

FIG LEAVES

Volume 21 Issue 7

August 2012

Note: Do not look for the July issue: *There Was No July Issue*

August Picnic:

Saturday Aug 18, 3:30 PM,
Veteran's Memorial Park

FIG's Summer Picnic & Potluck

Veteran's Memorial Park, Union Township, Clermont County, Ohio
Clough Pike at Glen Este-Withamsville Rd, Cincinnati, OH 45245
(about 1 mile from Eastgate Mall)

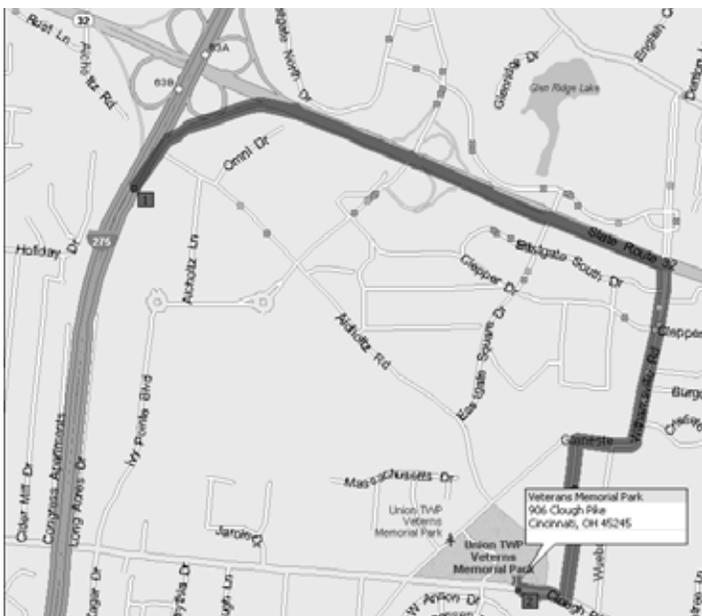
Join us at the "FIG-nic" for our annual summer celebration. We will be meeting at Veteran's Memorial Park near Eastgate. We have a shelter reserved with picnic tables and grills. We will start gathering around 3:30pm and food should be ready to eat by 4:30pm. FIG will provide Hamburgers/Hotdogs (meat and veggie varieties), buns, condiments, soft drinks, water and plates and napkins.

Feel free to bring a dish or snack to share. Also, there is room at the park if you want to bring along any games or activities.

Special thanks to Susan Davis who helped reserve the shelter!

Driving Directions: (see map below)

Take I-275 to the east side of the city, Exit at OH 32 go East, (that is turn to R if you come from the south, turn to L if you come from the North) After about a mile turn Right on Glen Este-Withamsville Rd (White Castle, UDF, Medache Clinic on corner at turn), Continue for about 1/2 mile and the park will be on the left. Look for FIG at the Shelter.



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Events

(Note dates & times)

August Picnic

Saturday, Aug. 18 at 3:30 pm
Veteran's Memorial Park, Union
Township, Clermont Couty,
(Clough Pike & Glen Este-
Withamsville Rd.)
Cincinnati, OH 45245

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FIG LEAVES



THINGS TO DO....



THINGS TO SEE...

Upcoming Meetups

Monday, August 20, 2012 6:30 PM
Monthly Monday at The Washington Platform

Thursday, September 6, 2012 7:00 PM
First Thursday at The Hofbräuhaus

Monday, September 17, 2012 6:30 PM
Monthly Monday at The Washington Platform

Saturday, August 18, 2012 3:30 PM

FIG's Summer Picnic & Potluck

Veteran's Memorial Park, Union Township OH, Clough Pike at Glen Este-Withamsville Rd., Cincinnati, OH 45245; (about 1 mile from Eastgate Mall)



FIG Leaves - Thoughtful articles, letters, reviews, reports, anecdotes, and cartoons are very welcome. Submit in Electronic format via the internet to figmessage at gofigger dot org; or on disk or typewritten via mail to Editor, FIG Leaves, P.O. Box 53174, Cincinnati, OH 45253. Contributions received before the first Friday of the month will be considered for publication that month.

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Science Book Club

2012 Schedule, books, and dates

All meetings are on 3rd Sunday of month at 2:30 pm except in June on 4th Sunday because Father's Day falls on 3rd Sunday. All meetings at the Hamilton County downtown Public Library in room 3A except for April and May (room 3B) as noted below:

August 19 — *The Grammar Of Society: The Nature And Dynamics Of Social Norms*, Cristina Bicchieri (game theory) 2005

September 16 — *Thinking In Pictures : And Other Reports From My Life With Autism*, Temple Grandin 2006

October 21 — *Drama Of The Gifted Child : The Search For The True Self*, Alice Miller 2008

November 18 — *The Revenge Of Gaia: Earth's Climate In Crisis And The Fate Of Humanity*, James Lovelock 2006

December 16 — *How We Decide*, Jonah Lehrer 2009



Yes, I know I'm God, and yes, I do buy TV dinners. To be honest, I've had bad experiences with making things all by myself ...

