

FIG LEAVES

Volume 13 Issue 7

July 2004

July Meeting: Tuesday, 27 July

July Meeting: July 27, 2004

Title: **Some things are really and truly impossible.**

Speaker: Wolf Roder, Professor Emeritus of Geography at UC

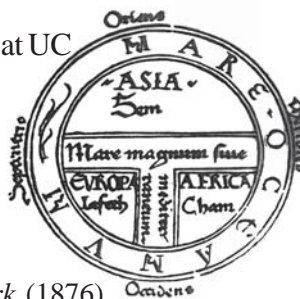
What's the good of Mercator's North Poles and Equators, Tropics, Zones and Meridian Lines?

So the Bellman would cry:

And the crew would reply,

"They are merely conventional signs!"

-- Lewis Carrol, *The Hunting of the Snark* (1876)



Wolf Roder will talk about the art and science of mapping the whole world, specifically about the problem of a projection of the whole spherical earth onto a flat piece of paper. In telling you stories he will touch, — in no specific order, — on why you can not go straight east, on Claudius Ptolemy who was a geographer as well as an astronomer and why he was forgotten for a thousand years, he will explain why the ratio is not equal to 3.14159 but somewhere between that irrational number and two, he will also refer to Leonard Euler who is responsible for the proof of the impossible. Roder will talk about Gerardus Mercator, who was a true Renaissance man, who invented the Atlas (well, the word at least) even though he is mainly known for his famous Mercator map, which is frequently and often misused, and Roder will tell you how and why. He will also tell you what the Mercator map is good for and how to use it if you are crossing the Atlantic without GPS locators, and probably more about maps and projections than you ever wanted to know.

Website News: gofigger.org

Check it out!

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

A brand new section has been added called "Humanism." It includes two complete sections called "Humanism 101" and a "Historical Overview of Humanist Philosophers." The not yet complete sections are a page entitled "Types of Humanism," a section on Humanist poetry and a section for reviews of Humanist Books. These sections will be completed in the next few months. If you have comments or requests, e-mail me at webnut@gofigger.org.

Check it out!

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Events

July Potluck

Sunday, 11 July 2:00 PM
at the home of the
Philip & Martha Ferguson

July Meeting

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

August Picnic!

Sunday 22 August 2:00 PM
at the home of the
Edwin & Helen Kagin
Bring a side dish and swimsuit.

August Meeting

No Meeting is planned
Join us at the picnic!



June Meeting Report

New Religious Threats to American Freedoms.

Zachary Miner, Campus and Community Organizer for the Council for Secular Humanism

The speaker started off by reviewing the activities of the Council for Secular Humanism, the Council for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) and the Student group CFI-On Campus. Each one of these groups publishes a magazine from the Councils' headquarters in Amherst, N.Y. Before shifting to his main topic he relayed some interesting statistics. There are 120 Secular Humanist societies, 150 campus groups and 80 Skeptics groups in the US. And their numbers are increasing around the world.

The movement he will address is called The Mind Siege Movement. The two people leading this movement are Tim LaHaye and David Noeble on the Christian Right. They are the authors of the *Left Behind* series which just recently published its 12th volume. It fantasizes what happens after the Rapture in *Revelation* and all good Christians disappear, and the rest of us are left behind. It is the most successful Christian fiction in publishing history. The NY Times has estimated sales of fifty million. In 1980 LaHaye also published the book *Battle for the Mind*, which has attacked Secular Humanism. The co-author, David Noeble, is the head of Summit Ministries in Colorado Springs. Every summer he runs conferences in which students are taught how to be foot soldiers for the Christian Right. They are sent back to their college campuses to start ministries during the next academic year. Along with their book *Mind Siege*, they have produced a video sent to 11,000 churches. These churches are to create study groups meeting once a week for six weeks for video discussions. Essentially the book and the discussions are focused on *Free Inquiry*, *The Humanist Manifesto*, Paul Kurtz and the Council for Secular Humanism. One thing to keep in mind about this Movement is that most people haven't given any thought to Secular Humanism, or think that Secular Humanism is wrong, or have really even heard of it. So what the *Mind Siege* people are trying to do is to make people aware of Secular Humanism and its "evils."

The speaker then showed a clip from the video to give an idea of what the people are learning when they take this series. When watching this clip, we can think about it in context. We can certainly deconstruct it, but imagine ignorant folks in church with a discussion led by the pastor or a community leader. Certainly someone you would trust. Church folk would not have any reason to question or think critically about the issues raised. So the first clip brings on the "war" metaphors. Tim LaHaye and David Noeble introducing what you are meant to see as "the battle for truth in the new millennium." They continue to give the viewer, the Christian foot-soldier, powerful ammunition to defeat an active enemy, one who threatens all. They go on to relate the current "conflict" to the battle between good and evil beginning in the Garden of Eden. Finally they then insist the battle is between biblical "truth" and Secular Humanism.

Zach then examined the preponderance of warlike metaphors in their presentation. He explained that prior to 9/11 the Council had scheduled a number of debates with the *Mind Siege* team. After 9/11 they requested the debates be cancelled. At the time the people at CFI assumed the reason might be that LaHaye and



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Noeble feared their language made them sound much like the 9/11 attackers and that the comparison could not be lost on listeners to the debate. Our speaker also pointed out how in this clip and indeed throughout their series they create dichotomies: battle between good and evil, between god and Satan, between themselves and Secular Humanism. They being on the god-side and Secular Humanism being on the satan side.

