

FIG LEAVES

Volume 16 Issue 6

June 2007

June FIG Meeting:

Sunday, 24 June 2:00 PM At the Vernon Manor

Does Religious Belief Have An Effect on American Foreign Policy Attitudes?

Speaker: Amanda Metskas

Amanda Metskas, a graduate student in political science at Ohio State University, presents original research on the effects of religious belief or lack thereof on the foreign policy attitudes of Americans. Metskas statistically examines survey data on the religious affiliations of Americans and their attitudes about how active the U.S. should be in world affairs, support for the military, and support for humanitarian interventions. Do religious views have a relationship to these foreign policy attitudes over and above the effects of political party or ideology? Is there a theological basis for these differences? Amanda will also share a brief introduction into her dissertation topic on religion and violence.

Amanda Metskas serves as President of the Board of Directors of Camp Quest, Ohio. Along with August Brunsman, she co-wrote an essay for inclusion in *Parenting Beyond Belief*, a new book for loving and thoughtful parents who wish to raise their children without religion. Amanda will bring copies of the book along with her if people are interested in purchasing a copy. Proceeds from the book support Camp Quest.

More information about *Parenting Beyond Belief* can be found at:
<http://www.parentingbeyondbelief.com/>

July FIG Meeting - Sunday July 22 at 2 PM

The Evolutionary Theory of Sexual Selection

Speaker: Denice Robertson, Ph.D.

Dr. Robertson will explain how Darwin's theory of sexual selection fits with his overall theory of evolution. She discusses many features of sexual selection, using a great variety of examples, illustrating many with slides.

The success of an organism is not only measured by the number of offspring left behind, but by the quality or probable success of the offspring. She explains that it is usually the female who makes the choice of mate, which helps to explain why the males have unusual features and habits designed to attract females.

Denice Robertson is a lecturer in Biological Sciences at Northern Kentucky University.

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Events

June Meeting

Sunday June 22, 2007, 2:00 PM at
the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, OH

July Potluck

Sunday, July 15, 2007, 2:00 PM at
the home of

July Meeting

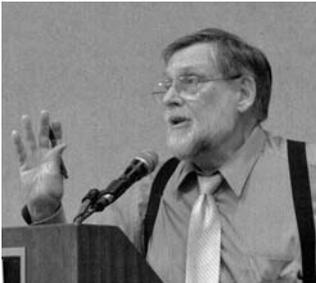
Sunday July 22, 2007, 2:00 PM at
the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, OH

*August Swim/Potluck
More information next Issue!*



May Rally for Reason Speakout... 27 May 2007

Rally for Reason *Speak Out* held at the Hilton Cincinnati Airport hotel. We reserved a room for one hundred attendees, but about 150 showed up. Thus the hotel expanded our meeting into a second room. Various TV crews filmed parts of the proceedings. Here is a brief description and pictures of our speakers.



Edwin Kagin

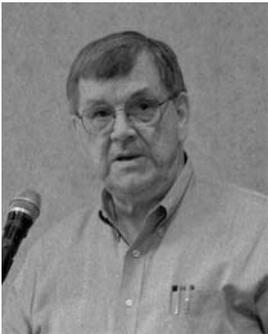
Wolf Roder introduced **Edwin Kagin**, who introduced **Herb Silverman**, who introduced the other speakers and acted as master of ceremonies.



Herb Silverman

Frank R. Zindler, a historian of creationism and atheism lead off with the keynote observation: *Don't let the Dark Ages come again*. He emphasized the damage the teaching of this "museum" can do to children and other innocents. Zindler is editor of American Atheist Press, a biologist and science writer by training and a prominent figure in the debate over evolution vs. creationist pseudo-science.

Here is a brief excerpt from his remarks:



Frank Zindler

Answers in Genesis - the organization led by Ken Ham, the motive force behind the creationism museum now opening here in northern Kentucky - has grown from modest beginnings to become a significant threat not only to science education but, through its newly gained lobbying potential, a threat to science itself. Any organization that can cough up \$ 27 million for a theme park is going to be viewed by politicians as a force to be reckoned with. We can expect funding for research to sink ever lower if it offends the superstitious constituents of politicians who control the budgets of scientific granting agencies such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH) or the National Science Foundation (NSF).

We are witnessing the grand opening of what might fairly be called the Eighth and Ninth Wonders of the ancient World. The Eighth Wonder is, of course, the museum in which the technology of the twentieth century CE is used to illustrate the scientific misunderstandings of the twentieth century BCE. The Ninth Wonder just has to be the amazing iron fence that protects it from the demonic forces that Kenneth Ham imagines haunt the northern regions of Kentucky. Yes, indeed: the Great Fence of Kentucky is the Ninth Wonder of the Ancient World.

I cannot help but think the \$ 27 million could have been better spent. Of course, I speak as someone who values education, knowledge, and truth. I speak as someone who values health, who wishes that human suffering could be reduced or eliminated. I realize that these are not the motivations of the builders of the Science Mausoleum, but I can't help thinking that \$ 27 million could have been better spent if the values I have expressed had been anywhere close to the top of Ken Ham's list.



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

figleaves@fuse.net;

or on disk or typewritten via mail to Editor, FIG Leaves, P.O. Box 19034, Cincinnati, OH 45219. Contributions received before the first Friday of the month will be considered for publication that month.

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



Chuck Smalkowski

Chuck Smalkowski reported on his experience as an atheist in a small town in western Oklahoma. He was dragged into court on trumped up charges after protesting his daughter's expulsion from school. He was defended by Edwin Kagin and American Atheists, and found not guilty.

Chuck was followed by his daughter Nicole with a description of her treatment in high school. She was expelled for refusing to join in reciting the "Lord's Prayer" after a basketball game.