Memberships run from:

1 January to 31 December.

One year: \$30

Family: \$40

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

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



Leukemia & Lymphoma Society Light The Night Walk

Help CFI Light the Night in the Fight Against Cancer

We at the Center for Inquiry are proud to announce an exciting new project we've joined in which pro-science and secular groups like CFI are uniting to raise \$1,000,000 to fight cancer.

Light the Night is the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's evening walk and fundraising event to pay tribute and bring hope to people battling blood cancer. Each fall, in communities all across the US and Canada, thousands of participants raise funds for vital, lifesaving research and patient services and, on these special nights, they carry illuminated balloons to show the support of a caring community.

Light the Night walkers raise funds and walk as individuals or on a team with friends, family and co-workers—and this is where we need your help.

This year, for the first time ever, freethought, atheist, skeptic, and secular humanist groups are coming together as one unified team to pool our efforts and become the first team in LLS history to raise \$1,000,000 in its first year.

Our team is Foundation Beyond Belief (FBB) and we need you to help this worthwhile cause by joining a local FBB Light the Night team.

To find a team near you, go to the FBB International Team page and scroll down to the list of cities. (We already have many CFI FBB teams, so be sure to look for a CFI team in your city.) If there's not an existing FBB team at a walk site near you, you can create a new team using the instructions found here. If there isn't a Light the Night walk site near you, you can still join and raise money as a "Virtual Team." Donations from all the local FBB teams will be aggregated together under the FBB International Team and will count towards our \$1,000,000 goal!

How will we ever raise \$1,000,000 ?

A million dollars is a LOT of money, but we have a not-so-secret weapon: the Stiefel Freethought Foundation has pledged to match every dollar we raise up to \$500,000! As an extra incentive, the top fundraising teams will have the opportunity to direct up to \$5,000 in SFF grants, with half going to a local qualifying freethought nonprofit and the rest to qualifying FBB Allies of their choice, such as CFI. (More information about the incentive program can be found here.)

This is a great opportunity to rally behind something big that reflects our shared values: the healing power of scientific research, education, and compassionate patient care. Please sign up for an existing team or create a walk team for your group under the FBB International Team banner and join all of us in the fight against cancer.

Thank you! For more information, visit CFI's **Light the Night** page, and send questions to Lauren Becker at lbecker@centerforinquiry.net.

The Cincinnati Team for Light the Night is
Skeptical Society of Cincinnati FBB
(contact Colin Thornton)

The walk is on October 11, 2012 at Sawyer Point
Their website is
<http://pages.lightthenight.org/soh/Cinci12/SkepticalSocietyofCincinnatiFBB>





Contradiction Corner

By Dennis Davis



This month I would like to discuss the Christian fundamentalists' hatred of evolution. Many varieties of scientific facts and theories contradict the Bible, yet no other branch of a scientific discipline elicits raw emotional outrage like the mention of biological evolution. Why is this? Why does this branch of science elicit such vehement hatred like no other? There is no single answer that can be applied to all fundamentalists, but from my earlier experience as a fundamentalist minister myself I can provide some answers.

To see things from the fundamentalist perspective, you need to have a little insight into how they view their relationship with God. They see mankind as a race that fell from grace requiring redemption through Jesus Christ. They believe that this fall occurred through the failings of the first man Adam, though created perfect, somehow still disobeyed and brought sin into the world. Through evolution we know that humanity instead arose from primitive ancestors to slowly become who we are now without there ever being a "first man". Remove Adam from the picture and there can be no fall from grace. Without a fall there is no need for redemption. If humanity doesn't need redemption then Jesus came and died for nothing and the entire gospel story is meaningless. From their perspective, the gospel is a lie if evolution is true; therefore evolution is a direct attack on their belief system.

There is another reason that fundamentalists find man's ascent from an ape-like ancestor so offensive. From the beginning Judeo-Christian religions have taught that man was made in his creator's image, a separate act of creation from all the other inhabitants of our planet, the crowning achievement of the divine. Surely one of the most appealing benefits of religion is the comfort it gives the believer by telling them that they are important and special in God's eyes. I remember the chilled excitement I used to feel knowing that I was God's warrior fighting on the front lines in the cosmic war between good and evil.

Then science comes along instead saying that we are part of the natural world sharing common ancestry with all the rest of the animal kingdom. While the Genesis

story appoints man Lord of the planet to do with as he pleases; a humanity that is part of nature shares in the fate of the world he inhabits. This makes the fundamentalist feel cheated, that science is trying to deprive him of his divine heritage. It should not surprise us that evolution puts them on the offensive, we've stolen their birthright and made them less than special, and they resent it. It should not surprise us that these same people who reject evolution also reject Global Climate Change, because they do not see themselves as part of the natural world.

