

FIG LEAVES

Volume 18 Issue 5

May 2009

May FIG Meeting:

Tuesday, 26 May 2009
7:00 PM

The Vernon Manor has closed it's doors. We will be trying out various meeting places. If you have a suggestion for a new meeting place for FIG, please contact Shawn Jeffers or John Welte.

New meeting place! -- Quality Inn Norwood

For the May Meeting we plan to meet in the Montgomery Room at the Quality Inn in Norwood. The hotel is located at 4747 Montgomery Road, close to where the Norwood lateral crosses that street.

From I-75:

Take the Norwood Lateral from I-75, and get off at the Norwood/Montgomery Road exit.

Turn left at the end of the exit ramp and go over the expressway.

Turn Left at the stop sign.

Continue till you get to Montgomery Rd. (1st traffic light)

Turn Left onto Montgomery Rd. Drive over the expressway.

The Quality Inn is on the right side(south) of the road just after Frisch's restaurant.

From I-71:

Take the Norwood Lateral from I-71 and get off at the Norwood/Montgomery Rd exit. (*careful, it's very close to the end of the Ramp from I-71.*)

Turn Left at the end of the exit ramp at the stop sign.



From I-75

From I-71

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Events

May Meeting

Tuesday, May. 26, 2009

7:00 PM

Location:- Quality Inn Norwood,
Montgomery Room
4747 Montgomery Rd.
See left for directions.

June Meeting

Tuesday, Jun. 23, 2009

7:00 PM

Location - TBD

May FIG Meeting, Tuesday, 26 May at 7PM

Atheism and Free-Thought in 19th-Century Cincinnati: Some Historical Snapshots.

William B. Jensen, Oesper Professor of the History of Chemistry, University of Cincinnati. Atheism and Free-Thought have a surprisingly long history in the City of Cincinnati. The talk will recount various encounters between the free thinkers of 19th-century Cincinnati and assorted famous visitors, ranging from Mrs. Trollope to Mark Twain and Moncure Conway.



April Meeting

The Roots Of Prejudice

by Shawn Jeffers

For the April meeting, FIG member, Shawn Jeffers, engaged the group with several activities. Shawn introduced the activities by noting that at previous FIG meetings we had Ken Petren's lecture on evolutionary biology and then in March the opportunity to visit the *Race: Are We so Different* exhibit at the Cincinnati Museum Center. The theme of these previous topics were able to build on one another, and lead directly to this presentation which encourage members to engage one another in an effort to explore their personal awareness, interpersonal awareness and systemic awareness.

Our first activity was the "Silent Interview." Shawn inquired, "What are the best practices for going to a job interview?" Answers ranged from dressing up, to firm handshake and eye contact to researching the company before hand so you would be able to speak intelligently about the organization. In the silent interview, individuals formed groups of three and each member was handed a list of twelve questions. In silence, they were charged with answering these questions as they surmised the person sitting opposite might answer the questions. The questions ranged from "What kind of car does this person really want to drive" to "What religion did this person grow up in?" to "How many siblings does this person have and what is their position in the birth order." In other words, members were asked to guess the reality of another. After the answers were recorded, members shared their responses, and learned how good or false were their guesses.

In this sharing portion, the "interviewer" would read what he or she wrote and check to see if it was correct. The idea being that we make assumptions every day about countless numbers of things, but how often do we check those assumptions? This was an opportunity to check twelve assumptions and score how well we performed. The conversation turned to exploring what information we used in making those assumptions. Participants used clues based on clothing, past interactions and also sometimes when they didn't know an answer put down what they themselves would have wanted for the answer. Shawn shared one of the key message on this section by distinguishing between the golden rule and the platinum rule. The golden rule is "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you". The platinum rule is "treat others how **they** want to be treated."

Then we transitioned to the second activity entitled "Trading Places." In this activity, five signs with identities on them were placed on the wall around the room. These identities were:

1. White male, recovering alcoholic, living in his car.
2. Unemployed, quadriplegic PhD physicist.
3. Hispanic construction worker, with limited English, illegally in country.
4. Black female factory supervisor, has GED.
5. Unemployed lesbian with 2 children, partner also unemployed.

