

FIG LEAVES

Volume 17 Issue 7

July 2008

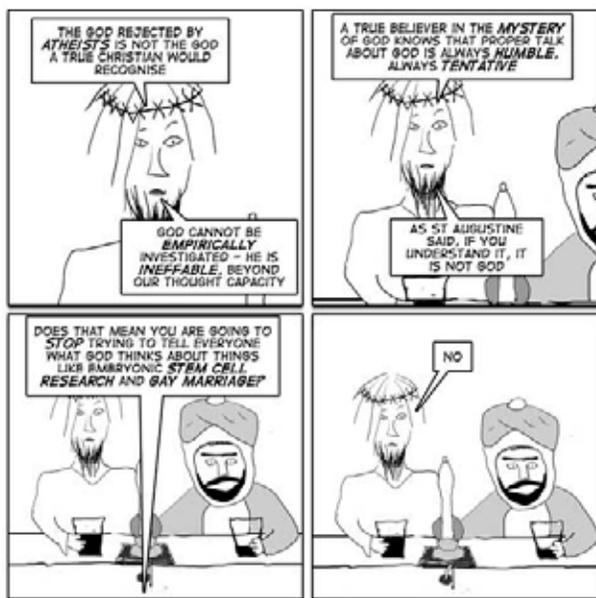
July FIG Meeting: Tuesday July 22, 7:00 PM
at the Vernon Manor
***Surviving America's Depression Epidemic: How to Find
 Morale, Energy, and Community in a World Gone Crazy***
 by Bruce Levine

Bruce E. Levine, Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist and has been in private practice since 1985 in Cincinnati, Ohio. He will talk about his most recent book *Surviving America's Depression Epidemic: How to Find Morale, Energy, and Community in a World Gone Crazy* (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2007). Dr. Levine will discuss the possible causes for the dramatic rise of depression in the United States, and he will offer solutions -- for individuals and society -- that mental health professionals all too often ignore.

Dr. Levine is also the author of *Commonsense Rebellion: Taking Back Your Life from Drugs, Shrinks, Corporations, and a World Gone Crazy* and has authored a chapter for *Alternatives Beyond Psychiatry*. He has been a regular contributor to *AlterNet*, *Z Magazine*, and *The Huffington Post* and his articles and interviews have been published in *Adbusters*, *Salon*, *The Ecologist*, *High Times* and numerous other magazines. He is on the advisory council of the International Center for the Study of Psychiatry and Psychology and on the editorial advisory board of the journal *Ethical Human Psychology and Psychiatry*. Dr. Levine has presented talks and workshops to diverse organizations throughout North America. More information on Bruce's writing can be found at <www.brucelevine.net>.

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*Dig out your swim suit, prepare a dish
 and plan to attend our
 Annual August Picnic
 during a weekend in late August.
 More information will be in the next
 FIG Leaves.*

Events (note date/time changes)

July Potluck

No Potluck

July Meeting

Tuesday, July 22, 2008, 7:00 PM
 at the Vernon Manor
 400 Oak Street, Cincinnati,
 OH

August Potluck

At the Home of the Kagins
 More details in the next issue.

August Meeting

*There will be no meeting -
 See you at the Picnic!*



June Meeting

Televangelism and Prosperity Theology

by Katie Hladky,

PhD Candidate in Comparative Religion at Florida State University

Katie started off by making a reference to *The Secret*, a movie and then a book detailing the so-called "Law of Attraction." It deals primarily with a New Age concept around the power of thinking positively, and like attracts like and if you want things to happen to you, you have to visualize those things. For example if you want to be a millionaire, you should write a check for a million dollars, hang it over your bed and look at it every day. If you want to lose weight, you should think only of thin people. These ideas have gained acceptance, especially through adoption by TV personality Oprah Winfrey.



(photo compliments of Fran Welte)

Katie Hladky

The speaker then switched to a screen depicting the Grassley Six consisting of the six televangelists being investigated by a Congressional Committee headed by Senator Grassley of Iowa. Their lavish life styles have raised the suspicion of violation of IRS regulations regarding tax-exempt religious status. The six displayed showed Eddie Long, Benny Hinn, Paula White, Joyce Meyer, Creflo Dollar and Kenneth Copeland. These preachers promote the power of positive wishing in their approach to religion.

