

FIG LEAVES

Volume 16 Issue 7

July 2007

July FIG Meeting:

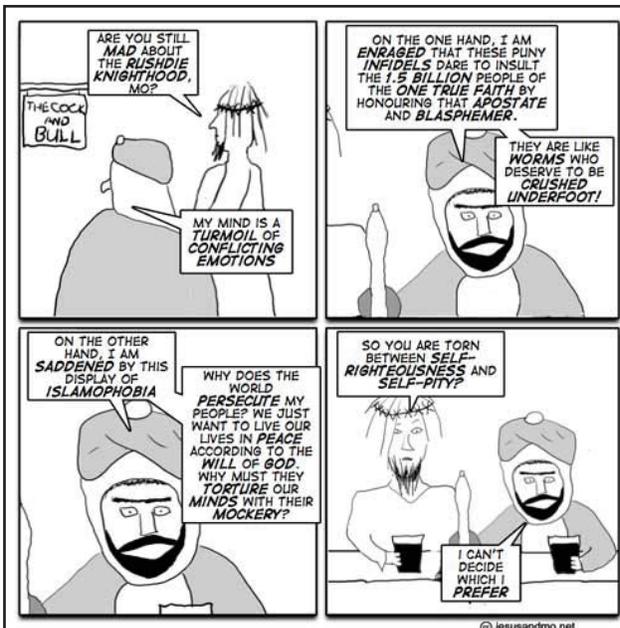
Sunday, 22 July 2:00 PM At the Vernon Manor

The Evolutionary Theory of Sexual Selection

Speaker: Denice Robertson, Ph.D.

My talk will focus on the evolutionary theory of Sexual Selection and tell how it fits into Darwin's overall theory. I plan to discuss the relationship sexual selection has with how males and females of different species interact. I will discuss direct and indirect male competition as well as female choice. I will also address some of the reasons for female choice in different species. Finally, I will look at the possibility of sexual selection in plants. My points will be illustrated by a variety of slides illustrating most of the animals and plants being discussed.

I graduated from Purdue University in 1994 with a B.S. in Biology. At Purdue I focused on Ecology, Evolution and Population Genetics and conducted research on the population dynamics of field mice *Peromyscus leucopus*. I then attended Old Dominion University in Virginia where I received my Ph.D. in 2001 in Ecological Sciences. My doctoral research was in Marine Ecology where I focused on how population dynamics impacted reproductive output and mating behavior. I came to Northern Kentucky University in 2001 with my husband and have been working at NKU as a lecturer in the Biology Department and the Center for Integrated Science and Mathematics (CINSAM).



The great flood has finally receded. The Arc rests on a rock ledge high on Mount Ararat. Noah, as a good captain is the last to leave the boat. He and his wife sit down on some rocks to rest and catch their breath and think over their position.

Says the wife: "It's really a pity. There is that good boat, and here it will sit for centuries to contaminate the visual environment." Noah stops her, "no, no, wife" he says, "I've already thought that through. So I left a termite pair on board to take care of it."

And that is why John Morris and the Creation Research Society has never been able to find Noah's Arc on Mount Ararat.

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Events

July Potluck

Sunday, July 15, 2007, 2:00 PM

July Meeting

Sunday July 22, 2007, 2:00 PM at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, OH
(Our meetings are free and open to the public - Join Us!)

*August Swim/Potluck
More information
next Issue!*



June Meeting...

The Effect of Religion on American Foreign Policy

by Amanda Metskas

The Research

Ms. Metskas addressed us on the question what variables influence Americans' foreign policy attitudes. She is a graduate student in political science at Ohio State University working on a dissertation on the role of religion in violent conflict – but that is still a work in progress. At this time she talked of *A New American Crusade?* Note the question mark!

Many factors influence American social attitudes including foreign policy attitudes. Such variables include, political and social ideology, party affiliation, gender, socio-economic status and many more. Interestingly little research has been done on the role of religion in attitude formation, perhaps because the US Census does not record data on religious participation.

The research is based on a sample of N=1511 of a broad, general telephone, random dial, survey representative of American adults. The survey was taken in 1996 which may seem old; but the early date has the advantage it came before the 9/11 attack, before the Iraq war, and before President Bush was elected and before the controversy over his Middle Eastern policies. So any effect of religion in 1996 probably has intensified in the interval. There followed a number of questions and extensive discussion of the method of random dialing, designed to obtain a representative sample of adult Americans.

Ms. Metskas used only three questions on foreign policy from the survey as dependent variables. The three questions are

- (1) Generally the more influence the US has on other nations, the better off they are.
- (2) The best way to insure world peace is through American military strength.
- (3) The US needs to play an active role in solving conflicts around the world.

