

FIG LEAVES

Volume 22 Issue 7

July 2013

July 2013 Meeting:

Sunday July 14, 1:00 PM,
Cincinnati Museum Center

Ultimate Dinosaurs Exhibit Cincinnati Museum Center

11:30 AM Brunch at Frisch's; 1001 Gest St, Cincinnati, OH 45203

1:00 PM Ultimate Dinosaurs Exhibit at Cincinnati Museum Center
1301 Western Avenue, Cincinnati, OH 45203

In July, FIG will visit the new traveling exhibit, *Ultimate Dinosaurs: Giants from Gondwana*, coming to the Cincinnati Museum Center.

Based on ground breaking research from scientists around the world, this exhibition reveals bizarre, unusual looking dinosaurs virtually unknown to North Americans because they evolved in isolation in South America, Africa and Madagascar. Ultimate Dinosaurs features three Augmented Reality (AR) experiences, used in creative ways to bring these specimens to life and illustrate the story of how a dynamic Earth with drifting continents affected the evolution of dinosaurs, from a Southern perspective.

Brunch will be at 11:30 am at the Frisch's one block from the Museum Center and our tour will start at 1:00 pm at the Museum Center. Tickets to the Museum Center are \$8 for FIG Members and the \$13 for non-FIG members.

Members - To join us for brunch and/or the tour, contact Shawn Jeffers at figcincinnati@gmail.com or 513.404.8191.

August Meeting, Saturday, August 17, 3:00 pm Annual Fignic

Our annual Fig Summer picnic will be held on Saturday 17 August at 3:00 pm at the home of Bryan Sellers, 8895 Wuest Rd, Cincinnati, OH.

FIG will provide meat and vegetarian grilling foods, and individuals may bring a salad, side dish, or dessert to share if they choose.

Inside

Page

June Meeting	2
Contradiction Corner	3
Things To Do, Things To See	4
Science Book Club	4
CFI - Advocacy Update	5
It Only Takes One	
by Fred Edwards	5
In The News	6
On Religious Atheist	
by Herb Silverman	7

Events

July 2013 Meeting

Sunday July 14, 1:00 pm
Cincinnati Museum Center
1301 Western Avenue.
Cincinnati, OH 45203

August FIGnic

Saturday Aug. 17, 3:00 pm
Bryan Sellers, 8895 Wuest Rd,
Cincinnati, OH

Please Let Us Have Your E-Mail Address!

Whenever we send out an E-mail, several rejections are returned. If you want to stay in touch with FIG, please make sure we have your correct and up-to-date E-mail address. We also need your current snail mail address.

To confirm your E-mail and Snail-mail address if it has changed, please send an E-mail to Brian Sellers at bsellers@fuse.net.



June Meeting

Douglas Whaley Talk On The Imaginary Friend

For the June FIG Meeting, author and retired law professor, Douglas Whaley, came to speak to us. Whaley was a professor of law at the Ohio State University and retired in 2004. Since retiring, he wrote an atheist thriller titled *Imaginary Friend*.

Whaley opens new territory with his engaging novel. *Imaginary Friend* begins at Ohio State's Horseshoe Stadium where atheist hero Franklin Whitehouse is attending a game. During the game, a bomber with ties to a Muslim organization brings down a section of the stadium trapping Franklin and dozens of other people. Franklin becomes a national hero as he helps people to safety.

During a talk show discussion of the bombing and rescue, Franklin makes clear that no "imaginary friend" helped him through this crisis. Suddenly, Franklin goes from being a national hero to being a source of national controversy. His girlfriend leaves him. His employer asks



him to go. He gets hate mail and gets shot at. He and members of his family get abducted by people offended that Franklin dares to speak frankly of his atheism. As a result of speaking out about his atheism, Franklin is forced into a situation where he is forced to choose between conversion and God.

After the book reading, Doug ask the group about their experiences with coming out as nonreligious, since that is such a critical part of his book. *Imaginary Friend*, the atheist thriller, was self-published by Whaley, but it has received great reviews and is available for purchase from Amazon for \$11 or as a Kindle download for \$2.99.

– reported by Shawn Jeffers ☚



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.