Nicole Smalkowski

Comments by Nicole Smalkowski

When all our schools teach the bible as historic and scientific fact I will ask you were you at the "Rally For Reason"? Or did you have better things to do. You all know what they did to me. There will come the day when they will be doing it to you and your children. The Christians will never share this planet, they mean to have it all. Part of their plan is to infect our children with lies taught as the truth in our schools. This museum is part of this plan. Please come down to the "Rally For Reason" on Monday, and lets show the world that there are Americans who see this museum as madness. My Dad says "When our schools become churches our republic will end". I say that goes for Museums too. We will be there! Heck we're already here.



Dr. Gretchen Mann

Gretchen Mann is a physician and outspoken critic of creationism.

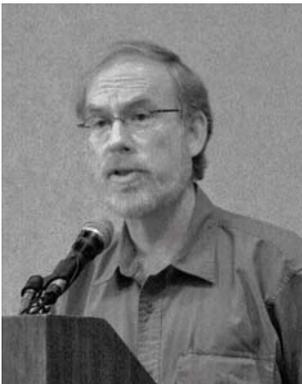
Carly Nichols is one of the organizers for the Rally for Reason. She is a housewife and mother from northern Kentucky. Without her the Rally would not have happened.



Carly Nichols

Melissa Hartman is a housewife and mother from northern Kentucky.

Dr. Gene Kitzky is a professor of biology at Mt. St. Joseph College in Cincinnati. He is a widely published expert on entomology, i.e. bugs, beetles, and insects, especially and the life and times of the seventeen year cicada. He is also an expert and author on the life of Charles Darwin.



Gene Kitzky



Melissa Hartman





FIG LEAVES



Dr. Helen Kagin

Dr. Helen Kagin is a retired physician and co-founder of Camp Quest, the first national summer camp for children of non-believing parents.

Reverend Mendle Adams is an ordained minister and pastor of the United Church of Christ in Cincinnati. He is a supporter of realistic science. He has spoken out against the mis-interpretation of god's word and theology represented by literalist creationism.



Rev. Mendle Adams

Hemant Mehta is a leader of the Secular Student Alliance.

Arlene-Marie is Michigan State director of American Atheists, and an outspoken critic of creationism, and of the harm it has done to education.

Blair Scott is Alabama State director of American Atheists.

Several people volunteered to speak out at the open mike, including **Fran and John Welte** (with dog) and other members of Fig.



Hemant Mehta



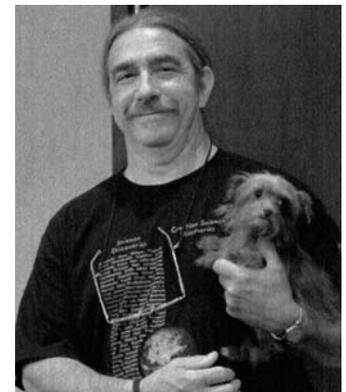
Arlene-Marie



Blair Scott



Fran Welte



John Welte

**Tell the HAMite heretics !
God Says...**

**THE EARTH
IS FLAT !!!**

Questions in Genesis 1-2-3

Read your Bible!

**LOCUSTS
HAVE 4 LEGS !**

Exodus 11:20-22



28 May 2007 - Rally for Reason

Rally for Reason at the newly opened "Creationism" museum of the organization "Answers in Genesis." This took place all day long. In all some 400 people rallied over the course of the day. An airplane circled overhead pulling a banner proclaiming "thou shalt not lie" provided by the Defenders of the Constitution.

John Welte comments on the Rally for Reason in *Swift* (8 June 2007) the newsletter of the ©James Randi Educational Foundation

The rally took place without a hitch on May 28 outside the iron-gated Answers in Genesis [AiG] Creation "museum." Demonstrators from all over the country gathered peaceably in a field across the street from the

fortress of fantasy (why does a museum need armed guards and attack dogs?). As visitors rounded the bend in the road, the first thing they saw was a large Rally for Reason banner and a line of folks holding signs with messages such as "Science – not Superstition."

Members of the international, national, and local media roamed the crowd interviewing everyone who was willing to speak. We kept stressing the fact that we were not there to interfere with anyone's beliefs, but were protesting the fact that AiG is claiming their myths to be proven as scientific fact. As I told reporters, I would be protesting the opening of a "psychic science" museum or "homeopathic science" museum if they were opening near me. The "science" used by Ken Ham is just as unsound.

See the AiG website for great examples of circular arguments and fitting results into your pre-determined paradigm. They try to make the facts fit into a Biblical, young-Earth scenario. If I didn't think it was so damaging to young minds and an affront to real science, I would see their attempts as sad and pathetic.

For a list of speakers, some of whom were genuine scientists, video, and photos of the event go to <rally-forreason.com>. I think we put the woo-woo world on notice that all people will not stand by and let uncritical thinking, dogma, and fantasies go unchallenged.



Once I saw this guy on a bridge about to jump. I said, "Don't do it!" He said, "Nobody loves me." I said, "God loves you. Do you believe in God?"

He said, "Surely, yes." I said, "Are you a Christian or a Jew?" He said, "A Christian." I said, "Me, too! Protestant or Catholic?" He said, "Protestant." I said, "Me, too! What denomination?" He said, "Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?" He said, "Northern Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist or Northern Liberal Baptist?" He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region, or Northern Conservative Baptist Eastern Region?" He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region." I said, "Me, too!" Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1879, or Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912?" He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912." I said, "Die, heretic!" And I pushed him over.