Participants were tasked with standing next to the identity that would be **least** desirable for them if they were to wake up in one of these individual's shoes. All participants shared why chose their particular identity and then summarized their responses and reported out to the larger group. ⇒



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

fignotes at(@) gofigger.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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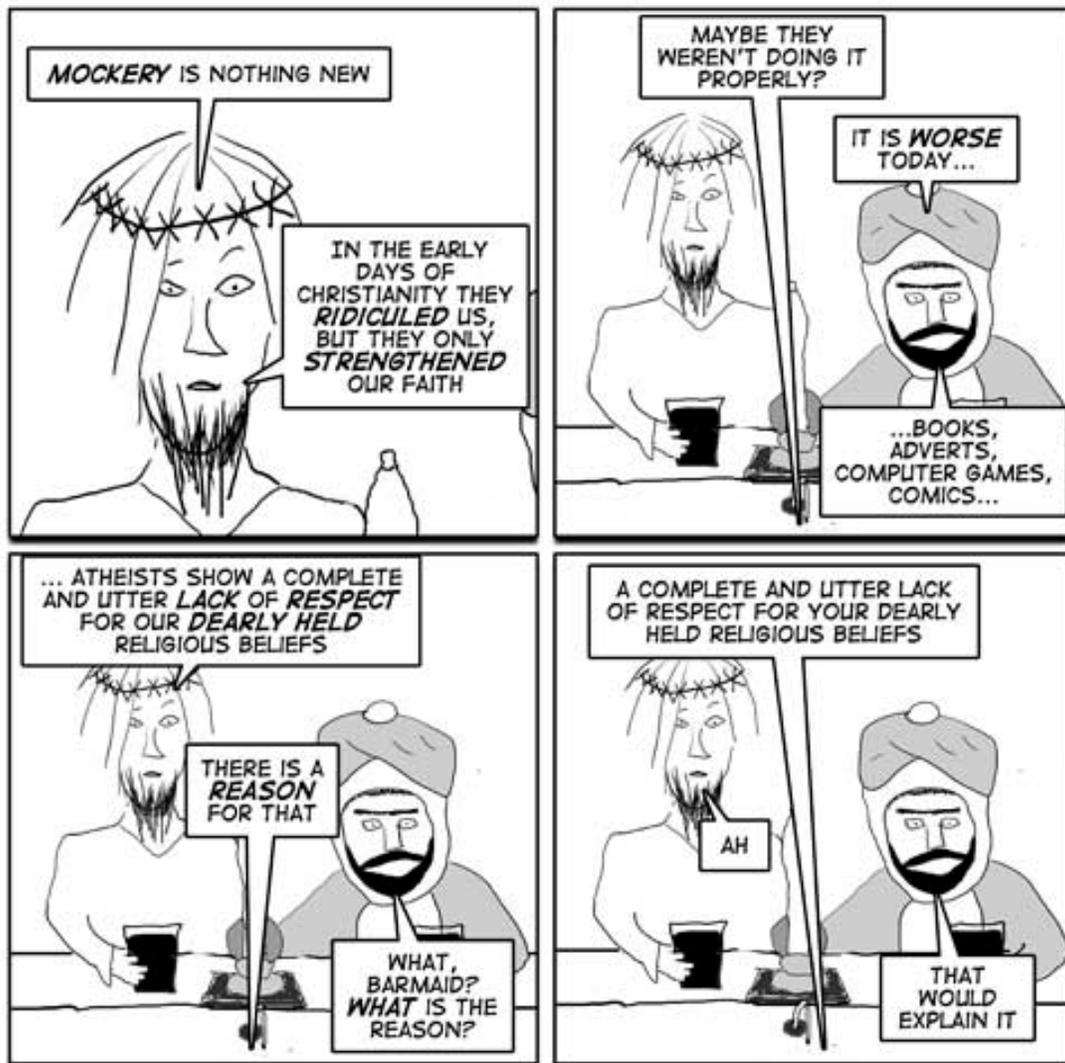