On each of these questions, the respondent was asked to characterize his or her attitude on a five point scale: strongly agree, agree, feel neutral, disagree, strongly disagree.

The speaker commented on the conventional wisdom in the literature. In the foreign policy area religious differences have shown themselves particularly elusive. Americans generally know little about other countries, and thus their foreign policy opinions are not stable or well informed. Group differences of any kind are less common than in attitudes on domestic policies.

These attitude questions were compared to demographic questions, which provide data on educational level, Republican or Democratic party affiliation, gender, →



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income level, and the liberal to conservative ideology of the respondents. Most important for this study was the open ended religion question: what is your religious preference? No list of denominations was given. The various and divergent answers were coded into seven categories, listed with prevalence:

	%
Mainline protestant churches	33.5
Roman Catholic	24.3
Evangelical, fundamentalist, Pentecostal	20.3
Atheist, agnostic, none	14.3
Non Christian religions	3.4
Major traditional peace churches	1.2
Not otherwise categorized	2.2

Results were based on interrelationships with the first four categories. The last three were too small for reliable inference and were dropped from the analysis. This still left a sample of about 1400 respondents. So there are three models, i.e. the three questions on foreign policy which relate to the question of interest: religion. Each model may also be related to the five other demographic variables: education, party, gender, income, and ideology. A lively discussion ensued in which the speaker elucidated how survey information is used to draw inferences to the population.

Results

With the first question, the first model: are other countries better off with American interference, the unbelievers agree least, and the fundamentalists most. Mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics fell somewhere in the middle. Only educational level had an independent effect in this model, with the better educated agreeing less with the question

With the second mod-



el, is the American military a force for world peace, all the religions tended to agree. Only the unbelievers stood out as agreeing less. Again, those with more education agreed less on this question as well. In contrast, males and conservative respondents tended to agree with this proposition.



On the third model, an active role for the US in solving conflicts, only one variable stood out, men tended to agree with this proposition more. None of the other variables showed an effect.

On the whole it appears that evangelicals have a higher support for American influence and action in the world, but the research does not predict what form action should take. Evangelicals emphasis on conversion and activism, a belief that lives need to be changed does find expression in foreign missionary activity. It may also lead to support for military action. There is a connection between patriotism and religion, a desire of seeing America as a Christian nation especially blessed by god to lead other countries and the world. ☩

- reported by Wolf Roder

Arthritis

A drunk who smelled like beer sat down on a subway seat next to a priest. The man's tie was stained, his face was plastered with red lipstick, and a half empty bottle of gin was sticking out of his torn coat pocket. He lit up a cigarette, opened his newspaper and began reading.

After a few minutes the man turned to the priest and asked, "Say, Father, what causes arthritis?"

"My Son, it's caused by loose living, being with cheap, wicked women, too much alcohol and tobacco and a contempt for your fellow man."

"Well, I'll be damned," the drunk muttered, returning to his paper.

The priest, regretting what he had said, nudged the man and apologized.

"I'm very sorry. I didn't mean to come on so strong. How long have you had arthritis?"

"I don't have it, Father. I was just reading here that the Pope does."





George II declares “all human life is sacred.” Peace activists say the same thing. The President said this while issuing his second-annual summer-solstice-veto of legislation to lift his ban on embryonic stem cell research. He said that the United States is “founded on the principle that all human life is sacred”

n unless you’re in Iraq, where 80 American lives have been sacrificed so far this month. I couldn’t find such a principle in the Constitution; instead I found the First Amendment. By imposing his bizarre religious belief that embryonic stem cells are people on the rest of us, the President has violated the constitutional rights of every living, breathing American.

--*What’s New* by Robert L. Park, 22 June 2007

The “atheism is a faith position too” competition

Yes, it’s the old mantra, “atheism is a faith position too”.

In “On a Mission,” *Education Guardian*, May 8th, Joanna Moorhead quotes head teacher Terry Boatwright (head of a religious school) as saying “Even people who don’t believe in God have a faith - they have faith that God doesn’t exist. People say: How dare you push your faith at young people? But a head who doesn’t believe is still a head with faith.”

So that’s why it’s ok for Boatwright to “push” his faith at kids.

Jeez, “atheism is a faith position too” has really entered the *zeitgeist*. It seems to crop up almost weekly in the press now. Where’s it coming from? The idea that science is also based on “faith” seems to be behind a lot of it. Who can find the most irritating, sinister or downright funny use of this ever-popular myth? I’ll send the winner a signed (if desired) paperback copy of *The War For Children’s Minds* (published July).

--Posted by Stephen Law

“If atheism is a faith, not collecting stamps is a hobby.”

House reverses ban on contraception. Before you applaud, it faces a veto, and there are not enough votes for an override. The ban is a key element of Bush foreign policy. Though why the U.S. opposes birth control in other countries is beyond comprehension. Uncontrolled population growth will, in time, overtake every advance in the human condition.