All material printed in FIG Leaves may be reproduced in similar publications of non-profit groups which grant FIG Leaves reciprocal reprinting rights as long as proper credit is clearly attributed to FIG Leaves and the authors and do not necessarily reflect opinions of the editor or the Free Inquiry Group, Inc., it's board, or officers.

FIG Board of Directors:

- President:** Shawn Jeffers
- Vice President:** Chuck Byrd
- Secretary:** Susan Davis
- Treasurer:** Bryan Sellers,
- Librarian:** Terry Kassnel
- Newsletter:** Wolf Roder.
- PR:** Michele Grinoch
- Social Media:** Emily Mullen
- Webmaster:** Dennis Davis
- Immediate Past President:**
John Welte

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.



Contradiction Corner

By Dennis Davis



Welcome to Contradiction Corner, for July. I would like to continue my series on Biblical facts church pastors know but don't tell their congregations. Last month I began the discussion of the New Testament by focusing on the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John by explaining the order they were written in and probable dates of authorship.

This month I will focus on how these four gospels differ and why. The authors of each gospel were not reporting differing eyewitness accounts but instead were crafting their stories for different audiences. Understanding the intended audience (as well as the world events happening when they were written) will reveal amazing information. For this article I will be referring to a book entitled *Who Wrote the New Testament* by Burton L. Mack and several books by Bart Ehrman. Any reader wishing to delve further into this topic should read these works.

Before beginning, be aware that the First Century Church was not a monolithic movement, but instead a collection of several groups from the Ebionites (who thought that Christianity should be an extension of Judaism); to the Marcionites (who taught that Jesus was the revelation of a new spiritual god separate from the corrupt evil god of the Old Testament) to Gnostic Christians (a collection of groups who primarily thought Jesus was never human and that his teachings were important not his death or resurrection.) And there were many, many more sects including what we could call protoorthodox Christians that would win dominance over the others within the next couple centuries.

As I pointed out last month, scholars believe that the book of Mark was written first in approximately 70 C.E. which places it just shortly before or immediately after the fall of Judea to the Roman's. The book of Mark tells of a Jesus who played his cards close to his chest, who is not quite sure of his mission. His family thinks he is crazy, and he tells anyone he heals not to reveal it to the public. For example, at his baptism in Mark 1:11, Jesus is told "You are my son in whom I am well pleased." It appears that this message was private and no one else is aware of the voice.

Mark puts the twelve disciples in a bad light, they don't understand who he is and seem quite dense, especially Peter. Remember that the writings of Paul predate all the gospels and it is fairly obvious that the author of Mark shared Paul's opinion of the Jewish Christian leadership, well intended but incompetent. The book of Mark appears to be written for an early Apocalyptic group of Christians who felt they were the last generation standing on the edge

of a new earthly kingdom. This group was not concerned with how to plan for the future because they wouldn't be around long enough to experience it.

Now move to Matthew, a book that appears to be written for a Jewish Christian Church that experienced persecution from their Jewish brethren. In Matthew, Jesus' family believes in him, he speaks freely in the open, preaches on mountaintops and is not afraid to let anyone know that he is a prophet. This time at his baptism everyone hears "This is my son in whom I am well pleased." Matthew's Jesus is a messiah come to save a remnant of Israel and condemning the rest. By this author's time, considerable animosity had developed between the Jewish authorities and early Jewish Christians. Matthew's author is concerned with Jesus' message fulfilling the Old Testament, not replacing it, and as a result he quotes more from Hebrew Scripture than any other gospel author. Matthew attempts to tie every action of Jesus to Old Testament prophecy whether they fit or not. During the trial before Pontius Pilate when he asks the Jews what he should do with Jesus, the book of Matthew is the only one who has the Jews reply "His blood be on us, and on our children."

Luke was written late enough that the early Apocalyptic cult was all but gone. This author was writing for a non-Jewish church that needed a clear connection between the first disciples to a new generation of church leaders. This is why the same author also penned the Book of Acts in order to show an unbroken connection between Jesus, the twelve disciples and the Apostle Paul.

The author of John wrote his gospel for a sect of Christian Mystics with a Super Jesus who isn't just the messiah, he is God. Unlike the other gospels, this Jesus is full of himself stating "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes to the Father, but by me." While the Jesus of Mark gives his glory to his father and avoids attention, the Jesus in John only talks about himself. Mark's Jesus asks why he is forsaken as he dies on the cross in agony, John's Jesus is cool and collected dying when he is good and ready declaring "It is finished!" with his last breath.