In round two, participants were again asked to stand by an identity, but this time they chose the **most** desirable for them. Again participants summarized their responses and reported out. Then as a large group we discussed each of the five identities and how it felt in round one to point out all of somebody's flaws since it was your least desirable and then in round two have somebody else stand next to the same exact sign and talk about why it would be **most** desirable to become that person. Also we explored language and how certain words are loaded in our society. In the example above with the White Male, when you see the phrase "recovering alcoholic", do you focus on the word recovering and think it is hopeful that he is getting help or do you focus on the word alcoholic. Most participants admitted they focused on the word alcoholic. A major issue are the negative and positive

assumptions we make about people from these simple descriptions.

The activities go hand in hand since in the Silent Interview, individuals start to explore how they make their assumptions. In Trading Places, we start to see when those assumptions go unchecked and how they can create stereotypes or judgments about certain individuals and groups of people. In concluding the workshop, Shawn shared that a major takeaway is "Your worldview is not **the** worldview, it is just that, **your** worldview" and understanding that everybody has a different lens through which they view the world.

Shawn Jeffers is Director of Programs for BRIDGES for a JUST Community, a human relations organization in Cincinnati dedicated to bringing people together to achieve inclusion, justice and equity for all and the activities used in this workshop are from BRIDGES' Equity Leadership Program. ☘



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THINGS TO DO....

THINGS TO SEE...



Media Events/Programs

The Humanist Perspective

Show times on Time-Warner Cable:

Channel 15: Tuesday 3:30 am and Saturday 7:30 pm

Channel 24: Friday 12:30 pm.

Programs:

12-15 May: *The Pledge of Allegiance*,
with Ed Buckner.

9-22 May: TBA

26-29 May: TBA

2-5 June: TBA

9-12 June: TBA

The Cincinnati Atheist Meetup(s)

When: Monday, 18 May 2009 at 6:30 PM

Where: Joseph-Beth Booksellers 2692 Madison
Road Rookwood Pavilion Cincinnati OH 45208
(513) 396-8960

Please note earlier time The bookstore is now closing at 9 PM, so we've moved the meeting time a bit earlier to 6:30 PM.

Atheists, Agnostics, Humanists and Freethinkers meet here. Regular monthly gatherings are held on the 3rd Mondays from 6:30 - 9:00 PM. New people join every month, and we all wear name tags (no quizzes). Check the Message Board for current hot topics.

This is a purely social gathering. No agenda, no speaker, no rules of order. If you'd prefer a bit more structure, please check the calendar for lectures, FIG meetings, and other events.

To find us: Go in the front doors of the bookstore and turn left. Enter the Bistro and walk straight back as far as you can go. We're all freethinkers, so we'll look just like you.

The Bistro has a full menu, including vegetarian options. If you like, enjoy dinner, dessert, tea, or a brewski. Restaurant direct line: 513.396.8970 The Bookstore / Bistro is not associated with this meetup group, and will not be able to answer questions. Please use our Message Board to connect with fellow group members.

Hear! Hear! *Answers in Atheism* at

<www.answersinatheism.net>

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

The Answers in Atheism crew

2009 SCIENCE BOOK CLUB Schedule - All meetings will be on the 3rd Sunday every month at the downtown Cincinnati Public Library except June 21 (Father's Day). **Room 3A** at 2:30 pm. unless otherwise stated.

May 17 -in Room 3B *The Unnatural History of the Sea* by Callum Roberts

June 14 -in Room 3B or 28 - *Commonsense Rebellion: Taking Back Your Life from Drugs, Shrinks, Corporations, and a World Gone Crazy* by Bruce E. Levine

July 19 - *Why Science* by James S. Trefil

Aug 16 - *Death by Black Hole : and Other Cosmic Quandaries* by Neil deGrasse Tyson

Sept 20 - one of a number of books on complexity theory and applications

Oct. 18 - *Are Universes Thicker Than Blackberries?: Discourses on Godel, Magic Hexagrams, Little Red Riding Hood, and Other Mathematical and Pseudoscientific Topics* by Martin Gardner

