although intelligent design is not mentioned by name, supporters declared victory.** Critics say such language opens the classroom door to a faith-based concept that some living things are too complex to have come about by chance and natural selection, and thus a higher, unnamed intelligence must have played a role.

Throughout the process, the Taft administration was concerned about Ohio’s image. In January 2002, Paolo De-Maria, then Taft’s policy chief, wrote Hicks that state schools Superintendent Susan T. Zelman “is very concerned about this as well, and is working hard to manage the process and search for middle ground without making Ohio a ‘Kansas-style’ laughingstock. “Some of her board members - including some we appointed - are problematic on this issue. Given the passions, it may be difficult to avoid some





FIG LEAVES



PR spillover, but I think we are all working hard to avoid it.”

The governor appoints eight of the 19 members of the Ohio Board of Education while 11 are elected to represent regions of the state. DeMaria’s reference to adverse publicity stemmed from a 1999 decision by the Kansas school board to drop evolution from its science standards, a move which brought national ridicule. The following election, Kansas voters defeated three conservatives who had approved the measure, and the new board reinstated evolution to its curriculum guidelines. However, after yet another election they are currently again under review.

Initially, Ohio’s proposed science standards called for teaching evolution only, with a seeming minority of board members seeking inclusion of intelligent design. “The intelligent design language that three board members . . . are fighting for is going to be adequately blocked by Sheets et al . . . Zelman and I are very well aware that we do not want an issue,” Ross wrote Hicks in January 2002. She was referring to intelligent-design supporters Michael Cochran, of Blacklick, Deborah Owens Fink, of Richfield, and James L. Turner, of Cincinnati. Fink and Turner were appointed to the board; Cochran was elected. The e-mail also mentions Jennifer L. Sheets, of Pomeroy, who was board president and also appointed by Taft. Like Taft, Sheets refused to publicly state her position on the issue, saying it was inappropriate because of her position. “As president, I try and retain a neutral position, so I don’t think it’s appropriate

for me to take a position,” Sheets later told The Dispatch. As debate continued through the summer and the election neared, e-mails show that Taft faced increasing pressure. “We can barely keep up with the calls that evolution and Darwinism should not be the only views taught in Ohio curriculum. Every person calling says they will work to sway votes from Taft and they want to hear his stand on this prior to the election,” Ross wrote Hicks in August 2002.

After the election, Ross warned Hicks that board member Fink was livid over an 11th hour attempt to strip from the standards her compromise allowing for critical analysis, replacing it with the teaching of evolution only. “Her message is that board member Marlene Jennings called her stating that she now had nine votes and hopes to have 10 or 11 by the board meeting in December to go back to “evolution only” no compromise. Fink says that if the compromise was a pre-election setup, she worked day and night before and she will do so again and bring the state down on the board and it will look very bad for the gov - bait and switch etc. “I told her I know nothing of this. In every conversation and communication you and the governor were committed to a workable compromise and this is totally out of line.” Jennings did make such a proposal, but it did not pass.

Fink said Friday that as “a staunch conservative Republican” she fought hard to protect a compromise position. “We were weighing in with whoever we could weigh in with.”

-- ccandisky@dispatch.com ☞

Quote

I contend that we are both atheists; I just believe in one fewer gods than you do. When you understand why you dismiss all other possible gods, you’ll understand why I dismiss yours. --Stephen Roberts

Unquote

The Science Book Club schedule for 2005

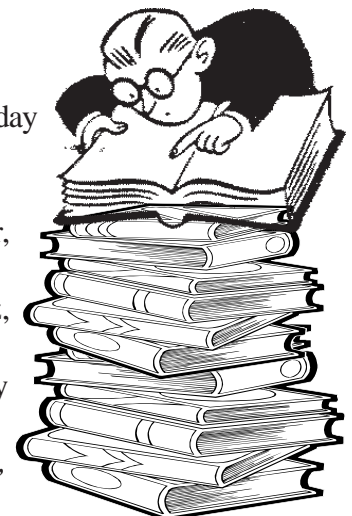
We will continue to meet in room 3A at the Cincinnati downtown library at 2:30 on the 4th Sunday of each month except where noted.

