

FIG LEAVES

Volume 21 Issue 3

March 2012

March FIG Meeting:

Wednesday, March 14,
6:45-8:45 PM,

Madeira Branch Library, 7200 Miami Ave. at Euclid Ave, ph: 369-6028

Please Note: We must end our meeting at 8:45PM because the library will be closing, so we will have announcements from 6:45PM and then start Ms. Heimlich's talk promptly at 7:00PM.

Breaking Their Will: Shedding Light on Religious Child Maltreatment A Book Talk with Janet Heimlich



In this revealing, disturbing, and thoroughly researched book, Ms. Heimlich takes an in-depth look at the many forms of child maltreatment that manifest themselves in religious contexts, including biblically-prescribed corporal punishment; beliefs about the necessity of "breaking the wills" of children; terrorizing children with scary religious messages; sexual abuse perpetrated by religious authorities; and religiously-motivated medical neglect. After speaking with dozens of victims, perpetrators, and experts, and reviewing a myriad of court cases and studies, Ms. Heimlich also explains how religious child maltreatment happens.

This book is an incredible read and is one of the first of its kind to report on this issue. Book will be available for purchase of \$20 at the meeting and \$9 for every book is being donated to FIG through an agreement with the publisher. Ms. Heimlich will also be available to sign books as well.

Janet Heimlich received a B.A. in Communications from Stanford University in 1984, after which she began a career of producing corporate and commercial film and video presentations in the Bay Area. In 1996, she moved to Austin, Texas, where she turned her interests toward journalism. For eight years, Ms. Heimlich freelanced as a reporter for National Public Radio. Her work won nine journalism awards, including the regional Katie, given by the Press Club of Dallas; the Houston Press Club's Radio Journalist of the Year; and the Texas Bar Association's Gavel Award. She has also written non-fiction articles for such publications as Texas Monthly, the Austin American-Statesman, and the Texas Observer. Her book *Breaking Their Will: Shedding Light on Religious Child Maltreatment* (Prometheus Books, 2011) is the first to take an in-depth look at child abuse and neglect caused by religious beliefs.

Janet Heimlich will be accompanied by Christine Woodman, a graduate student in sociology at George Mason University and a survivor of religious child maltreatment, having suffered egregious abuse at the hands of her mother and in a number of well-known Christian teen facilities. She and Heimlich have begun an organization called "Child-Friendly Faith," which is on Facebook.

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Events

Note dates & times

March 2012 Meeting

Wednesday, March 14,
at 6:45-8:45 PM,
Madeira Branch Library
7200 Miami Ave.
(at Euclid Ave.),
phone: 513-369-6028

April 2012 Meeting

Tuesday April 24, 7 PM, TBD

Please Let Us Have Your E-Mail Address!

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

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



February Meeting

Tour of Courage: The Vision to End Segregation, The Guts to Fight For It

For the February FIG Meeting, over 30 individuals visited the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center to visit a traveling exhibition titled Tour of Courage: The Vision to End Segregation, The Guts to Fight For It. The exhibit was created by the Levine Museum of the New South and the Freedom Center highlights the exhibit as follows:

Half a century ago, a series of lawsuits that changed America were launched. These lawsuits led to the 1954 landmark Supreme Court decision, Brown v. Board of Education. The Brown decision ruled racially segregated schools were unconstitutional and set in motion a series of events that continue to shape our lives today. Courage is an award-winning, groundbreaking exhibition that tells the story of Rev. J.A. De Laine and other brave citizens of Clarendon County, South Carolina. Through photographs, oral histories and key artifacts, Courage explores the grassroots community activism that one community initiated to begin the process that ended legal segregation of all races in America's schools.

The exhibit takes viewers back to Clarendon County in the 1940's. The law of the land was "Separate, but Equal", but it was very apparent from the photographs



Shawn Jeffers

on display that the school for black students was not equal. Over 90 students crowded into a one room school house that was ran by Rev. J.A. De Laine and his wife. Rev. De Laine started the process of organizing the people of Clarendon County to be able to receive bus transportation. Students had to walk up to 9 miles a day to get to school and many students attended school only about 50% of the time either because the weather made it too difficult to walk to school or because they had to help farm the land with their families.