There were dozens of gospels written, a Gospel of Thomas, a Gospel of Mary Magdalene, and even a Gospel of Judas Iscariot all appearing between 70 and 200 C.E.; however, the four we have today were so popular that the Orthodox Church had to accept them even though there were obvious differences.

Most people today believe that there was a unified single Christian movement until the modern era, but the variation and contradictions between the four gospels reveal that the early Church was just as confused and diverse as it is today.





THINGS TO DO...

THINGS TO SEE...



Save the Date:

Saturday, August 17
The FIGnic,

Our annual FIG summer picnic will be held on Saturday, August 17 at 3:00 pm at the home of Bryan Sellers, 8895 Wuest Rd., Cincinnati, OH.

FIG provides meat and vegetarian grilling options and individuals bring a salad, side dish or dessert to share if they choose.

Upcoming Meetings/Meet-Ups etc.

The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup

Monday, July 15, 6:30 pm
@ Rio Grande Mexican Restaurant
40 Carothers Road, Newport, KY 41071

Great Lakes Atheist Convention

Road Trip to Toledo, OH
Friday, August 16, 2013 7:00 PM
to Sunday, August 18, 2013, 1:00 PM
<http://glaconvention.com/>

Great Lakes Atheists are proud to present the first ever Great Lakes Atheists Convention in wonderful downtown Toledo. We're excited to have fellow atheists and freethinkers come to our fair city to share a weekend with us. We promise a good time! We have an absolutely amazing lineup of speakers coming in from all over the United States to share their thoughts with us.

Toledo has a lot to do in the summer months. Hopefully while you are here, you'll take the opportunity to experience what Toledo has to offer. We've got a world class museum and zoo along with an exciting baseball field, the home of the Mud Hens, in the heart of the city. And who wouldn't want to eat at the original Tony Packo's in east Toledo?

A lot of our speakers will be offering copies of their books for sale to be purchased at the convention. Autographs are available. The cost of admission includes a dinner and dance on Saturday, so bring your dancing shoes.

Science Book Club

2013 Schedule

All meetings on 3rd Sunday of the month. All meetings at the Cincinnati and Hamilton County downtown Public Library in room 3A .

July 21 *The Signal and the Noise : Why Most Predictions Fail but Some Don't* - Nate Silver, 2012.

August 18 *The Earth in Turmoil: Earthquakes, Volcanoes, and their impact on HumanKind* - Kerry Sieh, Simon LeVay, 1998

September 15 *End this Depression Now!* - Paul Krugman, 2012

October 20 *Incognito: the Secret Lives of the Brain* - David Eagleman, 2011

November 17 *The Republican Brain : the Science of Why They Deny Science and Reality* - Chris Mooney, 2012

December 15 *Time Reborn: From the Crisis in Physics to the Future of the Universe* - Lee Smolin, 2013



Membership Perk!

Access to the FIG library, including audio recordings of most of the programs thanks to John Welte's efforts. Great for car trips, your commute or just copied and to your favorite device so you can work out to "Reason as a Moral Imperative" J. T. Eberhard 10.11

Going cross country? How about "Why People Believe Weird Things" Michael Shermer.

Please take a moment to browse the library at the next FIG meeting and check your own book shelf for donations!

Thanks!
Terry, Librarian



Advocacy Update

June 2013



Dear friend of science and secular values,

Do you ever wish you could just walk right up the steps of Capitol Hill and tell your representative exactly what you think about separation of church and state, science education, or civil rights?

We know you're busy. We know you usually don't have time to come to Washington to speak up for the causes that are important to you. Fortunately, CFI's Office of Public Policy is here—every day – representing your values and making sure your voice is heard in the halls of government.

Whether we're meeting with senators, training new advocates, or addressing the United Nations, our success is your success. Our effectiveness is the direct result of your support and participation. Take a look at what we've accomplished in just the past month alone!

(1) Worked with dozens of organizations to successfully oppose any amendments to the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in the Senate and House that would create a federal school voucher program.

(2) Released a statement from scientists and policy experts expressing cautious optimism about measures to combat climate change announced by President Obama in his address at Georgetown University.