Of the second clip Zach said: “We omitted a section where they claim America was founded as a Christian Nation and they indulge in a bit of revisionist history.” They also talk about why the educational system is so important to them, and how this is a key point in the entire series.

The next clip starts off with an attack on Secular Humanism, stating that it camouflages belief behind such terms as philosophy, science, and even academic theory. They insist humanism is a religion that has established a stronghold in our schools. Getting cute, they claim we have strained out the gnat of school prayer and even prayer before football games and yet swallowed the camel of a whole religious system into school. The video speaker’s voices are joined by eerie background music while the speakers use their bellicose metaphors.

Zach pointed out the obvious, why the educational system is so important. By equating Secular Humanism to religion they can claim a religion has been allowed into the schools. Hence their Christian religion should be allowed to be taught as an alternative. They are merely asking for equal time in the market place of ideas. Throughout the tape they refer to the “censoring” of the text *Of Pandas and People* from the public schools, but neglect to state it was removed because of the protests of the scientific community.

The next clip shown shifted to the concept of worldview. The video says every person consciously or unconsciously has a worldview. Every worldview promotes values that

motivate. They point out that no teachers can completely separate her values from taught content. The strategy in this approach is to demolish the idea of values neutral education. Then they propose the government should open the doors to teaching both atheistic and Christian values in the public schools. If ethical relativism is taught, then Christian ethical absolutes must also be allowed. They hold out the hope that by emphasizing “fairness”, they can “drive the humanists back to private life.” Several points about the language they use. The video uses the term “pro-moral” Americans suggesting that humanists are anti-moral: they minimize the number of

Humanists by saying they represent only six percent of Americans. After some debate that figure is revised upward to twelve percent.

In another clip LaHaye and Noeble introduce their “five Pillars of Secular Humanism.” They refer to Paul Kurtz as the foremost exponent of Secular Humanism and accuse him of hiding his atheism behind the term scientific naturalism. They call that a clever game of semantics. They claim the words used mean one thing to the parents and another to their children; and that humanists use coded language to achieve this effect. In the next part of the clip they promise to show Paul Kurtz in action. Zach took the opportunity to give some background as to how this segment came about before

showing that video portion. While still teaching at the State University of New York at Buffalo, Paul was approached by what appeared to be two students who asked to interview him. He agreed to answer their questions, some of which were about Secular Humanism. That ancient piece of video has shown up not only on this tape but also on the Campus Crusade, the Christian Fellowship and Summit Ministries. It leaves the inescapable conclusion that the interview was obtained under false pretenses.

FH is Back!

Due to a variety of circumstances the newsletter *Freethought History* had to suspend publication in 1999. However, it is now resuming regular publication with four issues to appear each year. Professor Fred Whitehead remains the editor.

As before the newsletter will report on important events, such as the Jefferson Conference at the University of Paris in 2001, and the recently concluded Giordano Bruno symposium hosted by the Alliance against Conformity in Freiburg, Germany. Forthcoming issues will supply information on Dr. Marvin F. Zayed’s *International Archive of the Islamic Inquisition* — an ambitious and comprehensive project to collect and disseminate facts on the repression of intellectuals and freethinkers in the Muslim world. Another initiative, an International Committee for the Protection of Freethinkers, has been launched by Jaya Gopal of the Atheist Society of India, and the results of this solidarity effort will appear in various issues.

In addition, *FH* will carry book reviews, profiles, interviews, plus news and notes literally from all over the United States and abroad. *FH* remains the only publication devoted to the history of freethought and to atheist movements.

The price of a subscription to any place in the world is still only \$ 10. Please enclose \$ 10 and send to *Freethought History*, PO Box 5224, Kansas City, KS 66119.





FIG LEAVES



Part of the interview was about the book in which Paul defined the term *eupraxophy* and in which he explained how Secular Humanists could live the good life through the application of reason and science. In the clip Tim LaHaye states that Paul Kurtz has recently argued that Secular Humanism is not a religion. Without any proof to back this assertion, he merely repeats his statement that it is the world's oldest religion going all the way back to the Garden of Eden. He uses this as a springboard to bring up what he terms the five basic tenets of Humanism: 1) Atheism, the "belief" that there is no god. As a rule humanists are either atheists, agnostics or skeptical of religion. Atheism is used here as a negative buzzword. 2) Evolution is a "pillar" of Humanism. Secular Humanists do use the scientific method and the theory of evolution would be difficult to avoid. 3) Humanism is without morals. Secular Humanists do accept that we must, can and do discover what is ethical without reference to god. 4) Humans are autonomous. This follows from our conviction that a belief in god is not necessary to live a happy and fulfilled life. 5) Humanists are one world socialists. This is a flat lie, and if the video makers do not know better they are plain stupid. Humanists do represent all types along the political and economic spectrum.

The reason for accusing humanists of one worldism is rather interesting. The idea of one world government fits in with the Christian eschatology in which the risen Christ will fight against a world government centered in Jerusalem. In order for the end of the world to come about someone has to be promoting one world government so why not the Secular Humanists.