The application for busing was rejected and a young lawyer, Thurgood Marshall, got involved on the town's behalf. Thurgood Marshall was

working with the NAACP and helped the members of the town file a petition to integrate the schools. Over 70 members of the community signed the petition, many risking their livelihood to do so. Those who signed were at danger of being fired from their jobs or if they owned a business having their business be boycotted. Despite the risk, the members of the town moved forward with the lawsuit. ➔



FIG Leaves - Thoughtful articles, letters, reviews, reports, anecdotes, and cartoons are very welcome. Submit in Electronic format via the internet to figmessage at gofigger dot org; or on disk or typewritten via mail to Editor, FIG Leaves, P.O. Box 53174, Cincinnati, OH 45253. Contributions received before the first Friday of the month will be considered for publication that month.

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The lawsuit ended up in front of a three-judge panel, who rejected by a 2-1 decision the request to integrate schools. The lone dissenting vote was Judge J. Waites Waring, and he was the first judge in the South to vote for integration of schools. As a result of Judge Waring's decision, the South Carolina legislature took up a Joint Resolution to "Appropriate Necessary Funds to Purchase Two One-Way Tickets for the Judge and his wife to any point of their choice, Provided they never Return to the State of South Carolina". Judge Waring was threatened, but did not back down from his support. Members of the black community in town were also threatened.

Thurgood Marshall ended up getting five lawsuits filed to integrate schools first in South Carolina and subsequently in Kansas, Virginia, Washington D.C. and Delaware. These five lawsuits were combined into the landmark decision of *Brown vs Board of Education*. While the lawsuit of *Brown vs. Board* is frequently cited, the first lawsuit of its kind came from the small community of Clarendon County.

The exhibit does shed light on a relatively unknown piece of the Civil Rights Movement and the inspiring story of one small town in South Carolina. However, in parts, the exhibit has difficulty providing enough context or information to allow us to follow completely all of the events involved.

The exhibit will be on display until May 26, 2012 at the Freedom Center.

- reported by Shawn Jeffers



Quote

Faith: The preferred term for "religion" because it sounds warmer, more cuddly, more virtuous, less institutional, less hierarchical, and less coercive.

- *Butterflies & Wheels*, Euphemisms and Obfuscations

Unquote

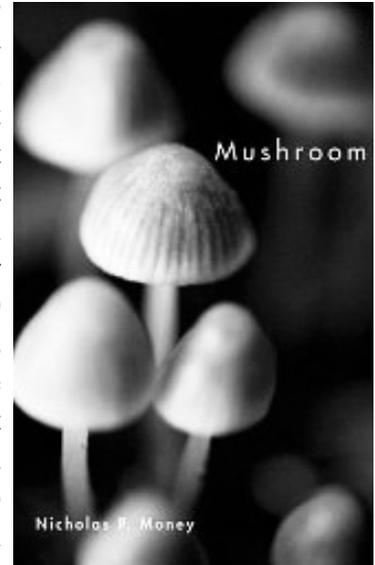
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February Science Cafe

Nicholas Money - Mushrooms...and the Meaning of Life

"Dismissal of rationality in favor of superstition and wishful thinking has been an enduring hallmark of humanity. We're a gullible species predisposed to looking for simple answers to complex questions and finding witches, ghosts and gods at the merest provocation. It's not surprising therefore that mushrooms have been linked to the occult for millennia." For the past 30 years, botanist Nicholas Money has studied the microorganisms that most people associate with bad smells, itchy toes, damp basements and rotten food. A renowned fungal researcher at Miami University in Ohio, Money has devoted his career to studying indoor molds, fungal movements and the mysterious world of mycology.



Money began his talk at the February Science Café with a little Cincinnati history. Cincinnati Curtis Gates Lloyd left his position at his family's pharmaceutical company in the 1890's to devote his life to studying fungi. An eccentric who shunned the academic world but published his own journal on fungi, Curtis did some groundbreaking work in the field. He was also a photographer. His mycological work, photos and extensive library can be seen at the Lloyd Museum on Plum St. in downtown Cincinnati.