– Emo Phillips

Quote

1919: on Russia

Western reactions to the new regime in Russia itself were deeply divided. Lack of information did not, of course, prevent people from having strong views. If anything, it made it easier. Both left and right projected their own fears and hopes into the black hole in the east. The radical American journalist Lincoln Steffens, who unusually actually got to Russia in 1919, crafted his famous "I have seen the future and it works" on the journey out. Nothing he witnessed in Russia changed his mind. On the right, every horror story was credited. The British government published reports, allegedly from eyewitnesses, claiming that the Bolsheviks had nationalized women and set them up in "commissariats of free love." Churches had been turned into brothels. Special gangs of Chinese executioners had been imported to work their ancient Oriental skills on the Bolsheviks' victims.

– Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: six months that changed*

the world (2002) p. 66

Unquote!



Religious Illiteracy?

Here are some questions:

- Which of these is not one of four Gospels?
 Luke John
 Paul Mark
- Which of these is not one of first five books of the Hebrew Bible?
 Genesis Job Numbers
 Leviticus
- Which acronym identifies the Hebrew Bible?
 NT Tanakh
 666 Ichthys
- According to the bible where was Jesus born?
 Nazareth Bethlehem
 Jerusalem Jericho
- With which form of Islam is AlQaeda identified?
 Sufi Sunni
 Shiite Ismaili
- Which of these is Mormon scripture?
 the Upanishads
 the Bible
 the Veda
 the Book of Latter-day Saints
- Which of these is not one of the ten commandments?
 Do not murder or kill
 Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy
 Honor your father and mother
 Do not engage in pre-marital sex
- Which of these is not one of Catholicism's seven sacraments?
 social service
 marriage baptism
 reconciliation

Stumped? For answers, see page 11.

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:

June 24 - *Natural Justice* by Ken G. Binmore

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



Quote

The growth of science and democracy.

The authoritarian presuppositions that had to be defeated for democracy to emerge as our primary political paradigm were closely linked, and sometimes identical, with the obscurantist articles of faith that science had to sweep aside in order to gain its place at the center of our contemporary knowledge system. In some cases, this is utterly obvious. The entrenchment of dogmatic religion was (and, to some extent, still is) an important prop of a social order based on hereditary caste and class. Simultaneously, it was wedded to an epistemology that automatically excluded both the modes of inquiry on which science depends and the conclusions about the physical and biological universe to which it inexorably led. Consequently, religion had to be annulled and diluted as doctrine, or divested of its political power and shunted to a subsidiary social position, for either democratic politics or science to thrive.

-- Norman Levitt, *Prometheus Bedeviled* (1999) pp. 4-5

Unquote



Imam in Johnston, PA, ousted over “death” remarks

Imam Fouad ElBayly has been asked to step down from his leadership roles at the Islamic Center of Johnstown, based on his comments published by the *Tribune-Review*. ElBayly, who came to the United States from his native Egypt in 1976, expressed his views on apostasy -- abandoning one’s religious belief -- during an interview prior to Dutch feminist Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s appearance April 17 at the University of Pittsburgh-Johnstown. He indicated that in the eyes of the Islamic community, a sentence of death would be warranted for Hirsi Ali, a Somali refugee, women’s rights advocate and atheist who has denounced the Islamic religion, criticized the practice around the world of female genital mutilation and spoken out against her Muslim upbringing. ElBayly, who tried to block Hirsi Ali’s campus appearance, said her attacks on the Muslim faith were “poisonous.” He did not threaten her, but explained that “all of her lies warrant a death sentence.”

The board and members of the Islamic Center of Johnstown were shocked and regret the comments made by Imam ElBayly regarding the visit of author Ms. Ayaan Hirsi Ali. The statements regarding the Islamic Center’s reaction to her visit were incorrect, unfounded and not the views of its members,” Dennis J. Stofko, the center’s attorney, said in a letter to the *Tribune-Review*. Stofko indicated that ElBayly’s views “are not shared or tolerated by the Muslims” associated with the Johnstown center.

“The Islamic Center of Johnstown was established to foster religious tolerance, education and the exercise of its religious beliefs,” Stofko wrote, adding that members “strongly believe in exercising religious freedom, which is the right of all citizens. The Islamic Center of Johnstown sincerely respects the rights of individuals to speak their opinions openly and freely without the fear of reprisal.”

ElBayly was not at home yesterday afternoon and could not be reached for comment, according to a man who answered his phone and identified himself as ElBayly’s brother. He declined to discuss whether ElBayly had been paid for his work as imam and president of the

center. Prior to his removal, ElBayly led a community that he described as an active core of about 30 families and a number of others who attend occasional services and programs. He said he tried unsuccessfully to convince university officials to cancel Hirsi Ali’s lecture because he feared her presence would incite violence. He described the Muslim faith as “a very merciful religion if you try to understand it.” “I’m trying to control my people here,” he said then. “I don’t want people to get hot and cause trouble.”

In the days after ElBayly’s comments appeared in the newspaper, the *Tribune-Review* received numerous phone calls and e-mails from readers across the country who were outraged by what they perceived as his threatening remarks, some calling for his arrest and prosecution. About a week later, ElBayly apologized for his comments on apostasy in a letter to the editor. “... I have come to realize that I was mistaken in my understanding of that issue. I misspoke, and I apologize,” he wrote. “After further deliberation, I have come to the conclusion that a person’s religious choices are a personal matter and should not be subject to state or individual intervention.”

By Robin Acton, <racton@tribweb.com>copyright ©Pittsburgh *Tribune-Review*, 10 May 2007.

Is there a push-back on primitive beliefs?

Every year since 1984 The Barna Group explores the state of the America’s faith, examining various facets of people’s spiritual activity, faith identity, commitment and religious perspective. According to the 2007 survey, while their spiritual activities and religious identity have changed little compared to recent years, the area undergoing the most change is what Americans believe.