These people ask for money. We have Paul Crouch asking for pledges of \$1000, if you say you don't have \$1000, then pledge \$10,000 or make it \$50,000 in Jesus name, "I dare you, I double dare you and just see what God will do." Katie described watching Trinity Broadcast Network and seeing Paul Crouch asking people to send checks for \$50,000, and she thought: "You can't make this up !"

These preachers are not people who want to expound in barren rooms; they want to have a throne and they want to have all the real fancy goods, things, and outfits. "We have to be prosperous and we are evidence that shows this is how God works." They will often assert that Jesus was not poor, but wore designer clothing and he wore clothes that would be like the best today. They have no theological basis for these claims, but they assert Jesus and all his disciples wore clothes that are the equivalent of Armani and Gucci today.

A question was asked about the Faith-based Initiative. Katie responded that the very first Faith-based initiative awarded was a six million dollar grant given to Pat Robertson. The first million was intended for one of his own projects, the other five million was given for Robertson to dole out to whatever charities he saw fit. There were no checks or oversight. So Robertson took all the money to fund his other pet projects.

Here is the an example of the typical argument made. These preacher folks are ready to say: "Our religion tells us we need a big jet. We got the jet, not because we wanted a jet, but because Jesus wants us to have a jet, and that's the way it is."

The distribution of the Faith-based initiative money has gone almost exclusively to Christian groups. CBS did a Special which discovered that all the money being granted was going to Christian groups and to specific Christians at that. The Episcopalians, to pick a liberal [?] group at random, weren't receiving much. Most of the money was given to the Evangelical and fundamentalist groups and they were getting the biggest chunks of money. The biggest issue with this faith based tax money is that it comes without any strictures or safe guards about discrimination. So funds are granted to do a drug program and then, for example, ➔



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

fignote @ fuse.net;

or on disk or typewritten via mail to Editor, FIG Leaves, P.O. Box 53174, Cincinnati, OH 45253. Contributions received before the first Friday of the month will be considered for publication that month.

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Memberships run from:

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One year: \$25

Family: \$35

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

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



the approved drug program teaches people the reason they are on drugs is because they are gay, or unbelievers, and that they must get right with Jesus. Meanwhile the government refuses to enact any rules about how the money can or should be used.

Once a government program has been started it is difficult to end. Interests are vested, and good (and less good) things are accomplished. Lots of groups claim to be doing important activities, as was shown, for instance, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. We need to insist on some restrictions, on limits how the money can be used, and no discrimination rules. Anything less is unconstitutional.

- Reported by George Maurer



Templeton Prize Founder dies at 95.

John Templeton, raised in the Bible-Belt town of Winchester, KY, was a devout Presbyterian whose middle class parents stressed the virtues of thrift and compassion. He learned both lessons so well that in 1968 he renounced his U.S. citizenship, moving to the Bahamas to avoid the income tax, and in 1987 was knighted for his philanthropies by the Queen. Believing spiritual understanding to be more important than understanding nature, he created the Templeton Prize for Spiritual Realities, directing that it be adjusted annually to be larger than the Nobel Prize. Now about \$1.5 million, it was first awarded to Mother Theresa in 1973. In recent years the Templeton Prize has been awarded almost exclusively to physicists who dream up connections between science and religion.

- *What's New* by Robert Park, 11 July 2008

Planning the first human mission to Mars:

John McCain told Florida newspaper editors that it would be exciting to send a man to Mars. He explained that he's been intrigued by Mars ever since reading Ray Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles*, (New York: 1950). Actually Mars has changed a lot since then. I've been making a list of appropriate crew members for the trip and I'd be happy to include McCain so he could see the changes for himself.

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 13 June 2008



Malthus and Reality.