(3) Met with Dr. Andrew P.W. Bennett, the Ambassador for Canada's new Office of Religious Freedom, and discussed the persecution of secularists and skeptics who face life threatening blasphemy and similar charges in their home countries.

These are just a couple highlights; more information can be found on our website.

As you can see, we've been very busy, and we wanted to give you an update on what your support enables us all to accomplish every month. Thank you for making this important work possible.

Sincerely,

82013 Center for Inquiry | Office of Public Policy
1020 19th Street NW; Washington, D.C. 20036
(646) 7066080 ; opp@centerforinquiry.net

It Only Takes One!



During the Reign of Terror of the French Revolution, one morning's executions began with three men: a rabbi, a Catholic priest, and a freethinker.

The rabbi was marched up onto the platform first. There, facing the guillotine, he was asked if he had any last words. And the rabbi cried out, "I believe in the one and only true God, and He shall save me." The executioner then positioned the rabbi below the blade, set the block above his neck, and pulled the cord to set the terrible instrument in motion. The heavy cleaver plunged downward, searing the air. But then, abruptly with a crack, it stopped only inches above the would-be victim's neck. To which the rabbi said, "I told you so."

"It's a miracle!" gasped the crowd. And the executioner had to agree, letting the rabbi go.

Next in line was the priest. Asked for his final words, he declared, "I believe in Jesus Christ--the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost--who will rescue me in my hour of need." The executioner then positioned this man's head on the block. And he pulled the cord. Again the blade flew downward--thump! creak!--stopping just short of its mark once more.

"Hallelujah," shouted the priest. "Another miracle," sighed the disappointed crowd. And the executioner for the second time had no choice but to let the condemned go free.

Now it was the freethinker's turn. "What final words have you to say?" he was asked. But the freethinker didn't hear. Staring raptly at the ominous engine of death, he seemed lost. The executioner had to poke him in the ribs and ask the question again before he would reply. But at length, the freethinker cried out, "You gullible, superstitious fools. Those weren't miracles! You've got a blockage in the gear assembly, right there."

That might explain why there are so few freethinkers today.

— from *Fred Edwards*





Civics Class

John Dryden had just taught his Batavia (Ill.) High School Social Studies class about the Bill of Rights when he was directed to administer a survey with students' names preprinted on the forms that called on students to reveal whether they were using drugs. So he reminded his students that the Bill of Rights (Fifth Amendment) protects

them from having to confess to crimes. But officials said the survey wasn't there to catch criminals, but was rather intended to help the school identify students who needed help. Over the protests of students, parents and even an alderman, the local school board formally reprimanded Dryden for reminding his students about their rights. "The board will not support any employees giving false impressions" about other employees, such as those who chose the survey, said board president Cathy Dremel.

(Arlington Heights Daily Herald)

God And The Great Pumpkin

A vegetable dealer in India's Jharkhand State decided that a pumpkin he bought was so enormous, – around 190 pounds, – that it must be a reincarnation of the god Shiva (the supreme God in the Hindu Trinity.) So he began worshiping the pumpkin. A priest counseled the man to continue his fealty, at least until the following Sunday, a holiday, after which he should carve it into small pieces and give it to devotees.

Betting On The Cat Goddess

The Egyptians worshiped a cat goddess in 3000 BCE. In Buri-ram, Thailand, a woman sliced open a sausage to find the distinctive body of a very small kitten. She took this to be a symbol of some sort, and deserving to be placed on an altar. Friends and Neighbors gathered to pray to it. Several even said they had considered the woman so fortunate that they played her age, – fifty-two, – in a local lottery. And they won!