How Beliefs Have Changed: It is not unusual to spot minor ebbs and flows in what adults believe. However, the 2007 study of the nation’s core beliefs found that five out of six theological perspectives have shifted in recent years away from traditional biblical views. This includes perspectives about three spiritual figures: God, Jesus, and Satan.

Most Americans still embrace a traditional view of God, but they are less likely than ever to do so. Currently two-thirds of Americans believe that God is best described as the all-powerful, all-knowing perfect creator of the universe who rules the world today (66%). How-



ever, this proportion is lower than it was a year ago (71%) and represents the lowest percentage in more than twenty years of similar surveys.

Few adults possess orthodox views about Jesus and the Devil. Currently, just one-third of Americans strongly disagree that Jesus sinned (37%) and just one-quarter strongly reject the idea that Satan is not a real spiritual being (24%). Each of these beliefs is lower than last year and among the lowest points in nearly two decades of tracking these views.

The other changes in beliefs include greater reluctance to explain their faith to other people (just 29% strongly endorse this view, compared with 39% in 2006) and the willingness to reject good works as a means to personal salvation (down to 27% from 31%).

Given these shifts, it is ironic that the only religious belief that was unchanged from previous years was the belief that the Bible is accurate in all the principles it teaches. Not quite half of Americans (45%) strongly assert this perspective.



pany disclaimer saying the quote is the author's opinion, not necessarily that of Starbucks. It invites customers to respond at <www.starbucks.com/wayiseeit>.

Starbucks spokeswoman Sanja Gould said the collection of thoughts and opinions is a "way to promote open, respectful conversation among a wide variety of individuals."

But Incanno said her Starbucks days are over. "I wouldn't feel right going back," she said.

(Dayton Daily News)

Iranian women "on yer bike"

Iran plans to make special bicycles designed for women that will be compatible with Islamic regulations and not expose their body movements while riding, the newspaper *Iran* reported. The new bicycle would have a cabin to cover half of a rider's body, project manager Elaheh Sofali told the paper.

Women's sports in general, and cycling in particular, have been a constant controversial issue in Islamic Iran. Efforts to promote athletics by reformist circles and women's activists have failed because of opposition by the conservative clergy.

Women in Iran are obliged to wear scarves and long gowns to hide their hair and body contours. Female athletes must also follow this rule and participate in sports wearing scarves and gowns. The clergy considers women's body movements made while riding a bicycle to be provoking to men and not compatible with social rules.

World News Australia, May 2007

Woman outraged over quote on Starbucks cup

Springboro, 6 May 2007

Michelle Incanno was an admitted Starbucks addict.

She'd buy the company's coffee beans every week. Whenever she'd get the chance to drop by a Starbucks, she would, placing the same order every time: a large, house brewed coffee with nonfat milk and two Splenda. When the Seattle-based chain opened a drive-through near her Springboro home, she was in java heaven.

That was until she got an unexpected jolt last week from her coffee cup. Printed on the cup was:

"Why in moments of crisis do we ask God for strength and help? As cognitive beings, why would we ask something that may well be a figment of our imaginations for guidance? Why not search inside ourselves for the power to overcome? After all, we are strong enough to cause most of the catastrophes we need to endure."

It is attributed to Bill Schell, a Starbucks customer from London, Ontario, and was included on the cup as part of an effort by the company to collect different viewpoints and spur discussion.

"As someone who loves God, I was so offended by that. I don't think there needs to be religious dialogue on it. I just want coffee," said Incanno, a married mother of three who is Catholic. She wasn't satisfied with a com-

Scientific illiteracy reaches to the top.

Last week at the Republican presidential debate, moderator Chris Matthews asked whether any of the wannabes did not believe in evolution. Sam Brownback, Mike Huckabee and Tom Tancredo raised their hands. John McCain waffled: "I believe in evolution," he said, "but I also believe when I hike the Grand Canyon that the hand of God is there." The Sunday *Washington Post* pointed out that they weren't that far from mainstream. In an ABC poll a year ago, 61 percent thought Genesis is literally true.

- *What's New* Robert L. Park, 11 May 2007



THINGS TO DO....

THINGS TO SEE...



IPF

Independent Production Fund

A Brief History of Disbelief

The First Ever
Television Exploration
of the Idea That
God Doesn't Exist



Premieres on
public television
May 4, 2007.

Jonathan Miller, author, director, and commentator, recalls the origins of this own lack of belief and uncovers the hidden story of atheism in *A Brief History of Disbelief*. This highly acclaimed BBC series of three one-hour programs is available now for the first time on public television in the US.

Underwritten by:

The Center for Inquiry, The American Ethical Union,
The American Humanist Association,
The Institute for Humanist Studies
The HKH Foundation

Brought to Public Television by:
The Independent Production Fund,
Al Perlmutter, Executive Director
155 West 46th Street, 2nd floor
New York, NY 10036

Phone: 212-221-6310, Fax 212-302-1854

Email: info@ipfmedia.org

Special Note: *A Brief History of Disbelief* is not being aired exclusively by PBS, and it is not being carried on a national feed. Your local public television station may be airing the show on a different day and time than what is listed above. To find out when the show is airing in your area, please consult their broadcast calendar.

If the show is not on your station's calendar, please contact your local public television station and tell them you'd like to see it! (Mention the program is being offered to public television stations everywhere by Executive Program Services.)

Joe Levee has a comment:

This program was cited by Bill Moyers recently when he interviewed Jonathan Miller. In this area I have been able to find it only on Dayton's ThinkTV 14. Part 1 will be broadcast at 10pm on Wednesday, June 13, parts 2 and 3 at the same time on June 20 and June 27.

Could the other PBS stations be avoiding it because "It's the first ever television exploration of the idea that God doesn't exist"?