--*What’s New* by Robert L. Park, 22 June 2007

The Muslim world is furious. The bestowing of a knighthood on the novelist Salman Rushdie led to a second *fatwa* against him. An apostate Muslim, his 1988 novel, *The Satanic Verses*, was called blasphemous, earning him a death sentence from Ayatollah Khomeini. It forced Rushdie to live in hiding for nine years. To be apostate is unforgivable to Muslims. Only religion can inspire such irrational hatred.

-- *What’s New* by Robert L. Park, 22 June 2007

••••• **Quote** •••••

The contents of government budgets are a big deal in other democratic societies - witness scenes of French farmers dumping produce on highways and 40,000 marchers in Vancouver, B.C., protesting government priorities.

Down here, we follow the DUI arrests of Lindsay Lohan and Paris Hilton, “American Idol” contestants, the custody battles over Anna Nicole Smith’s baby, and other examples of what Al Gore calls “the new priorities in America’s news coverage.”

--Joel Connelly, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 3 June 2007

Unquote

••••• **SCIENCE BOOK CLUB: 2007 Schedule** •••••

Science book club as in past years plans on meeting at the Cincinnati Downtown Library on the 4th Sunday of each month at 2:30pm in Room 3A, except on the 3rd Sunday because of holidays or other conflicts as noted below:

July 22 - *The Mountain People and The Forest People*, both books by Colin Turnbull

Aug. 19 (3rd Sunday) - *Into the cool: energy flow, thermodynamics, and life* by Eric D. Schneider

Sept. 23 - *The big splat, or, How our moon came to be* by Dana Mackenzie

Oct. 28 - *Facts and mysteries in elementary particle physics* by Martinus J.G. Veltman

Nov. 18 (3rd Sunday) - *What we believe but cannot prove : today’s leading thinkers on science in the age of certainty* edited by John Brockman

Dec. 16 (3rd Sunday) - *The Republican war on science* by Chis Mooney





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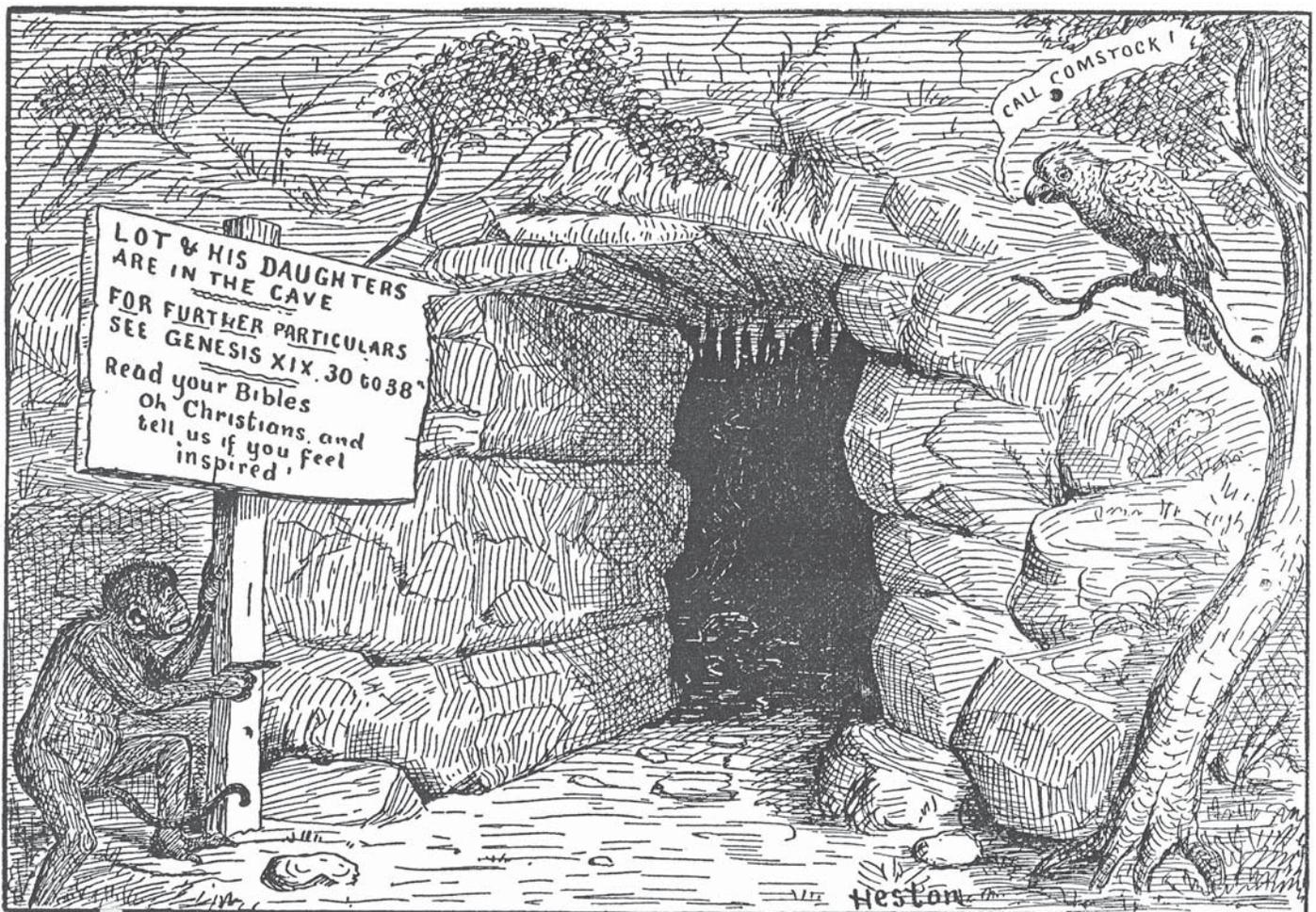
Easiest Quiz