Most fundamentalists have problems with science because they do not understand it, nor do they want to. Religion is an appeal to the emotional brain that desires absolute answers and the fundamentalist is the most extreme example of that phenomenon. Science is the exact opposite, no answer is absolute. The most cherished theories in physics, biology, geology or any other science is always open to refinement or outright rejection based on the data. To the fundamentalist any theory less than certain is worthless, so science's refinement of theory is proof it is uncertain and therefore false.

The Genesis creation story puts the first humans in a garden where they are forbidden to eat of The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Furthermore, the penalty for seeking knowledge (eating the fruit of the tree) is death. A couple of chapters further into Genesis humanity builds the Tower of Babel to reach the heavens and discover knowledge and once again mankind is punished. Anti-intellectualism is rooted deeply into the Judeo-Christian tradition and this is another reason for fundamentalist mistrust of science in general and evolution in particular. This can clearly be heard in the Christian claim that evolutionists are arrogant and that it is an attempt to make man a god. In their mind the thought that we can understand how nature works is a sinful enterprise that demands punishment; the mysteries of the universe are the realm of the divine and it is immoral to try to understand it. They already have an absolute answer and questioning it is sinful.

If you have any fundamentalist friends or family, I hope this article provides you some insight into how they view evolution.

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From Vaccination To Eradication.

There is not inoculation against incompetence, and first we must cure the world of its superstitions.

Vaccination programs prevent more human suffering than any other branch of medicine. Their success depends on public confidence in their safety. But according to a

report released last Wednesday by the U.S. Department of Health, spot checks by the Office of the Inspector General finds that free vaccines, provided under the nationwide Vaccines for Children program, are often stored at the wrong temperature, which can render them ineffective. The first generation to receive MMR vaccinations are now parents. They have been spared not only the direct misery of the illness, but also serious side effects that can show up many years later. They should be the first to demand strict standards of safety and effectiveness in administering vaccines. Someday perhaps, eradication of pathogenic diseases will be routine, but we're not there yet. What prevents it?

In 1977, smallpox, the most deadly and persistent human pathogenic disease, was eradicated from Earth by the World Health Organization following an unprecedented agreement allowing quick-response teams to freely cross every border to administer vaccine in case of an outbreak. It was a moving demonstration of what can be achieved by world cooperation, and was quickly followed by calls to eradicate poliomyelitis. Polio eradication was undertaken by WHO in 1988 with help from private organizations, but although the number of polio cases diagnosed each year has plummeted, final eradication remains elusive. Opposition by Muslim fundamentalists is said to be the major factor in the failure of polio immunization programs. In Pakistan and Afghanistan the Taliban issued fatwa opposing vaccination as an attempt to avert Allah's will, while others saw it as an American plot to sterilize Muslims. Some conservative Christian groups oppose vaccination for diseases that are transmitted by sexual contact, arguing that the possibility of disease deters risky sexual contact. It doesn't.

- *What's New* by Robert Park, 13 June 2012

Making Eve's Mistake; Fooling With Snakes

Mark Wolford was there when his father died, in 1983. His father was a Pentecostal pastor who believed the faithful should "take up serpents" as mentioned in the book of Mark (16;18), and for him that meant poisonous snakes. He had them in church, and in 1983 one bit him, and he refused medical treatment ("it shall not hurt them," Mark continues; "and they shall recover.") He died after 10-1/2 hours of agony, his son by his side. Wolford followed in his father's footsteps: he's also a Pentecostal preacher in West Virginia, and also uses snakes in church. He recently prodded followers to come for a special service, noting on Facebook he was "looking for a great time this Sunday" since it was the day after his 44th birthday. "Praise the Lord and pass the rattlesnakes, brother!" he wrote. Sure enough, he was bitten during the service. After failing to recover, someone finally called paramedics, but by the time they got him to a hospital, after 9-1/2 hours of agony, he was dead. (*Washington Post*)

Holy Hell:

Edward Wolfe applied for an operations supervisor position at Voss Lighting Store in Tulsa, Okla. According to his complaint with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, as part of the application process Wolfe was asked to identify every church he had attended over several years, the timing and circumstances of his salvation, and whether he "would have a problem" coming into work early to attend Bible study -- unpaid. The complaint says one of the managers told Wolfe that most Voss employees were Southern Baptist, but "it wasn't required that you go to a Southern Baptist church. As long as you were a 'born-again' Christian, it didn't matter what church you attended." Ultimately, Wolfe wasn't hired -- allegedly because of his religious beliefs. "Voss denies that the charging party was not hired as a consequence of his religious beliefs," said Steve Sanderson, Voss vice president and general manager. "The individual hired by Voss had more lighting product experience and was more qualified than the charging party." (*Tulsa World*)





Does This Candidate Have A Prayer?