Nov 15 - book not yet selected

Dec 20 - one of a number of books on the relation/conflict between science and religion





Center for Inquiry Pleased with Obama's Decision on National Day of Prayer, But Still Objects to Government Endorsement of Prayer

(Amherst, New York) -- The Center for Inquiry commends President Obama for deciding to scale back the observance of today's National Day of Prayer. Past observances have included an ecumenical service in the East Room of the White House each year on the first Thursday of May. This year President Obama has decided to change course by issuing a proclamation acknowledging Thursday, May 7, 2009 as a national day of prayer, without holding any official public events. This has enraged religious groups on the right, while pleasing groups committed to upholding a strong separation between church and state.

"We are delighted that the President has seen fit to curtail official White House observance of this day of prayer, which we believe to be a violation of the First Amendment, which says that congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion. In doing so, Obama has abandoned the practice of former President George W. Bush, who each year held a public prayer service at the White House with religious leaders in attendance, effectively resulting in a government endorsement of religious observance," said Paul Kurtz, chairman and founder of the Center for Inquiry.

While obviously pleased with this change, CFI President and CEO Ronald A. Lindsay sounded a note of caution, saying that "the whole idea of having an official National Day of Prayer is both illogical and unconstitutional. The government has no business endorsing religious practices, and the notion that a deity desires mandated prayers is absurd -- even barbaric."

Lindsay says that the decision to pray or not to pray is a private issue, one best left to individuals exercising their freedom of conscience, not the state. "We are pleased that the Executive Branch now appears to have some regard for separation of church and state. We hope Congress will have the same regard some day," added Lindsay.

The Center for Inquiry/Transnational, a nonprofit, educational, advocacy, and scientific-research think tank based in Amherst, New York, is also home to the Council for Secular Humanism, founded in 1980; and the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry (formerly CSICOP), founded in 1976. The Center for Inquiry's research and educational projects focus on three broad areas: religion, ethics, and society; paranormal and fringe-science claims; and sound public policy. The Center's Web site is www.centerforinquiry.net



How many people can fit on the planet?

Last week, a demographer in Moscow warned that the population decline in Russia will have serious economic consequences. This week, *Investors Business Daily* criticized famous British broadcaster Sir David Attenborough for supporting the Optimum Population Trust, a group that wants to reduce the number of people in the world. Reduce? No, no, the *IBD* editor says "we must produce more young workers to pay for our elderly retirees." He credits this insight to the "late, great economist Julian Simon," a University of Maryland libertarian who said, "People aren't a cost they're an asset." Personally, I grow more aware of the needs of the elderly with each passing year: Finding a parking place, for example. Fewer people I could live with. To ensure species survival, Darwin said, species reproduce far more often than needed for replacement. Evolution made it the dominant force in human relations. It's overkill, and behavior modification, as the church has discovered, is futile. Equilibrium is reached only when the death rate rises to meet the birth rate. For most species, therefore, the "balance of nature" is not a happy condition. The only exception is *Homo sapiens*, which has a technology (the pill) to restrain population growth reliably and humanely. Now, however, there's an added urgency; we're rendering our planet less habitable.

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 17 April 2009

At What Age Is Contraception An Emergency?

A cruel FDA ruling in the Bush years was to deny to women under 18 over-the-counter access to Plan B. Assistant FDA Commissioner Susan Wood resigned in protest. The policy was expected to change in the Obama Administration, but surprisingly the change was ordered by a federal court first. A federal judge ruled that the policy was based solely on politics. In fact, it had been opposed by virtually the entire staff at FDA. The new ruling extends access to 17-year-olds. But why stop there? Motherhood's an even greater problem at 16 and greater still at 15, nor would it get any easier to confide in a parent.

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 24 April 2009



Letters To The Editor



Yes, Looks Do Matter

By PAM BELLUCK
Published: April 24, 2009, *New York Times*



FOR more than a week now, people on both sides of the Atlantic have been using the story of Susan Boyle — the dowdy Scottish spinster who sang her way to fame on “Britain’s Got Talent” TV show — as an example of just how shallow we’ve become.