Shawn Jeffers adds:

I have observed that Cincinnati's and Northern Kentucky's PBS stations often do not schedule programs that have any possibility of being considered controversial. In the past, I have received e-mail notices about PBS shows that were going to address racism, homophobia, or things on the Holocaust and the local stations did not pick them up. And then CET will run the program several months after it was originally scheduled, possibly late at night, like 2am. I think it may have to do with some of their donors, but since it is a public station, people should call and request the program be played. ☘

"Do you believe in life after death?" the boss asked one of his employees. "Yes, I do" the underling replied. "Well, that's just fine," the boss continued, "after you left early yesterday to go to your grandmothers funeral, she stopped in here looking for you."



The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup

When: Tuesday, 16 June 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

Résumé

(remembering Dr. Death)

Razors pain you;
Rivers are damp;
Acids stain you;
And drugs cause cramp.
Guns aren't lawful;
Nooses give;
Gas smells awful;
You might as well live.

Dorothy Parker



From: Christopher Hitchen,(2006)

Got is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything

There are four irreducible objections to religious faith: that it wholly misrepresents the origins of man and the cosmos, that because of this original error it manages to combine the maximum of servility with the maximum of solipsism, that it is both the result and the cause of dangerous sexual repression, and that it is ultimately grounded on wish-thinking.

I do not think it is arrogant of me to claim that I had already discovered these four objections (as well as noticed the more vulgar and obvious fact that religion is used by those in temporal charge to invest themselves with authority) before my boyish voice had broken. I am morally certain that millions of other people came to very similar conclusions in very much the same way, and I have since met such people in hundreds of places, and in dozens of different countries. Many of them never believed, and many of them abandoned faith after a difficult struggle. Some of them had blinding moments of un-conviction that were every bit as instantaneous, though perhaps less epileptic and apocalyptic (and later more rationally and more morally justified) than Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road. And here is the point, about myself and my co-thinkers. Our belief is not a belief. Our principles are not a faith. We do not rely solely upon science and reason, because these are necessary rather than sufficient factors, but we distrust anything that contradicts science or outrages reason. We may differ on many things, but what we respect is free inquiry, open mindedness, and the pursuit of ideas for their own sake. We do not hold our convictions dogmatically: the disagreement between Professor Stephen Jay Gould and Professor Richard Dawkins, concerning "punctuated evolution" and the unfilled gaps in post-Darwinian theory, is quite wide as well as quite deep, but we shall resolve it by evidence and reasoning and not by mutual excommunication. (My own annoyance at Professor Dawkins and Daniel Dennett, for their cringe-making proposal that atheists should conceitedly nominate themselves to be called "brights," is a part of a continuous argument.) We are not immune to the lure of wonder and mystery and awe: we have music and art and literature, and find that the serious ethical dilemmas are better handled by Shakespeare and Tolstoy and

Schiller and Dostoyevsky and George Eliot than in the mythical morality tales of the holy books. Literature, not scripture, sustains the mind and; since there is no other metaphor; also the soul. We do not believe in heaven or hell, yet no statistic will ever find that without these blandishments and threats we commit more crimes of greed or violence than the faithful. (In fact, if a proper statistical inquiry could ever be made, I am sure the evidence would be the other way.) We are reconciled to living only once, except through our children, for whom we are perfectly happy to notice that we must make way, and room. We speculate that it is at least possible that, once people accepted the fact of their short and struggling lives, they might behave better toward each other and not worse. We believe with certainty that an ethical life can be lived without religion. And we know for a fact that the corollary holds true; that religion has caused innumerable people not just to conduct themselves no better than others, but to award themselves permission to behave in ways that would make a brothel-keeper or an ethnic cleanser raise an eyebrow. ☚



Quote

That there are people in 21st-century America who believe the Bible is literally true, who believe the Earth was created 6,000 years ago, and who believe that our lives today should be dictated by codes of conduct written by people who lived 2,000 years before modern medicine, electricity or equal rights—and that these same Americans have influence in national affairs—should infuriate anyone with a functioning mind. Fundamentalism, Sullivan reminds us, is the antithesis of reason. Its adherents—Christian, Muslim, Jewish or otherwise—have been handed The Truth and cling to it, facts be damned. Quoting figures as varied as Pope Benedict XVI and Republican Sen. Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania, Sullivan repeatedly emphasizes how fundamentalism abhors the thinking mind, insisting that an individual's conscious choices—whether to have an abortion or what to order at Burger King—amount to moral anarchy.

– Bryan Burrough in a review of Andrew Sullivan *The Conservative Soul: How We Lost it, How to Get it Back in The Wash. Post Nat'l News Weekly*, (6-12 Nov. 2006) p. 33

Unquote





Beware of holy scriptures!

Reading of God-sanctioned violence may make you aggressive, prove researchers

Not only action films and killer computer games can increase aggressive behavior. New research indicates: literary texts do the same, especially those offering divine justification for acts of violence. And their influence is not limited to religious extremists. Scientists of the highly regarded Institute for Social Research (ISR) at the University of Michigan found that reading about violence in the name of God provokes aggression in average believers and even non-believers. "It's important to note that we obtained evidence supporting this hypothesis in samples of university students who were, in our estimation, not typical of the terrorists who blow up civilians," wrote Brad Bushman, professor of psychology and communication at ISR. "Even among our participants who were not religiously devout, exposure to God-sanctioned violence increased subsequent aggression. That the effect was found in such a sample may attest to the insidious power of exposure to literary scriptural violence."