By Herb Silverman, 31 May 2012

“South Carolina is too small for a republic and too large for an insane asylum,” observed Congressman James L. Petigru, shortly after South Carolina seceded from the Union in 1860 and declared itself a republic. I’ve lived in South Carolina since 1976, and stories about our politicians no longer surprise me. The comedy group Capitol Steps takes its name from the escapade involving our former congressman John Jenrette, who had sex with his wife on the steps of the U.S. Capitol in the late 1970s. More recently, our former governor Mark Sanford was intimate with his “soul mate” in Argentina, which he mistook for the Appalachian Trail. Perhaps South Carolina is not too large for an insane asylum.

Some might argue that I’m also a candidate for this asylum. After all, why would a liberal, Yankee, Jewish atheist like me run for governor of South Carolina? Well, it wasn’t through blind ambition or unrealistic expectations, and certainly the devil didn’t make me do it. In 1990 a colleague at the College of Charleston, where I was a math professor, pointed out that the South Carolina Constitution prohibited atheists from becoming governor.

Since the U.S. Constitution bars religious tests for public office, I asked a local ACLU lawyer how this obviously unconstitutional provision could be removed. He said that to mount a legal challenge, an open atheist would have to become a candidate. And he added with a smile, “The very best candidate would be you-in a race for governor of South Carolina.”

After giving this surprising suggestion much thought, I agreed to run as a write-in candidate. I assumed, in my political naïveté, that state officials would consent to bring South Carolina into compliance with federal law. They didn’t. Governor Carroll Campbell said, “The South Carolina Constitution was fine as it was because this country was founded on Godly principles.”

And I soon learned that “atheist” was a very provocative word, and not just in South Carolina. The national Associated Press picked up the story, and the following day I got a call from a very distressed woman in Philadelphia--my mother! I had to admit that reading about me in the Philadelphia



Inquirer was not the best way to discover that her only child was a candidate for governor, and an atheist. I never expected publicity, so I thought I could spare my mother such heartache.



South Carolina Public Television invited all the gubernatorial nominees to debate a week before the election. Incumbent Republican Governor Carroll Campbell knew he would



have an easy election victory and declined, but nominees from the Democratic Party and the American Party (the old George Wallace party) jumped at the chance to debate me. Of course, afterward, friends assured each of us that we had won the debate, but one year later, there was an objective measure to determine the winner: Of the three participants, I was the only one who was not in jail. The American Party candidate was in jail for driving without a license and refusing to get one, while the Democratic Party candidate for a more traditional reason--tax evasion.

I engaged in an eight-year legal battle with my state, which finally ended in a South Carolina Supreme Court victory, nullifying the anti-atheist clause in our Constitution. South Carolina spent close to \$100,000 in an attempt to keep me from holding the exalted position of notary public.

Prior to this experience, I had been an apathetic atheist, as most atheists are. During my political campaigns, I heard from many who had thought they were the only atheists in South Carolina, so we formed a much-needed local secular humanist community. I also became active in national humanist and atheist organizations, helping to form the Secular Coalition for America, a political advocacy group that allows unlimited lobbying on behalf of secular Americans.

I journeyed from Orthodox Jew in Philadelphia to atheist activist in South Carolina. Lots of people don’t understand why I “waste time” focusing on nonexistent deities. Since I used to be an apathetic atheist, I can appreciate their point. At one time I saw no more need to promote atheism than to promote a round earth. Though a Flat Earth Society still exists, its supporters don’t have the political clout of a well-organized Religious Right. I don’t want special rights for atheists; I do want equal rights for everyone. In reality, for women, blacks, gays and lesbians, and atheists, it is taking a lot of candidates with or without a prayer to achieve this.

Herb Silverman is author of *Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt.* ☞



South Korea Surrenders To Creationist Demands. Publishers Set To Remove Examples Of Evolution From High-School Textbooks.

By Soo Bin Park, 5 June 2012

Seoul: Mention creationism, and many scientists think of the United States, where efforts to limit the teaching of evolution have made headway in a couple of states. But the successes are modest compared with those in South Korea, where the anti-evolution sentiment seems to be winning its battle with mainstream science.

A petition to remove references to evolution from high-school textbooks claimed victory last month after the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) revealed that many of the publishers would produce revised editions that exclude examples of the evolution of the horse or of avian ancestor *Archaeopteryx*. The move has alarmed biologists, who say that they were not consulted. "The ministry just sent the petition out to the publishing companies and let them judge," says Dayk Jang, an evolutionary scientist at Seoul National University.

The campaign was led by the Society for Textbook Revise (STR), which aims to delete the "error" of evolution from textbooks to "correct" students' views of the world, according to the society's website. The society says that its members include professors of biology and high-school science teachers.

The STR is also campaigning to remove content about "the evolution of humans" and "the adaptation of finch beaks based on habitat and mode of sustenance", a reference to one of the most famous observations in Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. To back its campaign, the group highlights recent discoveries that *Archaeopteryx* is one of many feathered dinosaurs, and not necessarily an ancestor of all birds². Exploiting such debates over the lineage of species "is a typical strategy of creation scientists to attack the teaching of evolution itself", says Joonghwan Jeon, an evolutionary psychologist at Kyung Hee University in Yongin.