Before she sang, Ms. Boyle seemed to be merely a frumpy 47-year-old unemployed church volunteer who lived alone with her cat, Pebbles, and had, she said, “never been kissed” (a claim that she later took back). Now, after the video of her performance went viral, a flurry of commentary has focused on how we stereotype people into categories, how we fall victim to the prejudices of ageism or look-ism, and how we should learn, once and for all, not to judge books by their covers.

But many social scientists and others who study the science of stereotyping say there are reasons we quickly size people up based on how they look. Snap judgments about people are crucial to the way we function, they say — even when those judgments are very wrong. They would even agree with Ms. Boyle herself, who said after her performance that while society is too quick to judge people by appearance, “There is not much you can do about it; it is the way they think; it is the way they are.”

On a very basic level, judging people by appearance means putting them quickly into impersonal categories, much like deciding whether an animal is a dog or a cat. “Stereotypes are seen as a necessary mechanism for making sense of information,” said David Amodio, an assistant professor of psychology at New York University. “If we look at a chair, we can categorize it quickly even though there are many different kinds of chairs out there.

”Eons ago, this capability was of life-and-death importance, and humans developed the ability to gauge other people within seconds.



Brain Change

*Challenge conventional wisdom.
Destroy dogma, superstition, and lies.
Spare thoughts, anyone?*

Posted by Peter Lloyd
Monday, April 13, 2009

A Most Extraordinary Shock

A woman named Susan Boyle sang “I Dreamed a Dream” from *Les Miserables* on Britain’s version of “American Idol,” a program called “Britain’s Got Talent.” Toward the end of this video, after Susan stunned the audience with her performance, one of the show’s panelists mumbles to one of his peers that what he had just witnessed was the “most extraordinary shock” of the show’s history.

Why was he shocked? Because Susan stepped forward to sing dressed in an ordinary house dress, her hair arranged in a conventional style, her 47-year-old frame far from svelte. In short, a very conservatively dressed, average-looking, middle-aged woman.

Watch and you’ll see, before Susan sings, the panel’s leading judge rolls his eyes, expecting a flop. A disgusting display of prejudice, in the sense that the word *prejudice* comes to us. Susan Boyle, the no-frills singer, was pre-judged. She’s going to fall on her face, the panel clearly assumed. The audience, in lock step, smirked and all but gagged when Susan announced that she hoped to be as successful as Elaine Paige someday.

During Susan’s stunning performance, no one could argue with her talent. From what I could hear over the din of the screaming morons in the audience, she sings very well. Afterwards one judge, reeling from shock, called Boyle’s performance, “the biggest surprise I have had in three years.” And as the audience heard the judges fall over themselves with praise, the auditorium of sheep could not contain their expressions of conversion.

Why was anyone surprised? Because Boyle was not decked out like a pre-teen prostitute? I’m afraid that their shock betrays the shameful shallowness of the public eye. What have we become that an average-looking woman shocks people with her voice? Have we become such slaves to appearance?

Susan’s performance was outstanding. The audience’s performance was appalling!





Losing the North

by: Hervé Kempf, *Le Monde*, 18 April 2009

Hervé Kempf argues that Québécois will lose their northlands should they choose to exploit them for hydro-power, mineral and forest resources.

When does one stop development? The customary answer to this question is: You can't refuse Southern countries the possibility of escaping from poverty and, in one way or another, of catching up to the level of comfort enjoyed in Northern countries. Certainly. So, let the countries of the South develop.

But when must the countries of the North, for their part, stop developing? This question poses itself very concretely when projects for highways, industrial regions, superstores, housing estates, parking lots, etc. arise. Rationality should, in virtually all cases, lead us to reject their implementation. The logic of economic interests - which camouflages the appetite for lucre underneath promises of job creation - most often imposes the pouring of concrete. The result of this rationale is the constant aggravation of the ecological crisis in which we are involved.