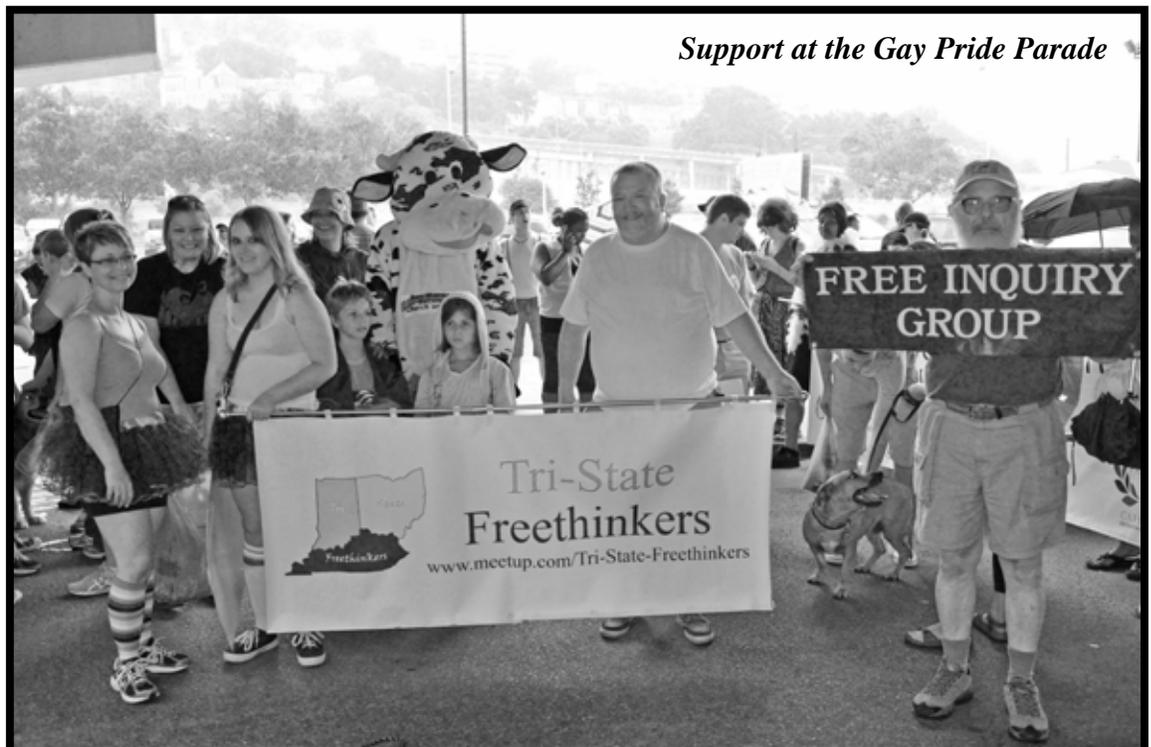
Atheist Seeking US Citizenship, Originally Told 'Go to Church', is Finally Approved

An atheist woman who was originally told she must join a church or her U.S. citizenship application would be rejected, yesterday was granted citizenship.

Immigration: Atheists Need Not Apply? Margaret Doughty, an atheist and permanent U.S. resident for more than 30 years, was told by immigration authorities this month that she has until Friday to officially join a church that forbids violence or her application for naturalized citizenship will be rejected. Doughty received the ultimatum after stating on her application that she objected to the pledge to bear arms in defense of the nation due to her moral opposition to war.

According to a letter to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services by the American Humanist Association on Doughty's behalf, officials responded by telling her that she needed to prove that her status as a conscientious objector was due to religious beliefs. They reportedly told her she'd need to document that she was "a member in good standing" of a nonviolent religious organization or be denied citizenship at her June 21 hearing. A note "on official church stationery [sic]" would suffice, they said.

National Secular Movement Update
Newsletter and Call: 20 June 2013



Support at the Gay Pride Parade



On Religious Atheists

By Herb Silverman, July 1, 2013

Herb Silverman is founder and President Emeritus of the Secular Coalition for America, author of *Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt*, and Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at the College of Charleston.

When I was six, I began Hebrew School as an Orthodox Jew because that's what my family was and that's the kind of synagogue I attended. At age 11, I started thinking seriously about the concept of God and soon became an Orthodox Jewish atheist, although I could not have used the word "atheist" to describe myself because I didn't know what "atheist" meant (a person without a belief in any gods). Nonetheless, I felt comfortable participating in Orthodox rituals for a couple more years, mostly because I was a good student who could read Hebrew faster than the other boys. There are satirical movies (like *Keeping Up With The Steins*) about families who compete to throw the most elaborate and expensive bar mitzvahs, but mine was simple and inexpensive. However, I won my invented "competition" of reading the complete Torah portion for the week with fewer mistakes than others in our congregation at their bar mitzvahs.

Our congregation considered the Jews at a nearby Reform synagogue to be almost as bad as the Goyim (Gentiles) because they not only failed to observe many of the Jewish rituals, but also conducted their services in English instead of Hebrew. Had I understood the English version of all my ritual Hebrew prayers, I'd undoubtedly have become an atheist even sooner. Eventually I stopped performing the rituals and moved from being an Orthodox Jewish atheist to just a Jewish atheist, without passing through Conservative or Reform branches.