In summary, the tape promotes the idea that Secular Humanists control America. LaHaye quotes his friend preacher James Dobson as stating: "The Secular Humanistic system of values has now become the dominant way of thinking in most of the power centers of the world. Influential groups of committed Humanists, under the guise of democracy, these politicians and academics are determined to turn America into an amoral Humanist country."

The last clip supposedly shows how Humanists control the United States. He starts off saying morality has a very low priority with many public officials. He is concerned with one current issue on the political landscape. If Humanists and their powerful homosexualist [sic] friends can persuade a majority to accept homosexuality as normal behavior, then 2000 years of western culture and 300 years of American history will go

up in smoke. If homosexuals can win their case, the legalizing of prostitution, pedophilia, drugs, gambling and who knows what else will soon follow. The video then went on to list a number of organizations claimed to be fostering this humanist agenda: Americans for Democratic Action, National Council of Churches, International League of Working Women, the American Ethical Union, the Sex Education and Informational Council of the United States, the National Organization of Women, the National Education Association and the American Civil Liberties Union. It is also interesting to know that Humanists leaders founded and direct the United Nations, UNESCO, and the World Health Organization. The most virulent attack is saved for the ACLU, which is labeled as having been founded by members of the Socialist and Communist Party in 1919. He also levels a few barbs at the media and the movie industry.

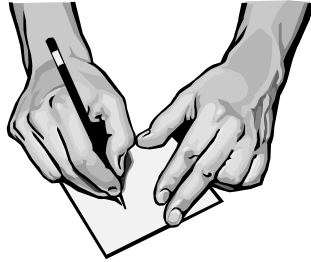
Our speaker commented on their propaganda technique. The pattern is to throw out statements without backing and never to explain the relevance. Towards the end they give a list of actions that "pro-moral" Americans can take to counteract the effects of the "Humanist Agenda." 1) Share the faith using television and the Internet. 2) Show compassion for the victims of Humanism. By reaching out loving arms to unwed mothers, AIDS patients, children being raised by one parent; all victims of humanism. 3) Protect our youth because the Humanist agenda is directed especially to young people. 4) Hit the campus with programs like Summit Ministries. 5) Deny funds to the humanist left. 6) Expose amoral public office holders and candidates. The bottom line is: no humanist is fit to hold public office.

Zach then mentioned some things that Secular Humanists can do to counteract the effects of the fundamentalists' program. First: each of us can **speak out**. Let others know that better views exist. Support the local, national, and international Secular Humanist groups. And keep informed about what is happening. — reported by George Maurer

Just a Note.....
 • A Generous Offer by Brant Abrahamson
 • Our speaker on the Hebrew Bible on 27 April 2004.
 • Any FIG member interested in the history of the
 • Hebrew Bible can receive a written script of his April 27
 • FIG meeting lecture (16 pages) and/or the 13 lesson series
 • (94 pages) that his colleague and he developed for young
 • adults. Send an e-mail request to teacherspr@aol.com or a
 • post card to Brant Abrahamson, 3731 Madison Avenue,
 • Brookfield, IL 60513. Include your postal address and
 • specify "script" and/or "lesson series." There is no charge.
 •.....



Letters To The Editor



Letter to the *Wall Street Journal* (28 June 2004)

Religious Faith No Guide on Torture

Preceding a thoughtful discourse on why the USA must not follow, must adamantly reject, the advice on torture of the Justice Department’s Office of Legal Counsel, Ruth Wedgwood and R. James Woolsey, write that, “In a democratic country bounded by religious faith, there is no room for unbounded power over any human being.”

What? Are secular humanists (unbounded by religious faith) more given to torture than the faithful? Of course not. Torture as an inquisitorial procedure was perfected by the faithful, by those who know God is on their side.

I ask the editors to save us from such offensive pieties, however alliterative they may sound.

-- Arnold Wilson

Dear Fig Leaves Editor,

Since I first learned to read I have wondered what those four words mean, and why they are printed on our currency. My lack of understanding made me feel unpatriotic, but I was too embarrassed by my ignorance to ask anyone for clarification. It seems simple enough: “In God We Trust.”

But trust has many meanings. Is it a statement of faith, where we express our willingness to trust that God exists? Or is it a reflection on human nature, where we make a distinction between God and untrustworthy humans? Since it appears on the money, perhaps it is a succinct credit report where everyone pales in comparison to God. As the saying goes, “all others pay cash.” At some point I must have decided that it was immaterial to an atheist and stopped thinking about it.

I decided to ponder the subject again subsequent to the recent non-decision of the Supreme Court regarding the intrusion of God into the Pledge of Allegiance. It turns out that “In God We Trust” was first inscribed on a two-cent piece in 1864 pursuant to an act of Congress. Perhaps the Union thought that it would curry God’s favor in defeating the Confederacy. Maybe the outcome of the Civil War proves the theists right, but why did God let so many people die in the process?