Population increases geometrically. Last year Russia established September 12 as Family Love Day, a holiday for people to stay home and do their part to halt population decline. Maternity wards were braced for business on June 12, but it was just another slow day. Just give women control over their own reproduction, and populations will stabilize. Food production, Thomas Malthus observed in his 1798 essay, grows arithmetically; without effective contraception, or war, or pestilence, he warned, world famine is inevitable. Government and business leaders were horrified at this negative thinking, not to mention the Church. Governments need armies, business needs workers, religion need souls to save. Malthus was vilified, and accused of favoring war and disease. The world population in 1798 was less than one billion.

The world population today is 6.7 billion, in spite of pandemics and almost continuous warfare. The closest the U.S. government has come to investing in population control is to fund Gerard O'Neill's loony fantasies of space colonies. Malthus is rarely mentioned today, and almost never favorably. Much is made of the fact that in industrialized countries the population is stabilized or shrinking as it is in Russia. Alas serious food shortages are growing, famine is widespread in Africa, shortages of clean water are on the increase, fuel costs are rising rapidly and ocean fisheries are declining. Energy shortages make all the other problems more difficult to deal with. Overpopulation is never mentioned as the cause, but the world population may already be unsustainable. Only China supports population control.

- *What's New* by Robert Park, 11 July 2008

Sending Astrologers and Faith Healers to Jail.

In Britain, astrologers can now end up in prison, if they fail to warn their prospective customers that their services are "not experimentally proven" and "for entertainment only". So can godmen, tantriks, tarot cards readers, faith healers, occultists, fortune tellers, seers, soothsayers, psychics, mantra-healers, mediums and babas.

Since May 26, 2008, the flourishing spiritual business in the country - estimated to bag an annual income of more than forty million pounds - has come under the scanner of new customer protection regulations. Result of the biggest overhaul of Britain's consumer laws in the past forty years, these regulations are implementing the European Union's Unfair Commercial Practices Directive (UCPD) from May 2005 that will soon govern consumer laws all over Europe.





Besides door-to-door-sellers, children's advertisements etc., the new British law targets miracle mongers of all kinds and backgrounds - no matter, if they are resident Brits or visiting Indians. It compels them to state in a disclaimer that their services are "for entertainment only" and that they are not "experimentally proven". Such disclaimers have to be well visible for all potential customers, put up on name boards, invoices, printed papers with terms and condition, in advertisements and in websites. If the "entertainment only" nature of their services is not made clear to a client before the session, they can be taken to court and will be liable to a prison sentence up to two years and a fine up to 5000 pounds.

- *Rational Internationalist Bulletin* No. 175 (15 June 2008)



the next president of the USA to "bring our boys home". And the other pocket treasures? Is Obama a Hanuman believer, inspired by the legendary monkey's great war against demon King Ravana? Is he a gambler? Does he believe in lucky charms? Does he believe that these small mascots carried around in his pocket have any impact on his life and "fate"? If the contents of his pocket is any indication for his state of mind, one may have to be prepared for strange - if not dangerous - surprises.

- *Rational Internationalist Bulletin* No. 175 (15 June 2008)

Tony Blair opens a huge alms bag.

British ex-premier Tony Blair has launched his *Tony Blair Faith Foundation* in New York on May 30, 2008. The ambitious charity is seeking hundreds of millions of dollars of funding to rescue religion and sell it as a force for good. The focus of its activities will be on interfaith dialogue B after 9/11 a bestseller in the Western world.

With its headquarters in New York and an "interfaith dialogue and conference center" in London, the new charity is according to Tony Blair "doing reasonably well in raising money in both places." Supporters speak of tens of millions of dollars initial funding.

Tony Blair had been reticent about his religious ambitions while he was prime minister, not to alienate Britain's largely secular society. Once his then spokesman, Alastair Campbell, told reporters: "We don't do God." But his biographer Anthony Seldon described him as a "profoundly religious figure," whose faith had always been a major influence on his politics. Last year, Blair told TV chat show host Michael Parkinson he had prayed to God when deciding whether to send troops into Iraq.

In December he converted from Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism. The Vatican, says Blair, is very supportive of his new interfaith venture.

- *Rational Internationalist Bulletin* No. 175 (15 June 2008)

What Barack Obama carries in his pocket.