The STR is an independent offshoot of the Korea Association for Creation Research (KACR), according to KACR spokesman Jungyeol Han. Thanks in part to the KACR's efforts, creation science — which seeks to provide evidence in support of the creation myth described in the Book of Genesis — has had a growing influence in South Korea, although the STR itself has distanced itself from such doctrines. In early 2008, the KACR scored a hit with a successful exhibition at Seoul Land, one of the country's

leading amusement parks. According to the group, the exhibition attracted more than 116,000 visitors in three months, and the park is now in talks to create a year-long exhibition.

Even the nation's leading science institute — the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology — has a creation science display on campus. "The exhibition was set up by scientists who believed in creation science back in 1993," says Gab-duk Jang, a pastor of the campus church. The institute also has a thriving Research Association for Creation Science, run by professors and students, he adds.

Antipathy to evolution

In a 2009 survey conducted for the South Korean documentary *The Era of God and Darwin*, almost one-third of the respondents didn't believe in evolution. Of those, 41% said that there was insufficient scientific evidence to support it; 39% said that it contradicted their religious beliefs; and 17% did not understand the theory. The numbers approach those in the United States, where a survey by the research firm Gallup has shown that around 40% of Americans do not believe that humans evolved from less advanced forms of life.

The roots of the South Korean antipathy to evolution are unclear, although Jeon suggests that they are partly "due to strong Christianity in the country". About half of South Korea's citizens practice a religion, mostly split between Christianity and Buddhism.

However, a survey of trainee teachers in the country concluded that religious belief was not a strong determinant of their acceptance of evolution³. It also found that 40% of biology teachers agreed with the statement that "much of the scientific community doubts if evolution occurs"; and half disagreed that "modern humans are the product of evolutionary processes".

Until now, says Dayk Jang, the scientific community has done little to combat the anti-evolution sentiment. "The biggest problem is that there are only 5–10 evolutionary scientists in the country who teach the theory of evolution in undergraduate and graduate schools," he says. Having seen the fierce debates over evolution in the United States, he adds, some scientists also worry that engaging with creationists might give creationist views more credibility among the public.

Silence is not the answer, says Dayk Jang. He is now organizing a group of experts, including evolutionary scientists and theologians who believe in evolution, to counter the STR's campaign by working to improve the teaching of evolution in the classroom, and in broader public life.



Radicalization Within The Armed Forces: DOD Losing Sight Of The Forest For The Trees

By Mikey Weinstein, *AlterNet* | Op-Ed, 07 June 2012

Peering inward, the top brass of the United States Armed Forces have dangerously lost sight of the forest for the trees. Invoking myopic, misleading drivel marinated in the “bath salts” of fundamentalist Christian predation, it has become all too clear that the Pentagon is incapable of making truly sober assessments of the profound internal threats and weaknesses it faces.

Earlier this year Lt. Gen. Ronald Burgess, director of the ultra-secretive Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), testified before the Senate Armed Forces Committee with Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey notably sitting with him. It was here that Burgess offered truly startling testimony depicting the threats that he claims undermine the integrity of the armed forces, endanger American life, and compromise our overall national security.

Among those threats is the menace of another WikiLeaks-style exposure. Understandably, the Department of Defense has no greater fear than another Bradley Manning-style whistleblower determined to shine a revealing light on the all too-frequent pattern of self-defeat which has become an outgrowth of a slipshod culture, rife with back-scratching favoritism and lazy pretension, which many in the Pentagon have become wedded to.

The next named threat, however, particularly caught our attention: “Self-radicalization or lone wolf individuals... within our own ranks, remain an enduring concern,” noted Lt. Gen. Burgess. This line leapt out at us immediately, like a blazing meteor in the night sky. We can understand the threat posed by isolated, embittered loners such as the murderous Fort Hood shooter, Major Nidal Malik Hassan, and the recently convicted failed bomber, Pfc. Naser Jason Abdo. Indeed, what animated these two was the fact that they placed their own twisted brand of sectarian religiosity above their oath to the United States Constitution and their obedience to the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Those who transgress their oaths, and their military mission, should be aggressively investigated and subject to timely trial by courts-martial as a simple matter of basic martial justice and discipline.

Staff and volunteers at the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF), the four-time Nobel Peace Prize-nominated civil rights organization of which I am Founder and President, immediately wondered — why are “lone wolves” and the “self-radicalized” the only subject of “enduring concern?” Is it because the above-named examples are Muslim? This could be one reason. Or is the Pentagon losing sight of the proverbial forest for the trees, as it is most certainly wont to do, particularly in line with the dictates of political expediency?