(Passing requires six correct answers)

- (1) How long did the Hundred Years War last?
- (2) In which country are Panama hats made?
- (3) From which animal do we get cat gut for string instruments?
- (4) In which month did the Soviet Union celebrate the great October Revolution?
- (5) What are camel's hair brushes made of?
- (6) The Canary Islands are named after what animal?
- (7) What was King George VI of the United Kingdom's first name?
- (8) What color is the purple finch?
- (9) Where do Chinese gooseberries come from?
- (10) What is the color of the black box in commercial airplanes?

- (11) What general fought at "Custer's Last Stand?"
- (12) The place: the American Naval Base at Pearl Harbor,
The event: nine American ships were sunk with heavy casualties,
The time: a Sunday morning in the nineteen forties.
What was the date?
- (13) German silver is composed of three metals: copper, zinc, and ... what?
- (14) A once popular dance was called "The Big Apple" after its place of origin.
Where did the Big Apple first appear?
- (15) He was a Virginian, a war hero, a general, and the only U.S. president who never voted in a presidential election. Who was he?
- (16) Where did "French fries" originate?

(Answers on page 8.)



Lot and his daughters find refuge from a wicked world.

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)



Top ten over-obsessed with Christian religion

- #10 - You vigorously deny the existence of thousands of gods claimed by other religions, but feel outraged when someone denies the existence of yours.
- #9 - You feel insulted and “dehumanized” when scientists say that people evolved from other life forms, but you have no problem with the Biblical claim that humans were created from dirt.
- #8 - You laugh at polytheists, but you have no problem believing in a Triune God.
- #7 - Your face turns purple when you hear of the “atrocities” attributed to Allah, but you don’t even flinch when hearing about how God/Yaweh slaughtered all the male first-born babies of Egypt in “Exodus” and ordered the elimination of entire ethnic groups in “Joshua” - including women, children, and trees.
- #6 - You laugh at Hindu beliefs that deify humans, and Greek claims about gods consorting with women, but you have no problem believing that the Holy Spirit impregnated Mary, who then gave birth to a man-god who got killed, came back to life and then ascended into the sky.
- #5 - You are willing to spend your life looking for little loopholes in the scientifically established age of the Earth (4.55 billion years), but you find nothing wrong with believing dates recorded by Bronze Age tribesmen sitting in their tents and guessing that Earth is about a couple of generations old.
- #4 - You believe that the entire population of this planet with the exception of those who share your beliefs B though excluding those in all rival sects B will spend Eternity in an infinite Hell of Suffering, and yet you consider your religion the *most* “tolerant” and “loving.”
- #3 - While modern science, history, geology, biology, and physics have failed to convince you otherwise, some idiot rolling around on the floor Aspeaking in tongues” may be all the evidence you need to “prove” your choice of religions to be the correct one.
- #2 - You define .01 percent as a “high success rate” when it comes to answered prayers, and consider that to be evidence that prayer works. And you think that the remaining 99.99 percent *failure* was simply the will of God.
- #1 - You actually know a lot less than many atheists and agnostics do about the Bible, Christianity, and church history - but you still call yourself a Christian.

Preaching to a Bear

A Priest, a Pentecostal Preacher and a Rabbi all served as chaplains to the students of Northern Michigan University in Marquette. They would get together two or three times a week for coffee and to talk shop. One day, someone made the comment that preaching to people isn't really all that hard. A real challenge would be to preach to a bear.



One thing led to another and they decided to do an experiment. They would all go out into the woods, find a bear, preach to it, and attempt to convert it. Seven days later, they're all together to discuss their experience.