It is quite revealing what comes to light, when the perhaps soon-to-be mightiest man in the world empties his pockets - as seen on a recent photo posted on Time's "White House Photo of the Day" collection. There is a tiny monkey - apparently Hindu god Hanuman - together with a gambler's lucky chit, a bracelet belonging to an American soldier deployed in Iraq and a tiny Madonna with child. The bracelet could be a reminder that it would be his most distinguished task as

The Pew Forum surveys the U.S. religious landscape.

The latest findings of the respected Pew Forum's massive survey make it clear that we are an overwhelmingly religious people. Only 16 percent identify themselves as "unaffiliated" and only a tenth of those are atheists. The strongest predictor of a person's faith has always been the faith of their parents, but with interfaith marriages increasing, a quarter of adult Americans have switched to another religion. The greatest gain was in unaffiliated, but even among the unaffiliated 70 percent said they believe in God. The willingness of Americans to compartmentalize their beliefs, holding totally contradictory convictions in different spheres, is remarkable. Scientists accept as a given that behind every physical effect lies a physical cause. That seems to rule out supernatural causes, leaving gods with little to do.

- *What's New* by Robert Park, 27 June 2008

The Pope and the causes of hunger.

In a message read at the June 3 opening of a three-day World Food Security Summit in Rome, Pope Benedict XVI said that hunger is unacceptable in a world that can produce plenty to eat. He quoted a 12th Century church text: "If you do not feed someone who is dying of hunger, you have killed him." But if you do not provide the pill to populations with inadequate resources, have you murdered starving infants? In a finite world, food shortages are inevitable in the absence of adequate family planning. In Britain, where population is soaring due to record immigration, the Chairman of the Sustainable Development Commission called for a "zero net immigration" policy. He commented on the malign combination of a Catholic Church that sees contraception as wicked, and a United States, which takes an ideological approach to family planning. Martin Rees, President of the Royal Society said: food and water shortages are a dangerous reality in developing countries.

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 13 June 2008





THINGS TO DO....

THINGS TO SEE...



Media Events/Programs

The Humanist Perspective

Show times on Time-Warner Cable:

Channel 4: Tuesday 9:30 am and Thursday 7:00 pm

Channel 24: Friday 11:30 pm

Programs:

15-17 July: *Did Jesus Exist?*

With R. Joseph Hoffman

22-24 July: *Humanism and the Law,*

with Ron Lindsay

29-31 July: *Conflict and Reconciliation,*

with Trudy Govier

5-7 August: *Fallibilism and Faith,*

with Susan Haack

12-14 Aug: *The Happiness Myth, Part 1,*

with Jennifer Michael Hecht

19-21 Aug: *The Happiness Myth, Part 2,*

with Jennifer Michael Hecht

Hear! Hear! Answers in Atheism at

<www.answersinatheism.net>

JOIN US! - We are live on the internet Thursday evenings from 7 pm to 8 pm EST. Our shows are also available as archived audio files, so you can listen later at any time of your choice.

Please tune in at www.answersinatheism.net.

The Answers in Atheism crew

O.F.A.

Operation Foxhole Atheists needs our help. Created by Blair Scott of the North Alabama Freethought Association (NAFA), OFA sends packages to troops in Afghanistan and Iraq who have identified themselves as atheists or humanists. You may not agree with the war but the soldiers aren't responsible for starting it and they need our support. I'm asking you all to bring some of these goods to our March meeting and I will see that they get to OFA and from there to the troops. We'll repeat this list in the next FIG Leaves as a reminder. The soldiers have requested:

Beef Jerky, Poptarts, Granola Bars, Breakfast Bars, Pringles, Cookies, Cheetos, Canned soup with poptop lids, Crystal Light on-the-go drink mix, Powdered Gatorade drink mix, Travel pillows (U-shaped), DVD's

Any magazines or books (atheist or humanist materials can be sent but some of the soldiers choose to remain unknown as such in their companies)

Any kind of snack food or reading material would be appreciated.

If you would prefer, their website takes PayPal donations. <http://thenafa.org/ofa/>

Let's rally behind our fellows in uniform and show them some support!