Fungi have been around since about 300 million years ago and some species are so well adapted that they have experienced little change in millions of years. Mushrooms are the sex organs that are produced by mushroom forming fungi. They produce spores that are spread to propagate the species. Over the course of a few days mushrooms can release billions of spores. These take root in moist soil and rotting logs on the forest floor. Professor Money showed slides of many intriguing →



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and novel ways that mushrooms spread their spores. They have adapted to all parts of the world. There is even a mushroom that grows entirely submerged in water!

The important points that Money wanted to make were three: without fungi the ecology of the world would not be viable, without fungi we probably could not have evolved, and there probably is no god. Without mushrooms feeding on dead vegetation, ecosystems of the world would collapse. We would be overwhelmed by undigested detritus and waste products from plants and animals if not for fungi. In fact, the second point is that we probably would not be here at all without fungi clearing the way and keeping the ecosystem running smoothly.

He explained the third important point by starting in the late 1800's with Mordacai Cook. In 1860 Cook wrote a book called *The Seven Sisters of Sleep*. In it he described the various substances that humans from different parts of the world used at that time to alter moods or expand the mind. He devoted an entire chapter to the fly agaric mushroom, which has been used for millennia in ritual and ceremony.

Peoples around the world have used these "magic" mushrooms as a mind expanding experience, often as part of religious rituals. It is thought that Lewis Carroll got some of the inspiration for *Alice in Wonderland* from Cook's book. The themes of hallucinogenic mushrooms reappear again and again in the literature and art of many cultures.

Psilocybin after ingestion is converted to psilocin, which is remarkably similar to serotonin. Due to this alkaloid which crosses the brain-blood barrier, normal nerve impulses are disrupted. This compound raises serotonin and dopamine levels in the brain. The cerebral cortex is affected in such a way that our perception is distorted. In clinical studies where subjects were given a measured dose of psilocybin, it was found that the subjects, even months after the studies, rated the experience as one of the most important experiences of their lives. It ranked with falling in love for the first time,

the birth of a child and other life changing experiences. The subjects reported a feeling of oneness with the universe, a feeling that they were in the company of unknown beings (angels?) and felt "close to God."

Recent studies have shown that MRI's of the brains of subjects who have taken the mushrooms reveal that sections of the brain are actually shutting down. An important role of our nervous system is to reduce or filter out some of the information that is available

to our brains, thereby allowing us to focus. The active chemical in the mushrooms bypasses this filtering system and allows us to subtract ourselves from day to day experiences and just experience without the filtering process. Professor Money pointed out that this one alkaloid from a fungus, one chemical, can have such a profound effect on our minds that it compares with the most intense religious experiences reported by humans. You might call it "The God Effect." Thus Money concludes that we can and do have "religious" experiences without any assistance from the supernatural. "While I don't have much patience for the supernatural,

I'm awestruck, sometimes overwhelmed by the sight of a ring of fresh mushrooms in a dewy meadow. Rather than diminishing the magic, the dismissal of fairies and elves, this scientific unweaving of the rainbow intensifies the brilliance of nature's masterpiece, the mushroom. And that is what this book is for."

In his book *Mushroom*, Money explores the history and sciences behind the fungal organisms that appear overnight on lawns, are occasionally poisonous and sometimes end up in our medications and on our dinner plates. If the book displays the wit and enthusiasm that Money displayed in his talk, it should be well worth the read.

You can hear an interview with Nicholas Money on the January the 18th, 2012 episode of *Fresh Air* on NPR. *Fresh Air* (WHYY-NPR) You can find a copy of *Mushroom* at Amazon.

- reported by John Welte ☚



Nickolas Money



Contradiction Corner

By Dennis Davis



Having spent the last several articles discussing logical fallacies, I will now turn to discussion of the most common arguments you are likely to hear among the religious in favor of a god and discuss the inherent weaknesses in them.

The most common erroneous argument made by the theologian, apologist, or believer is to point to some unexplainable event or natural phenomenon and conclude, therefore god. It is a shared form taken by the most unsophisticated creationist to the complexity of the KCA (Kalam Cosmological Argument) made by William Lane Craig.