The phrase appeared intermittently on various denominations over the years until the communist scare in the 1950’s. It is now our national co-motto (with “*e pluribus unum*”) and must by law appear on all of our money. The proponents of the motto could have chosen a word other than “trust”, but perhaps they thought that the alternatives were not ambiguous enough and thus more likely to be ruled in violation of the First Amendment. Putting the object of the sentence before the subject also muddies the meaning. Nevertheless, I can think of no interpretation that does not express a belief in the existence of something called God. And that to me is the hallmark of a religion.

I now understand the phrase to mean that God is somehow taking care of the United States. For example, God ensures that we are victorious in war no matter how dubious our motive. And though I understand this sentiment, I cannot make myself believe it. History has shown that we can only trust God to be blind to our suffering, deaf to our prayers, and silent regarding our destiny. I think we deserve better. In humanism I trust.

-- Philip Ferguson

Wednesday, 16 June 2004

To the Editors of the *Wall Street Journal*:

Professor Huntington’s 16 June Commentary, “Under God”, was a beautiful example of that distinguished academic subject: rhinotromania. It does not surprise me that he is a distinguished professor at Harvard, our most prestigious intellectual institution, and I do not doubt that Dr. Huntington has walked by the mathematics department at least once.

His performance as a nose counting maniac has inspired me to consult that perfect source of legal principles and reasoning, the national Census. It was there that I learned of the tremendous support for one of our most celebrated causes and the source of so much national pride—America as a white nation. (No caps, understated, and very cool.) Of course we lost that issue in the supreme court some time ago, but Dr. Huntington makes me believe that the time is ripe to readdress it.

Everything is there. Wonderful statistics, a (recent) tradition of tolerating non-whites, all white founding fathers...you name it, we can produce the numbers and we do so every 10 years! The trouble seems to be the Supreme Court. As I understand it from grade school civics class (I



wouldn't expect a Harvard Professor to remember this trivial stuff), there was something about not denying the right to vote because of race around amendment XV. But I say, if we're going to ignore the bit about establishing religion so that it's OK for atheists to be "outsiders" in America, it should be OK to ignore amendment XV so that non-whites can be "outsiders" too. Don't you think?

After all, we aren't governed by laws, but by people. And the greatest number wins. That business about two senators from each state to prevent a tyranny of the majority over minorities is old fashioned stuff that we can forget. If more than half the nation believes in, say, astrology, we should teach it in the schools. We'll soon teach creationism for just this reason, won't we? Expert scientists don't know what they're talking about anymore than those ethical leaders who suggest treating everyone equally before the law.

So thanks for that great commentary. The substitution of statistics for an analysis of fairness and morality is very economical and simplifies most of my ethical decisions. Unfortunately, as I looked at the census statistics, I noticed one bad thing for both Dr. Huntington and myself:

It seems that the United States of America has become a female nation, by about 148 million to 143 million. Would you please ask the good professor to expound on this dire development?

-- Robert Riehemann

Quote

A Nun's Marriage

A gentleman, who had a serious heart attack which required surgery, woke up in the hospital. He found himself in the care of devoted nuns at a Roman Catholic hospital. As he was recovering a nun in charge of administration had to ask him what was his medical insurance? The poor man replied in a raspy voice: "Sorry, no health insurance." Neither, he confessed, did he have any money in the bank.

So the nun asked about any relative who could help pay the bill. He replied: "I have just a spinster sister, who is a nun." His questioner was slightly perturbed by that phrasing, and informed him with asperity, that nuns are not spinsters but are married to God.

The patient took a deep breath and said: "Well, then send the bill to my brother-in-law."

— supplied by Charles Hughes

Unquote

Nominations for the FIG Board of Directors:

Eight members must be elected to bring the Board to its full strength of twelve. As directed in the Bylaws, the Board has prepared the following slate of candidates. Additional nominations were accepted from FIG members at the June meeting. The election will take place at our meeting in July. The nominees must be FIG members.

- Philip Ferguson
- Michele Grinoch
- Inez Klein
- Joe Levee
- Donna Loughry
- George Maurer
- Bill O'Kain
- Bryan Sellers



Donna Loughry has been proposed because she has become the FIG web master and also partners with Wolf on the publication of FIG Leaves. Bill O'Kain will be a candidate to take over the position of Treasurer.

Quote

As we have seen, modern science has left theology in a quandary. The universe revealed by science shows humanity as an infinitesimal speck, with random change as an important factor affecting events. Natural laws do not fully determine events but simply place constraints on them. Furthermore, these laws, such as the conservation principles, follow naturally from the symmetries of the void and suggest the absence of purpose. Where can God exert his influence in such a universe?

As far as we know from current science, the development of macroscopic complex systems, most notably the structures of living organisms, arises by processes of self-organization and natural selection that include a large element of chance. Our present best guess is that the behaviors of macroscopic systems are *emergent phenomena* resulting from a blend of chance and constraint. Start them up again and they will not develop in the same way because of the role of chance in randomly selecting out of many possible paths the particular path a system will follow as it develops with time. This includes, but is not limited to, the evolution of life and humanity, making it quite a theological challenge to find any purpose in it all without restoring determinism, natural or divine.

— Victor J. Stenger, *Has Science Found God?* (2003) p. 310

Unquote



Canada: Legal ghettos in the name of Allah

The plan to establish Islamic courts in the Canadian province of Ontario and leave the Muslim minority to the mercy of Sharia, has unleashed a wave of protest. Muslim women are horrified of the idea that a secular western democracy like Canada could invite archaic religious laws, deeply committed to the concept of gender inequality, to strike root in its legal system. Growing resistance against the threatened human rights crisis has forced the government of Ontario to reconsider the matter.