Father Flannery, who had his arm in a sling, was on crutches, and had various bandages on his body and limbs, went first. “Well,” he said, “I went into the woods to find me a bear. And when I found him I began to read to him from the Catechism. Well, that bear wanted nothing to do with me and began to slap me around. So I quickly grabbed my

holy water, sprinkled him and, Holy Mary Mother of God, he became as gentle a lamb. The bishop is coming out next week to give him first communion and confirmation.”

Reverend Billy Bob spoke next. He was in a wheelchair, with an arm and both legs in casts, and an IV drip. In his best fire and brimstone oratory he declaimed, “WELL brothers, you KNOW that we don't sprinkle! I went out and I FOUND me a bear. And then I began to read to my bear from God's HOLY WORD! But that bear wanted nothing to do with me. So I took HOLD of him and we began to wrestle. We wrestled down one hill, UP another and DOWN another until we came to a creek. So I quickly DUNKED him and BAPTISED his hairy soul. And just like you said, he became as gentle as a lamb. We spent the rest of the day praising Jesus.”

The Priest and the Reverend both looked down at the Rabbi, who was lying in a hospital bed. He was in a body cast and traction with IV's and monitors running in and out of him. He was in real bad shape. The Rabbi looks up and says, “Looking back on it, circumcision may not have been the best way to start.”



Tome truths

A.C. Grayling, 11 June 2007

http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/ac_grayling/2007/06/tome_truths.html

To the annoyance of many, the alarm of some, and the satisfaction of others, the half dozen books recently published that powerfully set out the case against religion and religious beliefs - books by Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett and Michel Onfray - have all sold in large numbers. At time of writing Christopher Hitchens' excellent and comprehensive dismantling of religious pretensions is at the top of the New York Times *bestseller list*. Among the reasons for the large sales of these books is doubtless the desire by believers to see what the opposition is saying; but the main reason is the hunger that the undecided and the hitherto misinformed have for a clear statement, no punches pulled, of the indictment against religion.

The appearance of these books shows that the immunity of religion to forthright questioning and challenge is over, and with it its claim to automatic respect, privilege, sensitive handling and a place at the high table of politics and public life. Remember what happened to the dictators of eastern Europe in 1989: they turned out to be cardboard figures, who suddenly turned soggy and collapsed into nothing at the first dose of real opposition. A 1989 is in process of happening to religion. The hard truths spoken about it in these books and the public debate surrounding them are as genies freed from the bottle: they cannot be put back.

Half a dozen anti-religious books; what is amazing is how little, if anything, is said about the many thousands of pro-religious books published every year all round the world. The magazine Publishers Weekly reported earlier this year that the member publishing houses of the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association between them produced 13,400 new titles in the two years 2005-6 alone. This is just one segment of the religious publishing industry in just one wing of one of the world religions; the mind boggles at the extent of forests being felled for purveyance of religious doctrine, opinion, exhortation and polemic in every shade, nuance and type.

A trawl along the shelves of any major bookstore is enough to reveal the vast output of every conceivable specimen of religious view, though admittedly much of it consists of saccharine would-be uplift merely. There

they are in their dozens and score and hundreds, where is the outrage, the condemnation, the complaining about this? Non-religious people simply ignore such books; they may feel contempt for them, but most grant the right of others to publish almost any kind of book (almost: there are obvious exceptions, though very few), and merely exercise their (hard-won, by our ancestors) right to ignore them.

Yet a mere half dozen anti-religious tomes have stirred up all the hornets in their nests, have offended and outraged the devout, and between them have exposed religious claims and beliefs for what they are. To me this suggests a profound insecurity among the religious. It is obvious why. They are not used to being under pressure somewhat after the fashion of a Honecker, a Ceausescu, a Wizard of Oz - this latter, remember, unmasked behind his screen, a knock-kneed pigeon-chested frightened little chap in his underpants, furiously pulling the levers and knobs to keep himself hidden. In the chorus of outrage at the books by Dawkins, Hitchens and others, one hears the furious squeaking of just such levers.

Perhaps that squeaking is the opening chord of a music of hope for a world too long oppressed by the superstitions of its infancy, too long forced to live whole litanies of lies, too wounded and wearied by the violence and hatred that they have loaded upon it. If so, it would be a sweet music indeed.

Letter to Continental, American, Southwest, Delta, United, and other air lines

I have the solution to prevent hijackings and get our airline industry back on its feet at the same time. Replace all female flight attendants with good lookin' strippers. What the hell? The attendants have gotten old and haggard looking. They don't even serve food anymore, so what's the loss? The strippers would double, triple, perhaps quadruple the alcohol consumption and get a "party atmosphere" going in the cabin.