While Nidal Malik Hassan's crimes were shockingly egregious, the radicalized, fundamentalist element within the U.S. armed forces is hardly a new or isolated phenomenon. Our organization represents just under 28,000 clients drawn from the ranks of active duty United States soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, cadets and midshipmen, veterans, Coast Guard, and National Guard reservists. As such, we have been well positioned to hear countless cries of help from thousands upon thousands of victims of such radicalization within all branches of the armed services. It is precisely this rapidly metastasizing threat of radicalized religiosity which has carved the greatest gash into the esprit de corps of our military, while also posing a concomitant enormous, ominous threat to the comprehensive national security of the United States itself.

Make no mistake, this homegrown “radicalization” has a specific name: extremist, evangelical, Christian fundamentalism or “Christian Dominionism.” Subscribers to this wretchedly exclusivist ideology bear more than a passing resemblance to Abdo and Hassan. Their virulent and utterly unconstitutional sectarianism is revealed in their arrogant attempts to coercively and viciously proselytize their

comrades-in-arms, be they Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Wiccan, or non-believer. Many are shocked by my revelation that some of the most gut-wrenching testimonials I or our MRFF staff have personally heard have been from faithful, dyed-in-the-wool Protestants and Roman Catholics who are harassed due to their lack of fundamentalist zeal. In fact, these disaffected Christians comprise a total of 96% of MRFF's clients. Indeed, MRFF's largest client growth area is actually with evangelical Christians who, despite their “born again” beliefs, are not prepared to proselytize in a manner that violates the time, place and manner restrictions imposed by our U.S. Constitution and its construing federal and state case law.

Other minority groups within the military have also borne the full brunt of this pernicious, radicalized scourge. These “radicals” have openly conspired to seek authorization for the bullying, abuse, and torment of LGBTQ service members, going so far as attempting to use the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) as a Trojan horse for their bigoted agenda. This virulent oppression has come in the form of attempts to seek amendments to NDAA that explicitly allow servicemembers to ruthlessly harass and persecute gay colleagues while also allowing chaplains the right to refuse to minister to them and carry out marriages between same-sex partners on a basis of homophobic bigotry and prejudice alone. Twisting the English language in an outright Orwellian manner, they refer to this reprehensible denial of servicemembers' human rights as examples of their own perverted and twisted, parochial “religious freedom” and “conscience protection.”

Servicewomen have also been subject to hideous torment as a result of the fundamentalist Christian cancer within →



the military. Hyper-patriarchal, misogynistic, and chauvinist attitudes are typically a part of the overall “package deal” of evangelical fundamentalism. Real world consequences mean altogether hellish conditions for female service members within their units. A recent VA survey has found that 30 percent of female veterans have reported sexual assault at the hands of a colleague or superior, while 20 percent have been raped more than once and 14 percent have been victims of gang rape. Eleanor J. Bader of RH Reality Check has cited the reason for the reluctance to report these sickening crimes: an unsympathetic military chaplaincy, a humongous 20 percent of whom were trained at the Rev. Jerry Falwell-funded Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary in Lynchburg, VA. These are the same chaplains who openly and brazenly agitate against, marginalize, and dehumanize gay and lesbian service members. Coincidence? Obviously not.

Bader quoted Rev. John Gundlach, a respected United Church of Christ military chaplain for 27 years, who explained to her that “[s]ome super evangelicals see the military as their own government-paid mission field...They are there to proselytize; that’s their mandate. Even though

proselytizing is prohibited, it takes place all the time.” This unconstitutional train of thought, which oozes the poison that military service is a taxpayer-funded missionary expedition, is systemically extant throughout the U.S. military up to and including the very highest leadership echelons of the Armed Forces. Think of it as an alloy of evil, for that is precisely what it is.

The real threats to the national security of the United States are varied and multidimensional, with radical fundamentalism standing amongst them as the foremost challenge. But it isn’t the obscure threat of disaffected Muslim servicemembers that poses the greatest danger. A different type of radicalism envelops the U.S. military. It is a homegrown variety, which threatens to subsume our servicemen and women in a tsunami of intolerant, pernicious, and explicitly unconstitutional bigotry and bloody apocalyptic zeal. The magnitude of this universal, fundamentalist Christian threat is matched solely by the endless capability for malfesance emanating from the Defense Department.