Sunday Sept 25 - *The Electric Meme : a New Theory of How We Think* by Robert Aunger, 2002

Sunday Oct 23 - *Where Mathematics Comes From* by George Lakoff and Rafael Nunez, 2000

Sunday Nov 20 (3rd Sunday) - *Eyes on the Universe : a History of the Telescope* by Isaac Asimov, 1975

Sunday Dec 18 (3rd Sunday) - *The Science of Good and Evil : Why People Cheat, Gossip, Care, Share, and Follow the Golden Rule* by Michael Shermer, 2004





Complexity: Biological and Economic

Life is too complex for evolution to explain, say supporters of intelligent design. Yet they insist market forces will suffice for the economy.

By John Allen Paulos, *The Guardian*, 8 September 2005

The theory of intelligent design, the purportedly more scientific descendant of creation science, rejects Darwin's theory of evolution as being unable to explain the complexity of life. How, ask its supporters, can biological phenomena such as the clotting of blood have arisen just by chance?

A key supporter likens the "irreducible complexity" of such phenomena to the irreducible complexity of a mousetrap. If one piece is missing - spring, metal platform or board - it is useless. The implicit suggestion is that all the parts of a mousetrap would have had to come into being at once, an impossibility unless there were an intelligent designer. Design proponents argue that what's true for the mousetrap is all the more true for complex biological phenomena. If any of the twenty or so proteins involved in blood clotting is absent, clotting doesn't occur. So, the creationist argument goes, these proteins must have all been brought into being at once by a designer.

But the theory of evolution does explain the evolution of complex biological organisms and phenomena, and the argument from design, which dates from the 18th century, has been decisively refuted. Rehashing the refutation is not my goal. Those who reject evolution are usually immune to such arguments.

Rather, my intention here is to develop some loose analogies between these biological issues and related economic ones and to show that these analogies point to a surprising crossing of political lines. Let me begin by asking how it is that modern free market economies are as complex as they are, boasting amazingly elaborate production, distribution and communication systems? Go into almost any drug store and you can find your favorite candy bar. And what's true at the personal level is true at the industrial level. Somehow there are enough ball bearings and computer chips in just the right places in factories all over the country. The physical infrastructure and communication networks are also marvels of integrated complexity. Fuel supplies are, by and large, where they're needed. E-mail reaches you in Miami as well as in Milwaukee, not to mention Barcelona and Bangkok.

The natural question, discussed first by Adam Smith and later by Friedrich Hayek and Karl Popper among others, is

who designed this marvel of complexity? Which commissar decreed the number of packets of dental floss for each retail outlet? The answer, of course, is that no economic god designed this system. It emerged and grew by itself. No one argues that all the components of the candy bar distribution system must have been put into place at once, or else there would be no Snickers at the corner store.

So far, so good. What is more than a bit odd, however, is that some of the most ardent opponents of Darwinian evolution - for example, many fundamentalist Christians - are among the most ardent supporters of the free market. They accept the market's complexity without qualm, yet insist the complexity of biological phenomena requires a designer.

They would reject the idea that there is or should be central planning in the economy. They would point out that simple economic exchanges which are beneficial to people become entrenched and then gradually modified as they become part of larger systems of exchange, while those that are not beneficial die out. Yet some of these same people refuse to believe natural selection and "blind processes" can lead to biological order arising spontaneously.

There are, of course, quite significant differences and disanalogies between biological systems and economic ones (one being that biology is a much more substantive science than economics), but these shouldn't blind us to their similarities nor mask the obvious analogies. These analogies prompt two final questions. What would you think of someone who studied economic entities and their interactions in a modern free market economy and insisted that they were, despite a perfectly reasonable and empirically supported Adm Smith account of their development, the consequence of some all-powerful, detail-obsessed economic law-giver? You might deem such a person a conspiracy theorist.

And what would you think of someone who studied biological processes and organisms and insisted that they were, despite an perfectly reasonable and empirically supported Darwinian account of their development, the consequence of some all-powerful, detail-obsessed biological law-giver?