Muslims would be afraid to get on the planes for fear of seeing naked women. And, of course, every heterosexual businessman in this country would start flying again hoping to see naked women. Hijackings would come to a screeching halt and the airline industry would see record revenue.

Why the hell didn't Bush think of this? Why do I still have to do everything myself?

Sincerely,
Bill Clinton





Beyond Demonic Memes: Why Richard Dawkins in *The God Delusion* is wrong about religion by David Sloan Wilson (excerpt)

One of my projects is a collaboration with the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (pronounced shick-sent-mehi), who is best known among general readers for his books on peak psychological experience, such as *Flow* and *The Evolving Self*. Csikszentmihalyi pioneered the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) which involves signaling people at random times during the day, prompting them to record their external and internal experience - where they are, who they are with, what they are doing, and what they are thinking and feeling on a checklist of numerical scales. The ESM is like an invisible observer, following people around as they go about their daily lives. It is as close as psychological research gets to the careful field studies that evolutionary biologists are accustomed to performing on non-human species, which is why I teamed up with Csikszentmihalyi to analyze some of his past studies from an evolutionary perspective.

These studies were performed on such a massive scale and with so much background information that we can compare the psychological experience of religious believers vs. nonbelievers on a moment-by-moment basis. We can even compare members of conservative vs. liberal protestant denominations, when they are alone vs. in the company of other people. On average, religious believers are more prosocial than non-believers, feel better about themselves, use their time more constructively, and engage in long-term planning rather than gratifying their impulsive desires. On a moment-by-moment basis, they report being more happy, active, sociable, involved and excited. Some of these differences remain even when religious and non-religious believers are matched for their degree of prosociality. More fine-grained comparisons reveal fascinating differences between liberal vs. conservative protestant denominations, with more anxiety among the liberals and conservatives feeling better in the company of others than when alone. Religions are *diverse*, in the same way that species in ecosystems are diverse. Rather than issuing monolithic statements about religion, evolutionists need to explain religious diversity in the same way that they explain biological diversity.

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Muldoon lived alone in the Irish countryside with only a pet dog for company. One day the dog died, and Muldoon went to the parish priest and asked, "Father, me dog is dead. Could ya be sayin' a mass for the poor creature?"

Father Patrick replied, "I'm afraid not; we cannot have services for an animal in the church. But there are some Baptists down the lane, and there's no tellin' what they believe. Maybe they'll do something for the creature."

Muldoon said, "I'll go right away Father. Do ya think \$5,000 is enough to donate to them for the service?"

Father Patrick exclaimed, "Sweet Mary, Mother of Jesus! Why didn't ya tell me the dog was Catholic?"



- (1) 116 years; between England and France from 1337 to 1453.
- (2) Ecuador (also Colombia), woven from the leaves of the Panama palm, *Caribrodovia palmata*.
- (3) mostly from intestines of sheep, also horses and mules; (4) in November, it took place on 24-25 October in the old style, Georgian calendar.
- (5) squirrel fur, mostly tail hairs.
- (6) dogs, from Latin *canis*; the Islands were known in Roman antiquity, the bird was named for the islands.
- (7) Albert Frederick Arthur George, born 1895, king 1936 till death 1952.
- (8) crimson red, state bird of New Hampshire.
- (9) New Zealand, also known as kiwi fruit or yangtao, *Actinidia chinensis*.
- (10) formally known as a "flight recorder," bright orange to be easily found in a wreck.
- (11) None. Custer's rank at the time was Lieutenant Colonel; he had been a temporary major general in the Civil War.
- (12) 21 May 1944 when a mysterious explosion decimated the Pearl Harbor docks. (On 7 December 1941 the Japanese sank 19 ships.)
- (13) Nickel.
- (14) At the Big Apple Club in Columbia, S. C.
- (15) Zachary Taylor, 12th president, hero of the Mexican and Seminole wars, he never voted, not even for himself.
- (16) Belgium, in the late 19th century, they became very popular in northern France.



ID's ID

by Tom McIver

ID, ID, burning bright,
Rescue us from Darwin's fright,
Beastly origin of our race,
Evolution's dread embrace.

But what science or what art
Frames immortal hand, eye, heart?
Can we force religion's claim,
Dare pronounce His very name?

Yahweh, Zeus, or Allah, then?
Yaldaboath, Urizen?
Raël's ET DNA?
Hosts of deities at play?

Ask the *Ichneumonidae*
Did he who made the lamb make thee?
Who created Heaven and Hell,
Human creativity?

ID's ID burning bright
Through obscuring fog and night,
Whether wielding Wedge or prism
ID is: Creationism.

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A little girl was talking to President Bush about whales. Mr. Bush told her that it was physically impossible for a whale to swallow a human being because even though it was a very large mammal, its throat was very small. The little girl stated that Jonah was swallowed by a whale. Irritated, the President reiterated that a whale could not swallow a human; it was physically impossible.