Now when I give public talks, I'm invariably asked how a person can be both Jewish and an atheist. But "Jewish atheist" is not an oxymoron, as indicated by the subtitle of my book, "Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt." Since Jewish law is based on matrilineal descent, even Orthodox Jews consider an atheist born to a Jewish mother as fully Jewish. Consequently, one can be a religious, cultural, or ethnic Jew.

Within traditional Judaism, there is little interest in what one believes compared to what one does. Fixed prayers are standardized and required for the entire Jewish community, regardless of God belief. Saying these community prayers is not assumed to be an individual declaration of faith. There are 613 Torah commandments, and Orthodox Jews try to follow as many as possible. Some, like performing a ritual animal sacrifice at a temple in Jerusalem that no longer exists, are impossible. A commandment to believe in God is also impossible because people can't will themselves to believe something they have solid reasons for not believing.

Judaism's view about Jewish atheists is akin to "don't ask, don't tell." When a

rabbi from a Reform synagogue spoke to my local secular humanist group (Secular Humanists of the Low country), he was asked how many in his congregation were atheists. He said, "I don't know. We don't ask such embarrassing questions." When someone else asked which answer would be more embarrassing, he just laughed. In the branch called Humanistic Judaism, rabbis and members of their congregations are openly atheistic.

Some atheists go through the motions of prayer to preserve their place in family and community. People in all religions can and often do pretend to believe. I'm more puzzled by atheists who pray seriously and fervently to nobody. For instance, atheist Sigfried Gold followed a rigorous prayer routine to a madeup goddess. His prayers apparently "worked," because he is no longer 110 pounds overweight. Obviously the pounds didn't just miraculously melt away. Instead, he and others often achieve a desired goal through strategies to overcome bad habits and replace them with good habits. Atheist prayers sound a lot like what I would call focusing or meditating, which some also view as a transcendent or spiritual experience.

Many churchgoers, religious or not, are more interested in experiencing love and support within a community than in defining God or finding evidence for God's existence. They can feel joy in religious fellowship and tradition even if they believe their official church doctrine is silly. Fred Edwards, Executive Director of the United Coalition of Reason, phrased it succinctly: "How many put up with nonsense for the smell of incense?"

Very few atheists pray to an entity that they don't believe exists, and the few who do usually view it as talking out loud to themselves about hopes for a given result and a desire for guidance: but not from above. I think they have much in common with people who are deeply religious, like Nik Wallenda.

When Nik Wallenda recently walked a two inch cable across a gorge near the Grand Canyon, I watched with part horror, part amusement, and a bit of admiration as he murmured prayers to Jesus almost constantly during the 23 minute walk. He thanked Jesus for steadying the wire, calming the wind, and even for showing him such a spectacular view. At the end, he thanked Jesus for his successful venture. Had Wallenda slipped and fallen to his death, as his great-grandfather and uncles had done on other dangerous walks, I wonder if he would have thought on the way down that it was God's will that his children grow up fatherless. I think risking his life in that way was irresponsible.

Nik Wallenda's ability to train and stay focused for so long was a remarkable achievement, as was Sigfried Gold's commitment to lose 110 pounds while praying and gaining self-discipline from a goddess he envisioned. Apparently, whether or not you know you are praying to an imaginary friend, your imagination can help you focus and achieve some (but not all) of your goals.

Although an argument can be made to do whatever works for you, reality works best for me. I don't need imaginary friends: nor do most reality-based people, whether they consider themselves culturally religious or not. ❧



August FIGnic
August 17
See bottom page 1 for location

July FIG Meeting
Sunday, July 14 1:00 PM
Cincinnati Museum Center



FIG Is On Facebook
If you have a Facebook account, become a Fan of FIG. To join you can type in this long weblink: <http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Cincinnati-OH/FIG-Free-Inquiry-Group-of-Cincinnati-and-Northern-Kentucky/306015475868> or it is much easier to search for "Free Inquiry Group" and find it the first option on the search page. By being a Fan you can receive FIG updates and meeting notices and RSVP for events such as the monthly FIG Community Dinners.

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