“We see no compelling reason to live under any other form of law in Canada and we want the same laws to apply to us as to other Canadian women,” demands the national Canadian Council of Muslim Women. But some self-nominated Muslim leaders have different plans, and the government of Ontario seemed willing to cooperate.

Entry point for the 1400-year-old Quran-based Sharia is the *Ontario Arbitration Act* of 1991. It allows religious and other groups to settle civil legal disputes among their members according to their own rules and arbitrations. Under this act, Hassidic Jews are running their own Beit Din, based on Jewish law. Catholics, Ismaili Muslims (followers of Aga Khan) and aborigines, too, are maintaining their traditional arbitration. In October 2003, conservative Muslim Sharia campaigners discovered this legal loophole could be used to enforce Islamic law in Canada. Securing acceptance of representatives of some major Muslim groups, sects and national communities, they were fast to create an Islamic Institute for Legal Justice and declare it the highest Islamic arbitration board in the country.

If the government does not act fast, Sharia courts may soon start handing down their rulings in Ontario. Those rulings would be final and binding, as the full authority of the Canadian judiciary is conferred on them and guarantees their enforcement by Canadian police and local Canadian courts -- without them having any discretion in the matter. There will be ghettos of religious law in Canada, pressing the secular democracy's executive machinery into service.

That does not mean that adulterers will be stoned to death, the authorities are fast to explain. They feel they have done enough by establishing certain “safeguards” against such excess: Sharia courts will -- for the time being -- not be in charge of criminal cases, but of civil cases only (divorce, separation, child custody, division of property etc.). Their decisions are required to be consistent with Canadian laws and the Human Rights Charter. And finally, they can only act, provided all parties involved give their consent to the

process.

So everybody is equal -- but some are far less equal than others. To get their fair share, inhabitants of the ghettos would have to bluntly refuse participation in religious tribunals or challenge decisions, passed in the name of Allah, in an ordinary Canadian court. That is certainly possible, amounts, however, to blasphemy and apostasy. Enormous communal and religious pressure, family ostracism and sometimes risk of life could be the price of justice.

What was fashionably labeled as “multicultural ethos” and presented as a gesture of generosity to Canada's one million strong Muslim minority, is in fact a

sellout by the legal system that divides Canadians into different classes. In future there would be women whose *equality* is protected by law, and others, less fortunate ones, whose *inequality* is protected by law.

The “model Ontario,” once practiced, will set new standards. It will help to legitimize the demands of fundamentalist religious leaders to establish autonomous legal ghettos all over the secular world. Delegates to the International Islamic Conference in Cairo in April have already urged the incorporation of Sharia and its moral values into International Law.

— *Rationalist International Bulletin* # 127
(5 July 2004)

Just a Note

Lawsuit against Bush's religion based initiative

The *Freedom From Religion Foundation* in Wisconsin has filed a lawsuit against the US-government over President Bush's “religion-based initiative.” The program, which he launched in the first week of his presidency, favors religious organizations over secular professional ones in competing for federal contracts. This is a violation of the First Amendment.

Though Bush's proposals have never been approved by the Congress, they are still being practiced on the base of executive orders and regulations. Special agencies have been established to promote religious groups to apply for grants and contracts and to provide them with advise and know-how.

The *Freedom From Religion Foundation* demands no taxpayer money should be touched for financing “religion-based initiatives” and that social service organizations that include religion as an integral component of their services are excluded from receiving grants and federal contracts.

— *Rationalist International Bulletin* # 127 (5 July 2004)

Quote

Neo-creationists imitate Paley's designed-watch metaphor and peddle it like a Hong Kong Rolex, insisting it is authentic science and not religion. — Bruce S. Grant (2004)