Thank you, John Welte



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

July 20 Bryan Sellers: *Under a Green Sky: Global Warming, the Mass Extinctions of the Past, and What They Can Tell Us About Our Future* by Peter Ward

Aug 17 Bob Streifthau: *World Without Us* by Alan Weisman

Sept 21 Bob Riehemann: *Doubt and Certainty* by Tony Rothman and George Sudarshan

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

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

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

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





THINGS TO DO....

THINGS TO SEE...



All-Ohio Atheists Coming Out Party

please mark you calendars

Saturday, August 2nd 12pm-5pm

Venue Change

Everal Barn

60 N. Cleveland Ave.

Westerville, OH 43081

Map available at: <http://healthyaddict.googlepages.com/home>

RSVP link on this site - \$5.00 each \$3.00 for students. You can pre-pay using pay pal. You can create a pay pal account using a link provided there. You can also pre -pay by postal mail or at the event by contacting Ashley Paramore at: ashley@secularstudents.org. Pre payment is strongly recommended.

E-mail is omnipresentatheists@googlegroups.com

From Ashley at the above website, "This will primarily be a social event, but I'm very excited about it. It'll be a great opportunity for freethinkers to be able to network with each other, and just have a good time! Please give me some responses with your thoughts."

North of Columbus is bringing side dishes. South of Columbus is to bring desserts.

American Atheists is now sponsoring the event.

Organizations involved so far: Students for Freethought at Ohio State, Omnipresent Atheists, Secular Student Alliance, Atheist Meetup Groups from Cincinnati, Columbus, and Cleveland, the Free Inquiry Group of Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky, and the Center For Inquiry group of Cleveland. As well as: Humanist Community of Central Ohio, Cleveland Freethinkers, Central Ohioans For Rational Inquiry, and Michigan Atheists.

Groups will be able to set up tables and/or pop-up canopies to distribute information about their organizations.

Contact John Welte about prepayment and ride-sharing at welte@fuse.net.

Speakers - Edwin Kagin and Hemant Metha

Sponsors - Students for Freethought at Ohio State

This is being planned as a social and networking event for all free thought groups in Ohio. It is the brain-child of Ashley Paramore, Secular Student Alliance Board Member. More information will be forthcoming and be available at the following website:

<http://groups.google.com/group/omnipresentatheists>.

And here is an idea whose time has come.

From reader Len Zanger: *it's beyond belief!* Camp Quest of Michigan, P. O. Box 656, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan 48303

"Heaven for the climate, Hell for the company."

Responding to popular demand, this summer I've decided to try to organize a family camp for those intrepid and fearless individuals willing to go to *Hell* and back.

A number of sites with water & electric hookups have been reserved for our "Weekend in Hell" at the Hell Creek Ranch in Hell, Michigan for the weekend of August 9-10.

Hell Creek Ranch; 10866 Cedar Lake Road; Hell, MI 48169 Phone: 734-878-3632 (this is in Pinkney State Recreation area)

* This is a 100-site campground, 40 "rustic" and 60 sites with water & electric.

* There is a playground, game room, horseshoe pit, volleyball, vending (including ice), in-ground pool and bath house.

* The ranch offers horseback riding, and they are adjacent to 1000 acres of trails on state land.

* Canoes can be rented nearby.

* Buy wood for campfires at the ranch only--due to continuing problems with the emerald ash borer, **do not bring your own firewood.**

* The village of Hell is about 10 minutes away (consisting of a post office, restaurant and ice cream parlor -- yes, you can get ice cream in Hell!)

Check in Friday evening, check out Sunday afternoon (unless you'd like to stay longer). Site fee for water & electric hookup is \$25 per day. A weekend family pass to use the pool is \$15. Those interested in horseback riding must make reservations in advance by calling 734-954-0500. Canoeing can be arranged through Screams Ice Cream Parlor at 734-878-2233.

Hell Creek Ranch is located in South Eastern Michigan's most beautiful countryside, in the heart of the Pinckney Recreation Area. Seventeen miles of beautiful hiking trails weave thru the Hell area, the same trails used by the Potawatomi Indians a century ago.