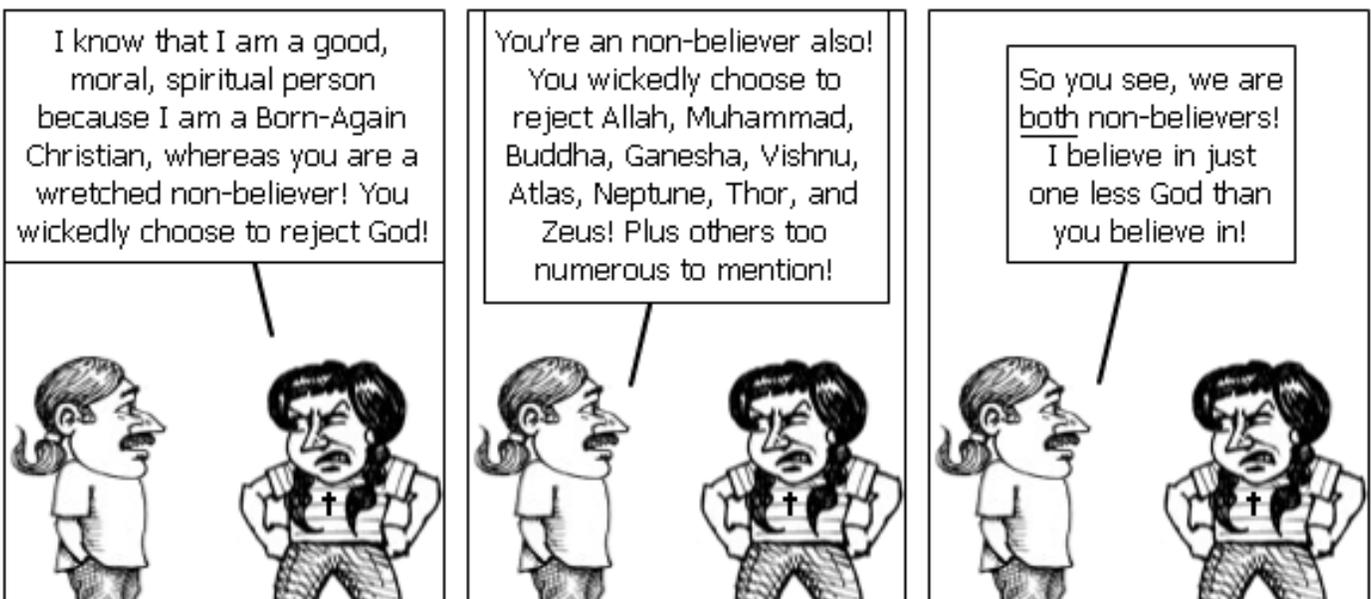
The DoD is clearly high on “bath salts” of a wholly dubious composition:

organizational shortsightedness mixed with the anti-Constitutional contraband of radical Christian fundamentalism. The result is the severe handicapping of the top brass’s abilities to gauge the threats that truly undermine our military’s functioning capabilities. The bottom line is that the perpetrators of this radical Evangelical threat are gnawing off the morale and integrity of the United States Armed Forces. So long as this process of cannibalization continues, our military will consistently fail to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

Michael L. “Mikey” Weinstein is president of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation and an honor graduate of the Air Force Academy. He previously served as White House Counsel in the Reagan administration and general counsel to H. Ross Perot and Perot Systems Corp. He is the author of the recently released book, “No Snowflake in an Avalanche: The Military Religious Freedom Foundation, Its Battle to Defend the Constitution and One Family’s Courageous War Against Religious Extremism in High Places” (2012, Vireo). ☞



Non-Believers by Eric Perlin



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BOOK REVIEW

Knocking on Heaven's Door: How Physics and Scientific Thinking Illuminate the Universe and the Modern World.

By Lisa Randall

(New York: HarperCollins, 2011)

book review by Michael Shermer

As Far As Her Eyes Can See

Lisa Randall has been justly appraised by Time magazine as one of the “100 most influential people in the world” for her work in theoretical particle physics. From her position at Harvard University, she often travels: to the European Laboratory for Particle Physics, CERN, in Switzerland, where her theories are being put to the test in the Large Hadron Collider (LHC); to speaking engagements with professional and public audiences about her work in particular and the awe and wonder of science in general; and to rock formations where her chalked fingers can find ways to defy gravity. On the side, she writes popular books, such as her acclaimed *Warped Passages* (1).

In *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, Randall picks up the story from where she left off when the LHC was years away from first collision, expanding her horizon from, as she poetically puts it, “what’s so small to you is so large to me” to “what’s so large to you is so small to me.” In other words, the book ranges from the smallest known particles to the entire bubble universe, from 10-35 meters (the Planck length, where quantum gravity rules) to 10-27 meters (the entire visible universe, 100 billion light-years across, where dark matter and dark energy dominate), a stunning 62 orders of magnitude. (Randall correctly notes the age of the universe at 13.75 billion years, clarifying her apparently paradoxical figure of 100 billion light-years

thusly: “The reason the universe as a whole is bigger than the distance a signal could have traveled given its age is that space itself has expanded.” She unpacks that sentence in the book.)