Prof. Bradman and his colleagues conducted two independent studies with students from Brigham Young University (USA) and Vrije Universiteit in the Netherlands. They published the results in the journal *Psychological Science* (Volume 18, No.3, "When God Sanctions Killing: Effects of Scriptural Violence on Aggression.") After reporting their religious affiliations and beliefs (USA: 99 percent of participants believed in God and the Bible; Netherlands: 50 percent believed in God and 27 percent in the Bible), both groups were given the same text for reading. It was an adaptation of a passage from the King James Bible that described the brutal rape and murder of a woman, and her husband's call for revenge on her attackers. Half of the participants in each group read a version that included a sentence in which God commanded his followers to take arms against others, half got a version without this sentence. Half were told the text came from the Old Testament, half were made believe it came from some ancient scroll discovered by archeologists. After reading the text, the test persons participated in a simple reaction test, each of them competing with a partner from outside the groups. The winner, they were told, would be able to "blast" the

losing partner with noise as loud as a fire alarm (about 105 decibels) - a common experimental measure of aggression. The researchers found that both the religious and non-religious students blasted their partners with louder noise, when told they had read a text from the Bible. Aggressive responses also increased with participants who had read the text including the direct reference to God calling for violence. However, the increased level of aggression was always greater among believers than among non-believers. "Our results further confirm previous research showing that exposure to violent media causes people to behave more aggressively if they identify with the violent characters than if they do not," Prof. Bushman said.

Established in 1948, the ISR is one of the world's leading institutes for development and application of social science methodology and collaborates with social scientists in more than 60 nations. ¶

- Source: *Internationalist Rationalist Bull.* No.166, 18 May 2007

Quote

Which President said this about which President and which war?

Trusting to escape scrutiny, by fixing the public gaze upon the exceeding brightness of military glory - that attractive rainbow, that rises in showers of blood - that serpent's eye, that charms to destroy - he plunged us into war.

- from Kurt Vonnegut, *A Man without a Country*, p76

Unquote:

16. False (leader was Moses)
15. True
14. False (he is Buddhist)
13. False (not for the last 100 years)
12. True
11. False (it is Muslim)
10. False (from Benjamin Franklin)
9. False (it's Hindu)
8. Social service
7. Do not engage in pre-marital sex
6. The Bible
5. Sunni
4. Bethlehem
3. Tanakh
2. Job
1. Paul

Answers:

Religious Illiteracy?



How to End 'Islamophobia'

By Tawfik Hamid; 25 May 2007

The latest survey of American Muslims won't reassure their fellow citizens. Islamic organizations regularly accuse non-Muslims of "Islamophobia," a fear and disdain for everything Islamic. On May 17, this accusation bubbled up again as foreign ministers from the Organization of the Islamic Conference called Islamophobia "the worst form of terrorism." These ministers also warned, according to the Arab News, that this form of discrimination would cause millions of Muslims in Western countries, "many of whom were already underprivileged," to be "further alienated."

In America, perhaps the most conspicuous organization to persistently accuse opponents of Islamophobia is the Council of American Islamic Relations. CAIR has taken up the legal case of the "Flying Imams," the six individuals who were pulled from a US Airways flight in Minneapolis this past November after engaging in suspicious behavior before takeoff. Not long ago, CAIR filed a "John Doe" lawsuit that would have made passengers liable for "malicious" complaints about suspicious Muslim passengers.

In an interview at the time, CAIR spokesman Nihad Awad accused Rep. Peter King (R., N.Y.) of being an "extremist" who "encourages Islamophobia" for pointing out what most people would think is obvious, that such a lawsuit would have a chilling effect on passengers who witnessed alarming activity and wished to report it. We can only assume that Mr. Awad believes flyers should passively remain in a state of fear as they travel and submissively risk their lives. In this case, Congress is acting appropriately and considering passing a law sponsored by Mr. King that would grant passengers immunity from such lawsuits.

It may seem bizarre, but Islamic reformers are not immune to the charge of "Islamophobia" either. For 20 years, I have preached a reformed interpretation of Islam that teaches peace and respects human rights. I have consistently spoken out--with dozens of other Muslim and Arab reformers--against the mistreatment of women, gays and religious minorities in the Islamic world. We have pointed out the violent teachings of Salafism and the imperative of Westerners to protect themselves against it.

Yet according to CAIR's Michigan spokeswoman, Zeinab Chami, I am "the latest weapon in the Islamophobe arsenal." If standing against the violent edicts of Shariah law is "Islamophobic," then I will treat her accusation as a badge of honor. Muslims must ask what prompts this "phobia" in the first place. When we in the West examine the worldwide atrocities perpetrated daily in the name of Islam, it is vital to question if we--Muslims--should lay the blame on others for Islamophobia or if we should first look hard at ourselves.

According to a recent Pew Global Attitudes survey, "younger Muslims in the U.S.

are much more likely than older Muslim Americans to say that suicide bombing in the defense of Islam can be at least sometimes justified." About one out of every four American Muslims under 30 thinks suicide bombing in defense of Islam is justified in at least some circumstances. Twenty-eight percent believe that Muslims did not carry out the 9/11 attacks.

While the survey has been represented in the media as proof of moderation among American Muslims, the actual results should yield the opposite conclusion. If, as the Pew study estimates, there are 2.35 million Muslims in America, that means there are a substantial number of people in the U.S. who think suicide bombing is sometimes justified. Similarly, if five percent of American Muslims support al Qaeda, that's more than 100,000 people.

To bring an end to Islamophobia, we must employ a holistic approach that treats the core of the disease. It is imperative to adopt new Islamic teachings that do not allow killing apostates (Redda Law). Islamic authorities must provide mainstream Islamic books that forbid polygamy and beating women. Accepted Islamic doctrine should take a strong stand against slavery and the raping of female war prisoners. Muslims should teach, everywhere and universally, that a woman's testimony in court counts as much as a man's, that women should not be punished if they marry whom they please or dress as they wish.