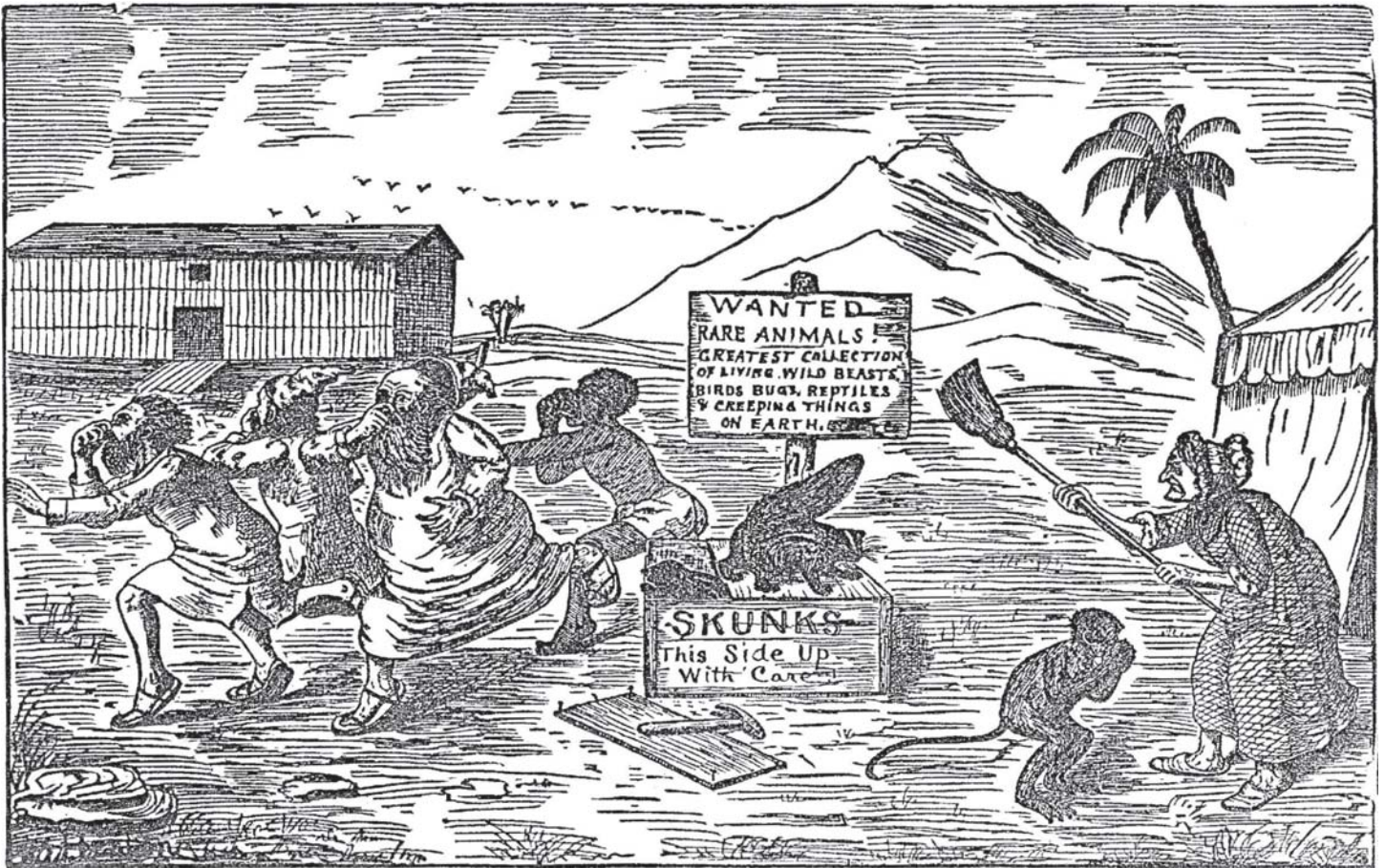
Unquote



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“And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark to keep them alive with thee: they shall be male and female.” -- Genesis vi, 19.



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

Quote

The Issue in a Nutshell.

“The world is full of coincidence,” Aine said wisely.

“I don’t believe in coincidence,” Emilio said. “You believe in coincidence, then you don’t believe in God. It’s God makes things happen, not coincidence.”

“Oh okay. Then it was God made me a junkie and a whore, right?”

Emilio looked at her. “What *are* you?” he asked. “Some kind of atheist?”

“That’s what I am, yes,” Aine said.

“Since when?”

“Since I was twelve years old and a priest felt me up in the rectory.”

“That never happened.”

“Oh no?”

“And anyway, you can’t blame God for some horny priest.”

“What *do* I blame him for? All these fucking lunatics fighting wars in his name? Killing each other in his name? I don’t know any atheists who kill people in God’s name. Not a single one. I don’t believe in a God who allows such things to happen. I believe in coincidence, is what makes things happen.”

— Ed McBain, *Fat Ollie’s Book* (2002) p. 248



Why we don't appreciate religion in politics:

And some more serendipitous reading that makes the same point I've been making. I happened to pick up a collection of essays by Richard Rorty and found "Religion as Conversation-stopper." Just so - my point exactly. And Rorty takes issue with Stephen Carter's *The Culture of Disbelief*.

The main reason religion needs to be privatized is that, in political discussion with those outside the relevant religious community, it is a conversation-stopper. Carter is right when he says: "One way to end a conversation - or start an argument - is to tell a group of well-educated professionals that you hold a political position (preferably a controversial one, such as being against abortion or pornography) because it is required by your understanding of God's will."

Yup, it sure is. Rorty actually lets Carter off much too easily at that point. Because note what Carter has done — note how easy he's made it for himself. Note how he's helped himself to the moral high ground while sort of kind of pretending not to (that weasel-word "controversial"). Let's do a little thought-experiment, shall we, and replace the items in his parenthesis with some different ones. Like, oh, I don't know -- how about slavery, or stoning to death, or forbidding women to vote or work or drive or leave the house, or flying loaded airplanes into tall buildings full of people. All of those items represent some people's -- quite a lot of people's, in the first three cases -- understanding of "God's will." So why the hell does he make it a matter of reproach that educated people, whether professionals or amateurs, don't leap and clap their hands for joy when people announce that they hold a political position because they think it's God's will? Why should we? Why does he think we should?

Even apart from the obvious objection that imaginary beings shouldn't be telling us how to make political decisions -- even apart from that, what about the issue of what terrible creatures those imaginary beings so often are? Humans invent them, humans invest them with their own nasty hatreds and sadistic urges, and then humans triumphantly point to them as authority for their nasty hatreds and sadistic urges. And we're supposed not to mind that? Not going to happen!