You are more likely to encounter religious devotees using the less sophisticated Argument from First Cause famously put forth by Plato and Aristotle. In a nutshell this argues that every event requires a cause and since it is difficult to picture an infinite regression of causes and events; there must have been a first cause, and they label this first cause “god”. This is the typical man on the street who will say that all you need to do to know god is real is look at the trees!

All of these believers look at the fact that the universe exists and conclude that an intelligent designer must exist because they cannot conceive of any other way the universe came to exist. Yes, in spite of the complexity and presumed intellectualism of the KCA, both it and creationism boil down to nothing more than an argument from ignorance.

First of all, just because the theist cannot think of an alternative explanation (and even if the atheist cannot provide one) it does not follow that a mythological being suddenly becomes credible. This is like walking out your door and discovering that your home was vandalized while you slept and concluding that aliens from Alpha-Centauri did the damage. The person claiming that an incorporeal intelligence created everything requires some sort of evidence before it is reasonable to accept their claim.

Although the claimant for intelligent design has not proved that a designer is needed or necessary, there is yet another weakness in their causation argument, which is the implication that their particular god is the proposed intelligence. Nothing in their argument allows us to identify whether the intelligence is Zeus, Jehovah or an alien race in another universe. Since nothing in nature

indicates that any god exists at all, there is absolutely no way of knowing anything about the creative intelligence if there was one. So even if we were to overlook the unproven claim that an intelligent designer is required, it would get the theist no closer to claiming their god is the one who was that designer.

Let us examine the theist’s claim closer; what is this god that he proposes as a solution to the question of origins? What words do theists use to describe their god, usually works like incomprehensible, immortal, holy, and so on. Notice that they are all words that do not tell us what this god is, but rather what he is not. For example, immortality means he has no beginning and no ending; holiness means he has no sin; incomprehensibility means we cannot understand god. In fact, most theists can tell you no positive attributes of their chosen deity at all, only negative. So in essence they are trying to solve the mystery of the origin of the universe with an even bigger mystery which isn’t a solution at all. Thinking they have the ultimate answer to everything, they have no answers at all.

The one thing that the theistic believer has been able to tell us about their deity is that it is a consciousness, a non-corporal mind having thoughts but no physical substance. Because most people in our society have been taught this idea from the cradle, they are not in a position to recognize the outlandishness of such claim. In all history and in all types of experiments there has never been the tiniest evidence of intelligence without a physical brain. Thinking is what brains do, and from what we can tell, thinking cannot occur without a physical medium such as a brain. Before the creationist can be justified in proposing that a disembodied intelligence is the force behind creation they must prove that such a thing can even exist; otherwise we must conclude the universe must have originated through natural forces and events.

Finally, although the human mind may be uncomfortable with the concept of infinite regression, discomfort is not proof that it cannot be reality; the current universe may only be the latest in an infinite series of universes that will continue on into the future. Of course, the universe could have just happened for no reason whatsoever, and such an appearance from nothing is just as good an explanation as any other. In fact neither you nor the theist has anything beyond guesses on these questions, but we as atheists can accept the fact that we don’t have all the answers. ☞





THINGS TO DO....

THINGS TO SEE...



Friday, March 23, 2012

6:00PM—9:00PM

CFI—Washington D.C.

Hill Center at the Old Naval Hospital

921 Pennsylvania Avenue SE

(Just two blocks from the Eastern Market Metro station.)

Washington, DC 20003

Before you trek to the Mall to demonstrate at the Reason Rally on Saturday, join us Friday night at the beautiful and historic Hill Center for a memorable evening with CFI staff and special guests!

In addition to CFI president & CEO Ronald A. Lindsay, Council for Secular Humanism executive director Tom Flynn, African Americans for Humanism director Debbie Goddard, CFI Office of Public Policy director Michael De Dora, CFI-DC executive director Melody Hensley, and other CFI staff, special guests include:

- Richard Dawkins, evolutionary biologist and author
- Lawrence Krauss, director, ASU Origins Project, honorary board member, CFI
- R. Elisabeth Cornwell, executive director, RDFRS
- Sean Faircloth, director of strategy & policy, RDFRS
- Jamie Raskin, state senator, Maryland
- Jessica Ahlquist, student activist and volunteer high school coordinator, CFI On Campus

Light fare will be served—along with great conversation and remarks from our guests—but space is limited, so be sure to purchase your tickets soon!