The Pavillion and Pond area is away from the campground area, offering a semi-private setting with plenty of space for outdoor activities. The Pavillion has picnic tables and a grill available for cookouts, and there is a bonfire pit near the pond.

Check in Friday evening, August 8 - check out Sunday afternoon August 10. Ask for the Camp Quest Family Camp reserved for Len Zanger. For more information, please contact me at campquest-mi@comcast.net or phone 248-330-5061.

☞



Irreligion: A Mathematician Explains Why the Arguments for God Just Don't Add Up
by John Allen Paulos
(New York: Hill and Wang, 2008)

The author, a mathematics professor, introduces us to his reasons for unbelief and atheism. He candidly explains the absence of any good logical arguments for God's existence, denies the need for divine allies or advocates, as well as supernatural task masters or tormentors. He prizes a secular humane and reasonable outlook, which may help improve the world and society. For most firm secular humanists Paulos will not provide many new ideas; atheism having been rehearsed by many authors in many books and at many times in various cultures throughout history. But, it is good to confirm the old arguments gathered in one place and expounded in a light and breezy style.

Paulos tells us he never was a believer, or at least cannot remember thus. He grew up in a nominally Christian, but firmly secular family. Most of his arguments rely on everyday common sense, they do not require any mathematics or philosophical sophistication. Many of his arguments are laid out as syllogisms like this one, and then refuted:

1. Whether brought about by prayer or taking place spontaneously, a miracle occurs.
2. This is evidence of divine intervention.
3. Therefore God exists.

But what is a miracle? Simply a very unlikely event. This leads him into a discussion of what is meant by unlikely, that is highly improbable – mathematical logic sneaking in by the back door. Every event is unique, and hence rare. Only when the unlikely event is a wish fulfillment does it qualify – for somebody, as a miracle.

Paulos has some attractive analogies and explanations. On the argument for "intelligent design" and the need for a creator he refuses to rehash the defenses of Darwin. Rather, he explicates an analogy between evolu-

tion – self organized apparent order – and modern free market economies. The national or world economy is a complex system which provides you and me with all the products and our needs in a timely manner. Yet, there is no plan or command system. "The physical infrastructure and communication networks are also marvels of integrated complexity."(p. 20) Things arrive when and where they are needed, and products are assembled in time for you to buy. No economic God or dictatorial creator designed this system. By analogy no god is needed for evolution.

This analogy gives Paulos an opportunity to comment on a surprising contradiction between political attitudes. The fierce opponents of Darwin, the believers in the necessity of a ruler and creator of the natural world, are often the believers in the free market, nay insist it remain uncontrolled and without oversight or government rules.

Occasionally the mathematician does peek in. He brings up the question: why does math work? Why is pi always 3.1415, presumably not only on earth but throughout the universe? Why do the questions of science so often yield to the solution of mathematics? To some this is God's work and indicates that God exists. Paulos answers that simple problems, counting your flock of sheep, or adding baskets of corn cobs are everyday human practices, and that math grew out of these abstract manipulations. I don't think that is quite the answer, though some historians of science would agree with him.

Paulos has written a charming book, a short book, and an amusing book. I can recommend it particularly for your secular friends who don't know what to make of our current political obeisance to religion, and who might like to know what a thinking person makes of the "god arguments."
- Wolf Roder ☚

Naturopaths:

In Minnesota they now call themselves *Doctors*. After 99 years of trying, naturopaths in Minnesota can now call themselves "doctor." That's OK, in Minnesota they call tag-team wrestlers "Governor."

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 13 June 2008



July Potluck
 August PICNIC
 (no potluck)
 TBA - Late August



July Meeting
 Tues. July 22, 2008 7:00 PM
 August Meeting
 No Meeting - Join us at the Picnic!



FIG Leaves
 P.O. Box 53174
 Cincinnati, OH 45253

FIG

Our Purpose

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

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



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

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

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

For more information, write the Free Inquiry Group at the address above, e-mail figinfo@gofigger.org, or visit our web site at gofigger.org or freeinquirygroup.org.