The little girl said, "When I get to heaven I will ask Jonah."

Mr. Bush asked, "What if Jonah went to the other place?"

The little girl replied, "Then *you* ask him."



Don't Believe Everything You Think: the six basic mistakes we make in thinking

by Thomas E. Kida

(Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2006)

review by David Ludden

I generally include a demonstration of visual illusions in my psychology classes. After several examples in which I induce students to see things that are not there, and to not see things that are there, I end with a discussion of how we can never trust that our senses are telling us what is actually out there in the real world.

"Well, that's not very comforting," blurted out one of my students not too long ago after one of these demonstrations. And she was right - much of what we have learned in cognitive psychology is disconcerting. Six of these uncomfortable facts about human thinking are explored in psychologist Thomas Kida's new book, *Don't Believe Everything You Think*. Throughout the book, Kida shows how these errors permeate our thinking, leading us not only to paranormal and pseudoscientific beliefs but also to more subtle cognitive errors that are dangerous to our health and wealth, both as individuals and as a society.

The first error is that we prefer stories to statistics. Kida illustrates this with an example of car shopping. Although Consumer Reports rates the car you are considering as very reliable, a colleague of yours owns that model and complains that it has been nothing but trouble. Would you still buy the car? In general, people trust unique personal experiences over "impersonal" data, even though the statistics represent the aggregated experiences of many people.

The second error is that we seek to confirm rather than question our beliefs. Furthermore, we are more likely to remember evidence that supports our beliefs rather than evidence that does not. This confirmation bias leads to stereotypes and prejudices as well as to pseudoscientific thinking. For example, if you believe in moon madness, you will notice the occasional crazy driver on a moonlit night without noticing all the other drivers (including yourself) that are driving normally. →



FIG LEAVES



The third error involves a general misunderstanding of the role of chance and coincidence in shaping events. Few people understand how to calculate the probabilities of events, and so people generally rely on intuitions developed from personal experience. This leads to cognitive errors such as the gambler's fallacy, in which people believe, for example, that tails is "due" after a run of heads, and the hot-hand fallacy, in which people believe that a basketball player who makes several shots in a row will likely continue making shots. Neither belief is true, and they are logically contradictory as well, but both beliefs are commonly held.

Trusting the reliability of our senses is **the fourth error** Kida discusses. "I know what I saw" is a common assertion, but in fact we never know for sure that our senses are accurately reporting what is going on around us. This is because perception is a reconstruction by the brain of the external world based on limited sensory inputs, and as such is subject to error. Not only is our perception influenced by our expectations, hallucinations are far more common than people think and are not just the product of drug abuse or psychosis.

The fifth error is that we have a tendency to oversimplify our thinking. The heuristics we use to guide our thought processes help us prevent information overload and let us make decisions in a timely manner. However, these mental shortcuts can also lead us widely astray and leave us vulnerable to deception by those who wish to manipulate us.

Finally, we need to be aware that our memories are faulty. We all know that we forget things sometimes, but we generally assume that what we do remember is an accurate representation of past events. However, a vast program of memory research has shown that human memory is exceedingly unreliable. The average person views memory as a type of video recording, but in fact it is a reconstruction based on current beliefs and expectations as well as the suggestions of others. Overreliance on memory recall has serious consequences. For instance, the criminal justice system still places inordinate weight on eyewitness testimony in spite of all the evidence showing how unreliable it is.

These six errors in thinking are part of our evolutionary makeup, and so there is little we can do to change them. However, Kida is not pessimistic. Rather, he maintains that we can overcome these weaknesses with

a two-step approach. First, we need to be aware of our cognitive biases so that we can anticipate when we are likely to fall victim to them. Second, we need to take a skeptical approach in all aspects of life. The skeptical approach Kida espouses is none other than the scientific method. Thus, Kida rejects the idea that there are various ways of knowing, depending on the field of inquiry. Although our beliefs may comfort us, Kida maintains that "we must learn to accept how much we don't know" (p. 237). It is only through the skeptical evaluation of evidence that individuals as well as societies can make informed decisions.

Don't Believe Everything You Think provides an excellent review of the literature on the psychology of belief, touching on all the standard topics of paranormal and pseudoscientific thinking. However, Kida also discusses important topics not always covered in the skeptical literature. For example, Kida's examination of the role of the media in perpetuating pseudoscientific thinking among the general public is excellent. Furthermore, Kida's examples of fallacious thinking in investment and finance are new to the skeptical literature and likely to challenge the assumptions of even the hardest skeptic. Kida's demonstration of the folly of financial forecasting is thoroughly convincing, and readers of this book will be asking their stock brokers and financial analysts some hard-hitting questions.