We Muslims should publicly show our strong disapproval for the growing number of attacks by Muslims against other faiths and against other Muslims. Let us not even dwell on 9/11, Madrid, London, Bali and countless other scenes of carnage. It has been estimated that of the two million refugees

fleeing Islamic terror in Iraq, forty percent are Christian, and many of them seek a haven in Lebanon, where the Christian population itself has declined by sixty percent.

Of course, Islamist attacks are not limited to Christians and Jews. Why do we hear no Muslim condemnation of the ongoing slaughter of Buddhists in Thailand by Islamic groups? Why was there silence over the Mumbai train bombings which took the lives of over 200 Hindus in 2006? We must not forget that innocent Muslims, too, are suffering. Indeed, the most common murderers of Muslims are, and have always been, other Muslims. Where is the Muslim outcry over the Sunni-Shiite violence in Iraq?

Islamophobia could end when masses of Muslims demonstrate in the streets against videos displaying innocent people being beheaded with the same vigor we employ against airlines, Israel and cartoons of Muhammad. It might cease when Muslims unambiguously and publicly insist that Shariah law should have no binding legal status in free, democratic societies.

It is well past time that Muslims cease using the charge of "Islamophobia" as a tool to intimidate and blackmail those who speak up against suspicious passengers and against those who rightly criticize current Islamic practices and preachings. Muslims should--must--develop strategies to rescue our religion by combating the tyranny of Salafi Islam and its dreadful consequences. Among more important outcomes, this will also put an end to so-called Islamophobia.

Dr. Hamid, a onetime member of Jemaah Islamiya, an Islamist terrorist group, is a medical doctor and Muslim reformer living in the West. Copyright © Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Used with permission from *OpinionJournal.com*, a web site from Dow Jones & Company, Inc.





The Impossible Fact

Christian Morgenstern (1871-1914),
trans. Max Knight

Palmstroem, old, an aimless rover,
walking in the wrong direction
at a busy intersection
is run over.

“How,” he says, his life restoring
and with pluck his death ignoring,
“can an accident like this
ever happen? What’s amiss?”

“Did the state administration
fail in motor transportation?
Did police ignore the need
for reducing driving speed?”

“Isn’t there a prohibition,
barring motorized transmission
of the living to the dead?
Was the driver right who sped . . . ?”

Tightly swathed in dampened tissues
he explores the legal issues,
and it soon is clear as air:
Cars were not permitted there!

And he comes to the conclusion:
His mishap was an illusion,
for, he reasons pointedly,
that which must not, can not be.

The village priest meets old Johnny, who is
clearly well under the weather.

“John,” he admonishes him seriously, “don’t
you think you should stop your drinking?”

“Oh heck, Father, for that it is much too late in
my life.”

“It’s never too late to reform, my son.”

“Well, in that case, I shall wait a little.”



God: The Failed Hypothesis
by Victor Stenger
(New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006)
book review by David Ludden

There’s good news for readers of Richard Dawkins’ latest bestseller, *The God Delusion*, whose appetites were whetted for more. Physicist Victor Stenger has just served up a second course of delectable arguments for the non-existence of God. In his latest book *God: The Failed Hypothesis*, Stenger runs through the standard rational and biological arguments against any sort of meaningful deity, but he does much more. In plain, easily understood language, Stenger lays out the evidence from cosmology, particle physics and quantum mechanics showing that the universe appears exactly as it should if there is no creator.

Stenger does not agree with those who maintain that science has nothing to say about the existence of god. He soundly rejects Steven Jay Gould’s NOMA (Non-Overlapping Magisteria) argument (*Rock of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life*, Ballantine, 1999), which posits that science and religion are independent fields of knowledge and that there can be no conflict between the two. Furthermore, he dismisses the notion that science is limited to studying the natural world. If there is a deity that interacts with the world - such as the standard Judeo-Christian-Islamic god - then the effects of divine intervention are observable within the natural world, and so they are under the purview of naturalistic science. Hence, Stenger argues, although science cannot directly test the existence of a supreme being, it can make inferences about a deity based on the observable behavior of the universe. This is exactly the same approach physicists have taken to the study of quarks and black holes, which cannot be directly observed either.

In a sense, every science experiment is a test of the God hypothesis. This is because of the assumption of methodological naturalism, that is, the null hypothesis that God does not affect the outcome of experiments. If scientists ever obtained consistent data that could





not be explained by any known natural processes, this would lend support to the hypothesis that God exists, and scientists would eagerly pursue this line of research. But the assumption of methodological naturalism holds; that is, we find no evidence of God's intervention in the natural world. Hence, we conclude that a god of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic type does not exist. While it is true, as the apologist will argue, that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, it is nevertheless reasonable grounds for an assumption of non-existence, at least until reasonable evidence to the contrary is provided.

Stenger considers a number of arguments from physics that point to the non-existence of God. Curiously, these are often the same arguments proffered by theists for the existence of a creator. However, Stenger turns each argument on its head. Consider, for example, the first law of thermodynamics, or the conservation of energy. Some theists argue that the universe could not have come into existence without a violation of the first law because energy was created at the beginning of the universe. However, Stenger shows that inflationary big bang theory, which is amply supported by the data, predicts a "close balance between positive and negative energy" so that "the total energy of the universe is zero." Thus, no violation of conservation was required to bring the matter and energy of the universe into being.

Another favorite of the theists is the second law of thermodynamics, or entropy. Savvy creationists have given up this as an argument against evolution, but it is still pulled out to argue for the existence of a creator. According to the second law, the total entropy, or disorder, of a closed system must increase over time. If the universe started as chaos, the theist argues, a miracle was needed to impose order upon it. On the other hand, if the universe was maximally ordered at the beginning of time, this could be interpreted as the signature of a perfect creator. But the cosmological evidence indicates that the universe began in a state of maximum entropy - and that the total entropy of the universe has been increasing ever since! This apparently contradictory state of affairs is explained by the fact that the universe is expanding, with the maximum possible entropy of the universe growing faster than the total actual entropy. Thus, the universe only appears to be getting more ordered, but this is only because there is more room to spread out the clutter.