John Allen Paulos is a professor of mathematics at Temple University, Philadelphia. www.math.temple.edu/paulos

Quote
No man with any sense of humor ever founded a religion. Robert G. Ingersoll
..... **Unquote**



BOOK REVIEW

An Empire of Wealth: The Epic History of American Economic Power
by John Steele Gordon
(New York: HarperCollins, 2004)

What we have here is a *paean*, — a praise song, — on the American free market, capitalist economy. It is a story of the pursuit of wealth by individuals, freely allowed to follow their own interests to improve their status and income. Markets were free at first, in our early history in a wilderness beyond the reach of law and power of the king, in the later centuries in a democratic society in which the government considered the economy none of their business. Steele does eventually acknowledge that in the economy as in other aspects of society some rules of law are needed. “Capitalism without regulation and regulators is inherently unstable, as people will usually put their short-term self-interest ahead of the interests of the system as a whole, and either chaos or plutocracy will result.”(p. 207)

Very interesting is his history of national banking in the United States. Alexander Hamilton created the original national bank, Jefferson got rid of it; it was re-invented until Andrew Jackson again abolished it. Throughout the eighteenth century the US did not have a central bank. Steele blames the extreme ups and downs of the economy, the depressions and booms, the many local banks, and bank failures on the uncontrolled money supply and the gold standard. The modern Federal Reserve system was created in 1912 but took a long time to become effective and secure. Steele blames the Great Depression of the thirties on errors committed by the Federal Reserve, which still needed a good deal of tweaking and reform.

In this book the market is by and large always right, and mistakes and blunders are made by government. Commenting on Reagan’s Savings & Loan fiasco towards the end of the book: “As so often happens in a democracy in the short term, politics trumped economic reality, and what followed was a near textbook case on how not to deregulate an industry.”(p. 399) He does not approve of many of Congress’ spending habits. Yet, government can do some things right, when it supports the free market, as in the New Deal: (p. 343)

Most of all, while many of the New Deal programs were unsuccessful and many of its economic principles shortsighted, in its totality it was an enormous success. The country since the New Deal has been a far richer, far more economically secure, far more just society. It has been one that has proved to offer far more opportunity for all and produce far more wealth as a consequence. There has never been a serious political effort to reverse the New Deal, although its worst ideas--such as the cartelization of much of the American economy--were discarded and much of it has been reformed, for democracy is a process of endless reform.

Much of Steele’s history is a history of technological innovation. Starting with water power and the steam engine, Americans took European scientific and technical innovations and turned them into every day, useful products inexpensive enough for ordinary incomes. Only towards the end of the nineteenth century did the US become a society leading in scientific and technical research. It seems that after World War II, Japan often took over this role by bringing American inventions to market.

Among innovations, Steele explains the history and role of the stock exchange. He also describes the corporation as a major innovation, and praises the growth of the major American mega-companies in autos, oil, electric power, steel and others products. His history of labor organization and of the growth of labor unions is less extensive or satisfactory.

Neither democracy, nor regulation, nor the market, nor the corporation have had quite the impact of our major wars. In less than a hundred years the US fought the Civil War, and intervened in two major European wars. Innovation and production were very much pushed and boomed by these emergencies.

Robert Samuelson in *Newsweek* (29 Nov. 2004, p. 45) calls the book “superb” and writes: “Gordon has written the best one volume economic history of the United States in a long time and, perhaps, ever.” I think he is a little over-enthusiastic, but it is a readable book. — Wolf Roder

Quote.....
• **Even back then.**
• . . . surely there is no country in the world where religion
• makes so large a part of the amusement and occupation of
• the ladies. Spain, in its most catholic days, could not exceed
• it . . .
• — Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*
• (1832) chap. XXVI
.....**Unquote**



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FIG

Our Purpose

The Free Inquiry Group, Inc. (FIG) is a non-profit organization founded in 1991. FIG is allied with the Council for Secular Humanism as well as an affiliate of the American Humanist Association and of the American Atheists.

Though most of our members are secular humanists, we welcome to our meetings anyone interested in learning about or furthering our purpose.



To foster a community of secular humanists dedicated to improving the human condition through rational inquiry and creative thinking unfettered by superstition, religion, or any form of dogma.

In accordance with our purpose, we have established the following goals:

- To provide a forum for intelligent exchange of ideas for those seeking fulfillment in an ethical secular life.
- To develop through open discussion the moral basis of a secular society and encourage ethical practices within our own membership and the community at large.
- To inform the public regarding secular alternatives to supernatural interpretations of the human condition.
- To support and defend the principles of democracy, free speech, and separation of church and state as expressed in the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights.

For more information, write the Free Inquiry Group at the address above, e-mail figinfo@gofigger.org, or leave a message at (513) 557-3836. Visit our web site at gofigger.org.