Although it is always uncomfortable to be reminded of just how fallible we are, Kida does provide his readers with a modicum of solace by offering copious advice on how to anticipate and work around our innate cognitive biases. *Don't Believe Everything You Think* is essential reading for anyone interested in the psychology of belief and pseudoscientific thinking. It also provides one of the best arguments around for the importance science literacy - the scientific method is the antidote to our fallible minds. ☘

The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup

When: Tuesday, 17 July at 8:00PM

Where: Joseph-Beth Booksellers
2692 Madison Rd. Rookwood Pavillion
Cincinnati OH 45207; 513-396-8966

To see who's coming and to see more event details:
http://atheists.meetup.com/90/calendar/5140742/t/cv1_ve



BOOK REVIEW

Atheists: A Groundbreaking Study of America's Nonbelievers

by Bruce E. Hunsberger and Bob Altemeyer
(Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2006)

This research is based on a social survey of atheists by two Canadian professors of psychology. Atheists are a relatively rare species, so how do you find a random, representative sample to interview. The short answer is that you don't and can't. Hunsberger and Altemeyer got permission to interview members of the San Francisco Bay Area atheist club. They obtained 253 usable responses. They further surveyed an Alabama and an Idaho atheist organization, yielding 10 and 15 responses respectively. They further gathered responses from their own students at the University of Manitoba, and interviewed parents of both believers and unbelievers, in order to find out about growing up in faith or secular. This yielded 418 responses.

These samples are a long way from being able to tell us much about atheists in general, and nothing about number, distribution, or attitudes of atheists in the general population. The surveys will tell us something about active atheists, the kinds of non-believers that join atheist clubs. From the Manitoba parents' study we may learn something about growing up in a secular home, as well as some comparison to the fundamentalist parents of theist students.

What then brings happiness, joy and comfort? Unsurprisingly fundamentalist religious parents scored high on getting comfort and joy from their faith, a median of 82. Unbelievers' parents asked to score a scale reversed from the believers measured positively on the "science brings happiness" question, but not nearly as highly as the religious, only 12. The San Francisco atheist sample scored high on questions such as: science and logic "provide the surest path we have to the truth." But at 56 did not reach the score of the Bible believers, (p. 96).

Why are they atheists? On the whole they did not reject religion because experience, depression, anger, or fear of death. Nor did they quail at religious teaching about

sex, or wanted to wallow in wantonness. "Then what did produce doubt, if it was not anger, fear, lust, resentment, and emotional letdowns? Mainly things more cerebral. God could not be shown to exist." (p. 39)

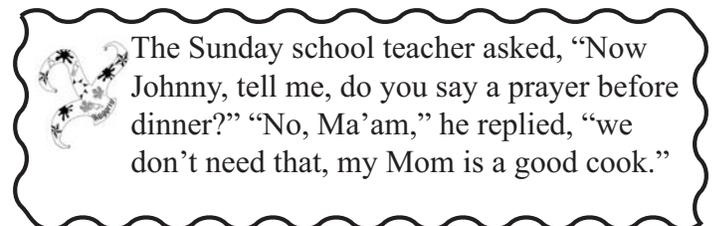
Many active atheists left the church or religion in middle age or later. Many of their reasons for "apostasy" came from reading, from pursuing ideas, from studying and thinking about science. Religious teachings did not make sense, did not agree with scientific evidence, could not stand up to examination and criticism. In short, religion for these atheists failed the test of veracity.

The authors devised a clever question design to get at hidden doubts about faith in god and heaven. Among religious students a third checked off on having hidden doubts about god. A similar question design invited the 253 Bay area atheists to express doubt in their atheist conviction. Only four percent admitted to secret doubts.

So on the whole, and on average active atheists who belong to clubs tend to be educated, left-liberal, older, and male. And, they are atheists down to their toes! Not only do they reject any version of the traditional or orthodox Jewish or Christian god, but generally they reject any supernatural being, power, or force whatever. "In the main they doubt religion for intellectual reasons, not because of emotional blows such as the death of a loved one. In the main, they simply found it all unbelievable." (p. 106).

This is a short book, only 159 pages. Space is taken up by the complete questionnaire administered to the atheists. Many further pages are devoted to reprinting the measuring scales used for religious belief, concepts, and doubts; scales of religious emphasis in the home, of dogmatism, and many, many more. The measuring tools are all clearly laid out and discussed. You may apply them to your own thinking. The findings are given briefly as dry fact. This is pioneering research, there has been no other comprehensive study of atheists. It is not, and can not be the final word. But anyone wanting to know about the people who call themselves atheists, secular humanists, or unbelievers must read this book. ☘

- Wolf Roder





July Poluck:
 Sunday July 15, 2007
 2:00 PM



August No Meeting
 Join us for a PICNIC!



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

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.