CFI-Washington DCTickets are \$50 per person.

Make your reservation online or by calling 716-636-4869, ext. 406. For more information, email grassroots@centerforinquiry.net.



Reason Rally in Washington D.C. March 24 event will celebrate secular values

Full details, including discount hotel reservations, speakers, and more:

<http://reasonrally.org>

What is the Reason Rally? The Reason Rally is a movementwide event sponsored by the country's major secular organizations. The intent is to unify, energize, and embolden secular people nationwide, while dispelling the negative opinions held by so much of American society... and having a damn good time doing it! It will be the largest secular event in world history. There will be music, comedy, great speakers, and lots of fun... and it's free!

The Reason Rally is being produced and run by the Reason Rally Coalition, a 501(c)(3) (pending) organization whose board consist of all the sponsoring organizations. There are two levels of sponsorship, the higher of which (8 organizations) will share equally in any profits generated by the event. In other words, your support benefits the movement on the whole, as well as the organizations that contributed the most to this free event.

When will the Rally be held? On March 24, 2012, from 10:00–4:00 p.m. at the National Mall, nontheists from all corners of the nation will descend on Washington, D.C. en masse to deliver the good news: "We're huge, we're everywhere, and we're growing."

Why are we doing this? Across America, in every city, every town, and every school, secularism is on the rise. Whether people call themselves atheists, agnostics, secular Humanists, or any of the other terms used to describe their god-free lifestyle, secularism is coming out of the closet. According to the 2008 American Religious Identification Survey (PDF), the percentage of people with no religious affiliation grew in all fifty states. The purpose of this particular rally will be to advance secularism (in the broadest sense of the word) in society.

March 23. 10:30 pm

Reason Rally bus for Cincinnati

Friday, March 23, 2012 10:30 PM ·

Make your reservation thru a link at

<http://reasonrally.org>



THINGS TO DO....

THINGS TO SEE...



Meetups:

March 19, 6:30 pm

Monthly Monday Meetup @ The Washington Platform
Monday, March 19, 2012 6:30 PM ·

April 05, 7:00 pm

First Thursday @ The Hofbräuhaus
Thursday, April 5, 2012 7:00 PM

Science Book Club

2012 Schedule, books, and dates

All meetings are on 3rd Sunday of month at 2:30 pm except in June on 4th Sunday because Father's Day falls on 3rd Sunday. All meetings at the Hamilton County downtown Public Library in room 3A except for April and May (room 3B) as noted below:

March 18— *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, Steven Pinker 2011

April 15 --- *Who's in charge?: free will and the science of the brain*, Michael Gazzaniga 2011 (room 3B)

May 20 — *A Life Decoded: My Genome, My Life*, Craig Venter 2007 (room 3B)

June 24 (Not 3rd Sunday) — *The Roving Mind*, Isaac Asimov 1983

July 15 — *The emperor of all maladies : a biography of cancer*, Siddhartha Mukherjee 2010

August 19 — *The Grammar of Society: The nature and Dynamics of Social Norms*, Cristina Bicchieri (game theory) 2005

September 16 — *Thinking in pictures : and other reports from my life with autism*, Temple Grandin 2006

October 21 — *Drama of the gifted child : the search for the true self*, Alice Miller 2008

November 18 — *The Revenge of Gaia: earth's climate in crisis and the fate of humanity*, James Lovelock 2006

December 16 — *How We Decide*, Jonah Lehrer 2009



Most Golden Section

© 2010 A. D'Agio

There once was a town of Perfection.
Who prayed to the Most-Golden Section.
When asked to define
the source of their pride,
They pointed in different directions.

Many had point to the right.
Believing they'd found true sight.
As taught in school,
they kept this rule.
In fear of G. Section's bite.

Some townies looked forward to PI.
Either in long or short supply
Inherited or taken
There was no mistaken
The sweetness of gimme more PI.

For others, guilt was turn-key
to reach the top of The Scene
"The cost is high
we do not deny."
"For no ones salvation is free."