At the time of this writing, eBooks occupy about 20 percent of sales space; that is, one out of every five books sold has no cover or binding save the faux effects offered digitally by the various eBook readers. Of late, however, a tiny and growing sliver of the pie is being carved out by audio books (primarily through Audible.com and iTunes), most unabridged and read by professional actors and readers. These provide a welcome alternative to those of us yoked to our iPods and MP3 players inside cars and gyms or on bicycles and hiking trails. Since fumbling around with cassette tapes and Sony Walkmans in the early 1980s, I have consumed on the order of 500- plus nonfiction audio books, so a measure of an author’s skill to communicate complex material clear enough to penetrate a multitasking cortex has become a mark of quality (or lack thereof). Many are called. Few are chosen. Randall’s explanatory prose places her among the elect. She is not alone, but she is rare among the many who have attempted the herculean task of explaining to us uninitiated the daunting science of theoretical particle physics. She devotes most of *Knocking on Heaven's Door* to covering this science,

along the way offering fascinating accounts of how the LHC was built, how the experiments are run, and, most notably, the engineering prestidigitation involved in teasing out nature’s secrets via energies never before witnessed on Earth.

The book’s subtitle hints that it may be yet another long and tiresome treatise on science and religion, with either convoluted (and ultimately failed) attempts at conciliation or pugnacious left hooks and fast jabs at the faithful. Neither are Randall’s modus operandi. She states her case succinctly and moves on. Stephen Jay Gould’s “nonoverlapping magisteria,” for example, would work if only religions would ⇨





stick to doing what they do best (providing aid and comfort to the poor and needy). However, conflicts arise the moment “religions attempt to address the external reality of the universe.” When they do, Randall notes, “[t]his leaves religious views open to falsification. When science encroaches on domains of knowledge that religion attempts to explain, disagreements are bound to arise.” As science expands its realm, the magisteria are becoming ever more overlapping. The deeper problem, however, is that if divine providence were on the offing, “it is inconceivable from a scientific perspective that God could continue to intervene without introducing some material trace of his actions.” In other words, if God did act in the world scientists would want to know how he did it. “Did He apply a force or transfer energy?” Randall asks rhetorically. “Is God manipulating electrical processes in our brains? ... On a larger level, if God gives purpose to the universe, how does He apply His will?” Inquiring minds want to know. Religion has no answer. I know because I have asked many times.

Another myth Randall thankfully busts is the notion of truth and beauty in science. What can a “beautiful truth” in science possibly mean? Take a look at a page of equations and formulas from a recent theoretical physics paper. Mind-boggling to the untrained maybe, complicated and detailed undoubtedly, surprising or inspiring occasionally, but beautiful? “Beauty is often agreed on only a posteriori,” Randall explains, although she adds the proviso “even though aesthetic criteria for science might be poorly defined, they are nonetheless useful and omnipresent. They help guide our research, even if they provide no guarantee of success or truth.” Considering weak interactions, which violate parity symmetry, she remarks, “The breaking of such a fundamental symmetry as left-right equivalence seems innately disturbing and unattractive. Yet this very asymmetry is what is responsible for the range of masses we see in the world, which is in turn necessary for structure and life.”

Knocking on Heaven's Door came out before the faster-than-light neutrino experiment was announced (2) and paraded through the press as an ostensible refutation of Einstein, implying in some circles that science is nothing more than one failed theory after another. Why thence should we believe anything scientists say about evolution, global warming, or vaccines? Randall ends her

book with a thoughtful discussion of how science really works to resolve anomalies unexplained by the prevailing paradigm. Einstein did not overturn Newton; he just expanded on the physical properties of the universe at high speed and large scale. If you want to get a spacecraft to the moon, Newton will take you there. As flawed as it sometimes can be, science is still the most reliable tool ever devised for understanding the world. Few have captured this essence better than Randall in *Knocking at Heaven's Door*.

References & Notes

- (1) L. Randall, *Warped Passages: Unraveling the Universe's Hidden Dimensions* (Allen Lane, London, 2005); reviewed in (3).
- (2) <http://arxiv.org/abs/1109.4897>.
- (3) J. D. Wells, *Science* 311, 40 (2006). ✂



More Words To Live By

1. It is easier to get forgiveness than permission.
2. For every action, there is an equal and opposite government program.
3. If you look like your passport picture, you probably need the trip.
4. There is always one more imbecile than you counted on.
5. Thou shalt not weigh more than thy refrigerator.
6. Light travels faster than sound. That's why some people appear very bright ... until they speak.
7. Someone who thinks logically provides a nice contrast to the real world.
8. Age is a very high price to pay for maturity.
9. Artificial intelligence is no match for natural stupidity.
10. Not one shred of evidence supports the notion that life is serious.
11. No man has ever been shot while doing the dishes.
12. A balanced diet is a cookie in each hand.
13. If you must choose between two evils, pick the one you've never tried before. Unless, of course, you really enjoyed the first evil when you tried it.





September FIG Meeting
TBD



August Picnic
Saturday Aug. 18, 3:30pm
Veterans Memorial Park, Union Twp



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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 - [figmessage at gofigger dot org](mailto:figmessage@gofigger.org), or visit our web site at gofigger.org or freeinquirygroup.org.