-- from *Butterflies and Wheels*

Website
Question: What is "Hyperbolic Doubt?"
Answer: See Fig's Website under Humanism/Historical Overview. (Hint: Checkout Rene Descartes.)
.....

Christian miracles a fraud:

Broadcasting Commission bans "miracles" from TV in Nigeria

The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) of Nigeria has banned the presentation of "miracles" and faith healing from all television programs. The TV stations have been warned to strictly respect the edict - or face fines, temporary suspension and even loss of license. NBC director general Dr. Silas Yisa initiated the sweeping drive in order to put a stop on the practices of Christian miracle pastors and tele-evangelists, who used to flood the channels with dramatic claims about the sensational success of their healing services. NBC has a mandate to protect the interests of Nigerians against such fraud, said Dr. Yisa.

The TV stations are suffering substantial financial losses after the miracle programs have vanished. They had reaped millions from churches and tele-evangelists. The broadcasting of a one-hour-program via satellite costs 10,000 US Dollar; some of the churches used to sponsor twenty hours per week. Now the gaps in the program are filled with non-commercial music and documentaries.

Many Nigerians feel relieved and happy about the change to "pollution free" TV programs. There is great resentment against the churches, which are widely seen as unscrupulous business ventures. Some demand that they should be taxed.

The Christian churches are up in arms against the miracle ban. They have tried to move the Senate against it, which has started an official investigation of the matter, but so far did not take a position. The "Christ Embassy", one of the largest churches in Nigeria, is challenging the ban in court.

— Source: *Rationalist International Bulletin* # 126 (21 June 2004)

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



From The Nature of the Universe (De Rerum Natura)
by Titus Lucretius Carus (98? - 55? BCE)
translated by Ronald Latham

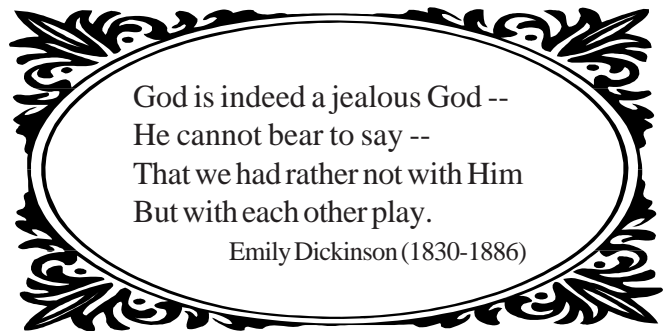
On Love, No God Needed

The thing in us that responds to the stimulus is the seed that comes with ripening years and strengthening limbs. For different things respond to different stimuli or provocations. The one stimulus that evokes human seed from the human body is a human form. As soon as this seed is dislodged from its resting-place, it travels through every member of the body, concentrating at certain reservoirs in the loins and promptly acts upon the generative organs. These organs are stimulated and swollen by the seed. Hence follows the will to eject it in the direction in which tyrannical lust is tugging. The body makes for the source from which the mind is pierced by love. For the wounded normally fall in the direction of their wound: the blood spurts out toward the source of the blow; and the enemy who delivered it, if he is fighting at close quarters, is bespattered by the crimson stream. So, when a man is pierced by the shafts of Venus, whether they are launched by a lad with womanish limbs or a woman radiating love from her whole body, he strives toward the source of the wound and craves to be united with it and to transmit something of his own substance from body to body. His speechless yearning is a presentiment of bliss.

This, then, is what we term Venus. This is the origin of the thing called love the drop of Venus' honey that first drips into our heart, to be followed by a numbing headache. Though the object of your love may be absent, images of it will haunt you and the beloved name chimes sweetly in your ears. If you find yourself thus passionately enamored of an individual, you should keep well away from such images. Thrust from you anything that might feed your passion, and turn your mind elsewhere. Vent the seed of love upon other objects. By clinging to it you assure yourself the certainty of heart-sickness and pain. With nourishment the festering sore quickens and strengthens. Day by day, the frenzy heightens and the grief deepens. Your only remedy is to lance the first wound with new incisions; to salve it, while it is still fresh, with promiscuous attachments; to guide the motions of your mind into some other channel . . .

In love there is the hope that the flame of passion may be quenched by the same body that kindled it. But this runs clean

counter to the course of nature. This is the one thing of which the more we have, the more our breast burns with the evil lust of having . . . In the midst of love, Venus teases lovers with images. They cannot glut their eyes by gazing on the beloved form, however closely. Their hands glean nothing from those dainty limbs in their aimless roving over all the body. Then comes the moment when with limbs entwined they pluck the flower of youth. Their bodies thrill with the presentiment of joy, and it is seed-time in the fields of Venus. Body clings greedily to body; moist lips are pressed on lips and deep breaths are drawn through clenched teeth. But all to no purpose. One can glean nothing from the other, nor enter in and be wholly absorbed, body in body; for sometimes it seems that that is what they are craving and striving to do, so hungrily do they cling together in Venus' fetters, while their limbs are unnerved and liquefied by the intensity of rapture. At length, when the spate of lust is spent, there comes a slight intermission in the raging fever. But not for long. Soon the same frenzy returns. The fit is upon them once more. They ask themselves what it is they are craving for, but find no device that will master their malady. In aimless bewilderment they waste away, stricken by an unseen wound.