(While others did say)
"Our choices we give to the Power
Let's deny ourselves this hour
Oh God, without you
We're only but fools
All praise to the Golden Tower"

Not to be forgotten, in Perfection.
Those who believed with total conviction.
"Un-import is being polite
when we are so right.",
Those living in Righteous Indignation

While outside of town were men
Who walked a sacred zen
I heard that day
a gem to say
"Practice compassion for all, amen."



Culture Wars And The Thirteenth Crusade.

Absolute freedom of religion is a myth. Republican Presidential wannabes Rick Santorum and Newt Gingrich have worked themselves into a lather protesting the Obama policy of including coverage of contraception costs incurred by employees of religious institutions under the Affordable Care Act, describing it as a “declaration of war against the Catholic Church.” This is mere ignorant political hyperbola. There are, after all, 217 religious denominations listed in the *2006 Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*, differing only over which superstitions they choose to believe. There is, of course, a strong precedent for legislation that gets into the marriage bed, as in the ban on polygamy practiced mostly by Mormons. We certainly don’t want to discourage anyone from practicing contraception.

At the start of the bewildering Republican Primary process everyone agreed that the overriding issue would be jobs and the economy. But a week before Super Tuesday, with more jobs and the economy recovering, Rick Santorum is calling for a holy war: “I don’t believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute.” He should take a minute to read the First Amendment. Meanwhile, Franklin Graham, son of Billy, questions the Christian credentials of both Mitt Romney and Barack Obama. Halfway around the world, two American officers were shot dead in Afghanistan in “retaliation” for the inadvertent burning of Korans, which of course harmed not a living soul. Here in Maryland, the Legislature sent a gay- marriage bill to Governor O’Malley, which he will sign. That won’t hurt anyone either. Next door in Virginia, the State Senate voted to suspend consideration of a bill defining life as beginning at conception, which is the position of the Roman Catholic Church. The law would instantly create millions of one-celled persons. Perhaps they would be granted souls by heaven, citizenship by the state, and be counted in the census along with millions of frozen embryos? Or would the frozen embryos have to wait till they thaw? Based on a different reading of *Genesis*, a Jewish zygote wouldn’t be a person for another nine months. How do we resolve this? Under case law, protection of a fetus

by the state begins only after the fetus is capable of surviving outside the womb. Freedom of religion is not up for discussion. Gods do not compromise.

- *What's New* by Robert Park, 15 and 25 February 2012



The Pill Is The Most Important Technology On Earth.

Atmospheric pollutants are causing global warming, our oceans are becoming sewers, shrinking freshwater resources are threatening food production, energy costs are rising, our beautiful blue planet is changing color. There is hope. These trends will all be reversed if the average fertility rate of the planet falls below two; it already has for much of our planet .

- *What's New* by Robert Park, 15 February 2012



Scholarly Insight.

A report by Muslim scholars at Saudi Arabia's highest religious council, the *Majlis al-Ifta'al- A'ala*, presented to the Saudi legislature, warned that ending the ban on females’ driving would cause a surge in prostitution, pornography, divorce and, of course, homosexuality. The scholars added that, within ten years, the country would have “no more virgins.”

How Do You Feel?

A journalist heard about a very old Jewish man who had been going to the Western Wall to pray, twice a day, every day, for a long, long time. So she went to check it out. She went to the Western Wall and there he was, walking slowly up to the holy site. She watched him pray and after about 45 minutes, as he turned to leave, using a cane and moving very slowly, she approached him for an interview. “Pardon me, sir. I’m Rebecca Smith from the paper. What’s your name?” “Morris Feinberg,” he replied. “Sir, how long have you been coming to the Western Wall and praying?” “For about 60 years,” said Morris. “Sixty years! That’s amazing! What do you pray for?” “I pray for peace between the Christians, Jews and the Muslims,” said Morris. “I pray for all the wars and all the hatred to stop.” “I pray for all our children to grow up safely as responsible adults, and to love their fellow man.” “How do you feel after doing this for 60 years?” asked Ms. Smith. “Like I’m talking to a solid brick wall!”





Soul Dust: The Magic of Consciousness

by Nicholas Humphrey

(Princeton University Press, 2011)

review by Robert L. Martone

Consciousness is an enigmatic hallmark of human existence. With his book, *Soul Dust: The Magic of Consciousness*, psychologist Nicholas Humphrey takes an ambitious approach to the problems of consciousness with a scope that encompasses science, literature and philosophy.