In short, no miracle, and hence no creator, is needed to explain the origin or current state of the universe.

Stenger even takes on one of the biggest mysteries of all - why is there even a universe in the first place? Intuition tells us that nothingness is the normal state of affairs. Hence, the theist argues that the mere existence of a universe is evidence for a creator, because without a creator there would be nothing. But Stenger argues that something, rather than nothing, is the normal state of affairs. The laws of physics tell us that nothingness is an unstable state and will soon "undergo a spontaneous phase shift" to a state of *somethingness*. Indeed, Stenger argues, a state of continuous nothingness is so improbable that it could only be maintained through divine intervention. Hence, the existence of a universe is no evidence for the existence of a creator.

Probably the most commonly-used theistic argument that Stenger challenges is the anthropic principle. The crux of this argument is that a number of constants in the universe are finely tuned to allow for the existence of life as we know it, and this fine tuning implies a benevolent creator. Stenger notes that the apparent precision in the values of many of these constants is nothing more than an artifact of the units used to measure them. Furthermore, computer modeling shows that something like our universe would have developed under a wide range of values for these constants. Stenger points out that those making this argument mistakenly assume that each of these values is independent of the others, when in fact they are tightly interrelated. Again, no creator is required to explain the features of the universe.

God: The Failed Hypothesis shares a common central theme with Dawkins' *The God Delusion*, namely that the universe looks exactly as we would expect it to look if there were no supreme being. However, while Dawkins' language is more eloquent, Stenger's is less abrasive, and so somewhat less likely to offend. Nevertheless, the two books complement each other, with Dawkins focusing more on biological evidence and Stenger on physical evidence. All freethinkers should have both volumes, side by side, on their bookshelves.

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BOOK REVIEW II

Only Half of Me: Being a Muslim in Britain

by Rageh Omaar

(London: Viking, Penguin, 2006)

Rageh Omaar was born to a middle class Somali family in Mogadishu in 1967. From the age of five he grew up in London, after his parents moved there, partly as refugees and partly to pursue business. Today he is a journalist and foreign correspondent for the BBC World Service. He has become a naturalized British citizen. So he is half English speaking British, and half Somali – but all Muslim. The book is about living in and adjusting to European culture as a Muslim.

The overall story of the book, told through a great deal of autobiography, is about the average everyday Muslim, who is neither full of rage and hatred trying to tear down the world, nor willing to change Islam for adjustment to demands of the West. The author, his family and friends, and the vast majority of Muslim in the West are average believers, some very religious, others more secular for whom Islam fills important roles in their culture and life.

The author starts by introducing us to two extreme individuals, Yassin Hassan Omar was one of the subway bombers, and Ayaan Hersi Ali, the young woman who wrote the anti-Islamic movie script for which Theo van Gogh was murdered by a radical Muslim. Both of these individuals, so Omaar tells us, lost their way, not in the Islamic world, but in their experience of the West. Both gave up on integrating within their adopted country and culture while remaining Muslim. Yassin, brought up in a series of foster homes in London, turned away from Britain to adopt a radical murderous and fundamentalist creed; Ayaan Hersi Ali turned her back on Islam, to become a secular Westerner. Both, so Omaar argues, became what they are not from their Islamic experiences, but from their life in the West. Both failed to find a way to integrate a moderate Islam with adopting European culture. This book is about the vast majority of Muslim living in the West, who do integrate Islam and Western culture.

Islam can and does thrive in the West, many Euro-

pean cities – London and Paris, Manchester or Hamburg, – have thriving Muslim communities. The author insists he and most other immigrants can have a British identity, yet remain a member of the global community of Islamic believers. Contrary to what others have written about Europe, Omaar thinks multiculturalism can and does succeed.

The attackers, the suicides, Al Qaeda are extremists who have failed to come to terms with Islam and with the West, and are among those who argue integration must be abandoned. Most Muslim regard it as absurd to think Al Qaeda speaks or fights for Islam. More Muslim have been victims of Al Qaeda, and of British and American policies than people of any other religions.

Omaar writes with a great deal of compassion and empathy for all sides. He is trying to show us the life and the thinking of the ordinary Muslim living in the West, who is trying to adjust and integrate into the culture. Much of what he says will be familiar to American readers, who are aware of the life and problems of past waves of immigrants. The problems facing the newcomer, the need to establish himself in the new home, in a job or position, and acquire fluency in the new language. The second generation growing up in the West has a different set of problems, which often alienate them from the immigrant generation, and sometimes lead to hatred of the new country. Migrants tend to create ethnic enclaves with the language and writing of the homeland, and in which the religion provides important physical support and emotional succor. Many waves of immigrants have gone through this process in the U.S. but it is a new experience for many European countries.

The author fails to come to grips with three major issues his readers would expect him to at least look at. The first is ethnicity. He is a Somali living within a Somali immigrant community and relations. How does his experience and attitude differ from that of other ethnic groups,-- Arab, Urdu, Farsi speakers etc. Second, he does not really examine the violent attackers, the suicide bombers, the Al Qaeda followers. These are dangerous people, and what does he, or the broad majority of Muslims expect us to do about them? Omaar also never deals with the problems and position of women, either in Islamic countries, or in immigrant communities. This too, is an important question, where Islam and the West collide.

– Wolf Roder
☞



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



June Meeting: "Speak Out!"
Sunday, June 24, 2007
7:00 PM



FIG Leaves
P.O. Box 19034
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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.