God is indeed a jealous God --
He cannot bear to say --
That we had rather not with Him
But with each other play.

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

Quote

Conversion of a Conservative.

I must also acknowledge that the party of my youth and middle age has changed enormously. For fifteen years after I published *The Emerging Republican Majority* in 1969, I supported the GOP campaign argument that public policy had gone too far in trying to squeeze religion out of American life. Now the voter backlash against that early squeeze has so reversed the national discussion that the *opposite* threat is crystallizing: there is a Republican Party dangerously dominated by southern fundamentalist and evangelical constituencies, willing to blend biblical theology into U.S. Middle Eastern policy and attach faith healers to the advisory structure of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

— Kevin Phillips, *American Dynasty: the House of Bush* (2004) p. vii

Unquote



BOOK REVIEW

Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism
by Susan Jacoby
(New York: Henry Holt and Co. 2004)

This history of American social and political thought is one sided in that it emphasizes the role of unbelief and secularism. We learn that humanist free thought was basic to the shaping of American society and a leading source of how we live and think today. Throughout the book freethought is shown as struggling,—and winning,—against conservative religious attitudes. Religious imperatives are seen as generally losing out in this struggle, so it is no wonder the fundamentalists feel rather left out today, and are staging a last ditch effort to oust and defeat progressive liberal thought.

Most of the early freethinkers, the fathers of the American Revolution, Tom Paine to William Lloyd Garrison were not unbelievers. Until James Hutton's ages of geology and Darwin's trial and error evolution, thoughtful intellectuals could not image Earth and the Cosmos without a Creator who set the Universe in motion. Nineteenth century freethinkers thought largely of a "religion" of humanity. In 1878 a convention speaker delighted:

"We have, or may have ... a religion of character, of abiding enthusiasm for humanity," (p. 148). Ingersoll, too, lectured: "We are laying the foundations of the grand temple of the future --...-- wherein will be celebrated the religion of Humanity." (p. 173). Today's secular humanists, — with some exceptions, — are largely unbelievers.

Looking back on the struggle between religion and reason, I feel no need to worry about abortion, gay marriage, and stem cell research today. These too will become legal. What was the great issue in the 1840's? Not slavery, not mistreatment of Indians, but Sunday closing. To the horror of all good church people, the US Postal Service continued working and delivering goods and mail on the Lord's Day. Religion insisted on making divorce difficult and a disgrace. Later, religious thinking gave us censorship, Comstock's

obscenity laws which precluded any information about birth control, and eventually prohibition. Towards the end of the nineteenth century as freethought publications proliferated, editors often found themselves prosecuted under the obscenity statutes. Although I remember Sunday closing and "no liquor" laws in Ohio in the sixties, all of these impediments to freedom have by and large vanished from American society. Thus abortion, gay marriage, and stem cell research will prevail because they are reasonable needs of society.

Yet, history repeats itself. The end of the First World War saw a wave of persecution of radicals. Accused of being communist and anarchist agitators more than six thousand individuals were deported, based entirely on their views and associations. After World War Two, the McCarthyist accusations and black lists seem like a repeat after another crisis. And, the present "war against terror" has furnished the pretext to deport Muslims from the shores of the land of "freedom".

Jacoby makes it clear that freethought has been a minority view throughout American history. The thought of unbelieving skeptics had its impact on many readers, but the needs of commerce, and most of all an alliance with liberal religion were indispensable to the success of rational laws and action. She describes the weaning of main line religions from their blind faith in the Bible by the rise of science and modern insights.

On the opposite side of the battle in the present "culture war," she describes the still growing alliance between fundamentalist Protestants with conservative Catholics supported by their Hierarchy.

Unlike present secular humanists, Robert Ingersoll in the late nineteenth century could become famous, and manage to keep politically active. Jacoby suggests this was not merely because of his intellectual and moral courage, but because he was famous for his wit, his jokes, his satire, in short his humor. He also kept friendships with his opponents by his invariable courtesy and fairness no matter how much they disagreed. In the conclusion of the book Jacoby suggests that freethought must recover the elan and emotion which is, — or should be, — the essence of the secularist and humanist faith.

— Wolf Roder

Quote
● **Kerry gets the idea!**
● I oppose abortion, personally. I don't like
● abortion. I believe life does begin at conception. But I
● can't take my Catholic belief, my article of faith, and
● legislate it on a Protestant or a Jew or an atheist ... who
● doesn't share it. We have separation of church and state
● in the United States of America.
●
● — Presidential Candidate John Kerry
●
● **Unquote**



July Meeting: Tuesday 27th 7 PM

August Picnic: Sunday 22th 2:00 PM



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

FIG

Our Purpose

The Free Inquiry Group, Inc. is a non-profit organization founded in 1991. FIG is allied with the Council for Secular Humanism as well as an affiliate of the American Humanist Association and of the American Atheists. Our members are mostly secular humanists. However, we welcome to our meetings anyone interested in learning about or furthering our purpose.

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

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

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

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