Humphrey's essential thesis is that consciousness is the key characteristic that differentiates humans from most if not all other living beings, and that consciousness must be the result of an evolutionary process driven by a positive selective pressure: consciousness confers a selective advantage that enhances the survival and success of conscious beings. Humphrey has three objectives; first, to define consciousness; second, to propose the means by which the neural circuitry required for consciousness could emerge from neural substrates present in non-conscious organisms; finally, to define the selective advantage that consciousness offers conscious beings.

Humphrey defines consciousness in terms of the familiar model of the "Cartesian Theater" wherein our experience of consciousness is merely an internal representation of the external world played out upon a mental stage. He postulates that consciousness emerged from the gradual internalization of stimulus-response circuits. In the most primitive state, these circuits consist of neuronal loops that direct responses at the site of stimulation, while in the more advanced state, both the sensory and motor systems are internalized in the brain, and the stimulus-response loop may be entirely internal to the organism. Here again, Humphrey treads familiar ground, with inspiration from Hofstadter's "strange loops,"(1) but he missed an opportunity to explore in this context "mirror neurons"—those motor neurons first described by Rizzolatti that are activated in the brain of an animal either when that animal performs an activity

or when it observes that same activity performed by another animal.(2)

What, then, is the selective advantage that drives consciousness? Humphrey posits that consciousness evolved simply because humans enjoyed being conscious. This psychic or metaphysical benefit conferred upon conscious humans is derived not so much from adaptation to the physical world, according to Humphrey, as it is to a metaphysical niche that he calls the "Soul Niche."

Perhaps one should not expect extraordinary scientific scholarship in a book that contains the word "soul" in the title and "magic" in the subtitle, but Humphrey appears to have ambitions to be taken seriously, or at least to be seen as a provocateur. When justifying his use of the term "soul," he asks, "Should I really be using it so freely? Doesn't the word "soul" carry too much baggage? Yes it does, and I should—I should because it does" (156). A certain narcissism creeps into his narrative at times as when, for example, he gushed with Oprahesque abandon, "For if you have a miracle at your very center, then miraculous you are (emphasis his, 138)." He supports his contention that consciousness provided positive selective pressure through human enjoyment of consciousness with life-affirming passages from Rupert Brooke, Gerald Manley Hopkins and even selections from *The Sound of Music*, but he is apparently less familiar with Nietzsche, Styron or Bukowski. Nor does the prevalence of depression (9.5% of the adult population in the U.S., 10% in the UK) dissuade him from his arguments, which are at times embarrassingly provincial. For example, he contemplates what he supposes would be the tedious world of being human without consciousness, noting, "We need to ask whether a dreary world is necessarily one in which an animal or a human would lead a less successful life. We need to establish what, if any, is the biological advantage of being awestruck" (120). This leads one to wonder whether he is completely unaware of how much of humanity—all of them quite conscious—live in such a dreary world, with very little to prompt awe, and with little hope for escape from the anguish of hunger and destitution?

Consciousness emerges with age, and the consciousness of an infant is very different from that of an adolescent, which in turn is removed from that of a middle-aged adult. Throughout human existence ⇨



from the Paleolithic era through early modern times, life expectancy was around 30 years, and while humans are sexually mature in their teens, the human brain—the substrate of consciousness—continues to develop until the mid 20s. If consciousness were to have evolved, the aspects of consciousness that conferred positive selective pressure were likely those that are manifest in the teen years. Humphrey acknowledges this emergence, yet still fumbles with it in his arguments. For example, he cites childhood curiosity as exemplifying the enjoyment of consciousness: “Human children in the first three years of life are consumed by a desire to explore and experiment with objects” (123), yet later acknowledges that human babies lack the unified sense of self that underlies consciousness. Similarly, he describes the “presentism” of a baby enjoying a bath, but it is precisely that presentism—that lack of historical context and indifference to the future—that he compared to the reveries of a gnat or a jackdaw and that would characterize any pre-conscious organism, infants included. Differences between teens and older adults that manifest in, for example, lower risk aversion are left fully unexplored in this work.

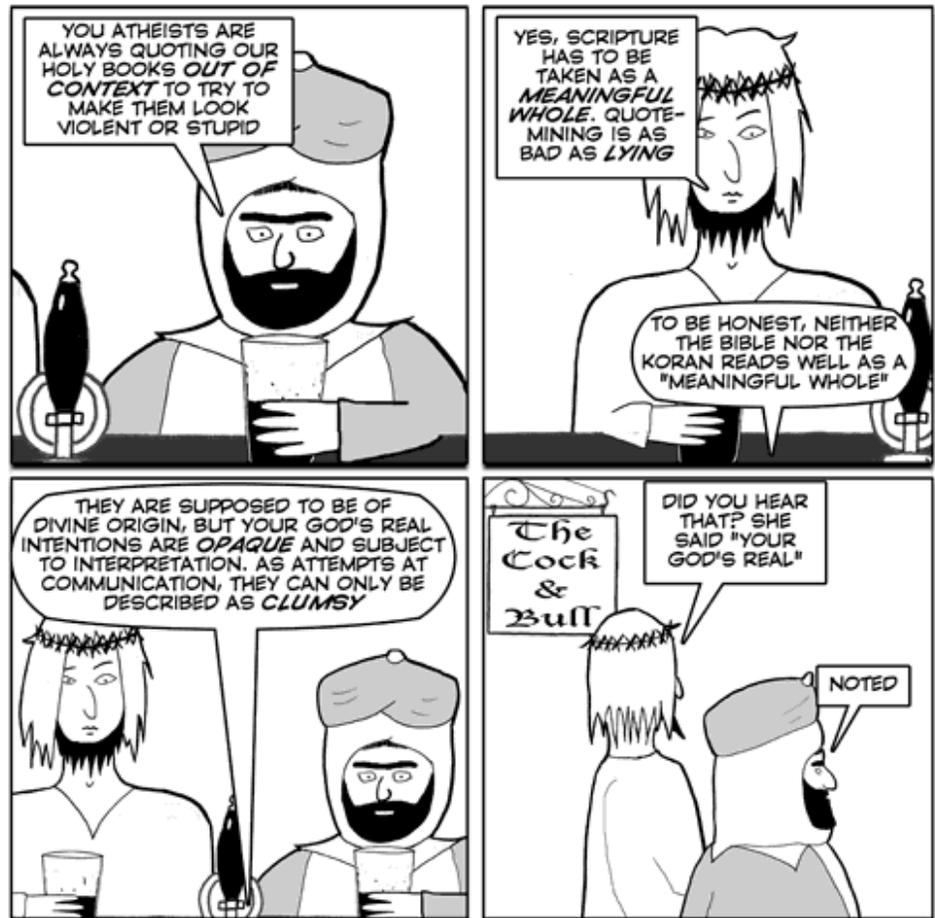
It may well be that humans created a metaphysical niche of their own, however, success and failure in that niche may be far more consequential than Humphrey’s rather banal choice between enjoyment and dreariness. Humphrey stumbles upon it when he states that, “human beings’ fear of death must always have been highly visible to natural selection—and hence so must have been the consciousness that lies behind it” (96–97). Has this fear of death led to avoidance of war or of killing in human culture? Obviously not. Rather, it may be that consciousness, and the theory of mind that is part of it, is essential to protect humans from their fiercest competitors—other humans. It is in this murderously competitive realm with other people that internalization

of stimulus-response loops becomes important by providing a level of secrecy regarding one’s own knowledge and intentions. Similarly, mirror neurons would offer a selective advantage by providing an internalization of another’s intentions.

Humphrey touches upon the historical context of consciousness, stating that, “during the Renaissance [attitudes] shifted from a sense of unconscious fusion with the world towards a state of conscious individuation” (141). Yet Renaissance humanism did not rouse a sleeping medieval Europe to consciousness. In fact, it is narcissism, that “state of detached self-absorption” (106) that is the true focus of Humphrey’s work rather than consciousness per se, and the reason that this work falls short in providing a compelling explanation of consciousness.

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April FIG Meeting
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 Wednesday March 14, 2012
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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.

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