This general movement is virtually undetectable since it is the result of a myriad of local decisions. Today, Québec presents the dilemma in a highly visible way. Its Prime Minister, Jean Charest, representing business milieus, announced a "Plan for the North," intended to exploit the region of Québec situated north of the 49th parallel - a territory twice as large as that of all France - to National Assembly of the "Belle Province" on March 10.

The plan consists of creating great hydroelectric dams and vast mining operations. New roads will be opened. One may imagine that the forest industry will demand to participate in the party. Thus will Québec increase its exports to the United States. It goes without saying, as the prime minister emphasized, "this is a project we will make an model of sustainable development."

This project will indubitably generate a flood of dollars, but, also, incontestably, a torrent of greenhouse gas emissions, pollution of lakes and other forests, an impoverishment of fauna linked to the opening up of these regions forgotten up until now by men. One or several national parks will certainly be created to delude the willingly credulous citizens into the belief that, in actuality, development of the North is a measure of environmental protection.

Let's restore the problem to its most crudely simple terms: If it's true that climate change, the erosion of biodiversity and chemical pollution are major problems, the North must not be developed. Does Québec need that development? According to the Statistical Institute for that province, disposable income per inhabitant is roughly equal to that of France or Japan. One may consider that that's enough and that there is no necessity for enrichment. It's up to Québec's society to decide whether, by occupying it, it wishes to lose the North. But the situation suggests an obvious fact that holds true for all rich countries: Developed countries no longer need to grow.

- Translation: *Truthout* French language editor Leslie Thatcher ☘

The Test

To set up an experiment
some money I on needles spent
and on a camel, which though old,
was quite exceptionally bold.

Near me a rich man took his stand,
twain bags of gold in either hand.
The rich man did not hesitate
to knock upon the pearly gate.

St. Peter answered: "It is writ:
A needle's eye will ere permit

a camels body to pass through
than this wide gate make way for you."

I, trusting fully God's command,
at once cajoled the creature and
displayed behind the needle's eye
a tempting piece of sugar pie.

And so indeed! Through went the brute,
although it wiggled like a newt.
The rich man, though, stared gloomily
and said no word but: "Woe is me!"

- Christian Morgenstern (1871-1914)



The Financial Crisis Explained

Heidi is the proprietor of a bar in Berlin. In order to increase sales, she decides to allow her loyal customers - most of whom are unemployed alcoholics - to drink now but pay later. She keeps track of the drinks consumed on a ledger (thereby granting the customers loans). Word gets around and as a result increasing numbers of customers flood into Heidi's bar. Taking advantage of her customers' freedom from immediate payment constraints, Heidi increases her prices for wine and beer, the most-consumed beverages. Her sales volume increases massively.

A young and dynamic customer service consultant at the local bank recognizes these customer debts as valuable future assets and increases Heidi's borrowing limit. He sees no reason for undue concern since he has the debts of the alcoholics as collateral. At the bank's corporate headquarters, expert bankers transform these customer assets into DRINKBONDS, ALKBONDS and PUKEBONDS. These securities are then traded on markets worldwide. No one really understands what these abbreviations mean and how the securities are guaranteed. Nevertheless, as their prices continuously climb, the securities become top-selling items.

One day, although the prices are still climbing, a risk manager of the bank -- subsequently, of course, fired due his negativity -- decides that the time has come to demand payment of the debts incurred by the drinkers at Heidi's bar. However they cannot pay back the debts. Heidi cannot fulfill her loan obligations and claims bankruptcy. DRINKBOND and ALKBOND drop in price by 95%. PUKEBOND performs better, stabilizing in price after dropping by 80%.

The suppliers of Heidi's bar, having granted her generous payment due dates and having invested in the securities are faced with a new situation. Her wine supplier claims bankruptcy, her beer supplier is taken over by a competitor. The bank is saved by the government following dramatic round-the-clock consultations by leaders from the governing political parties. The funds required for this purpose are obtained by a tax levied against the non-drinkers.

Finally an explanation I understand ... ☘

The Church in the Light of the Enlightenment

by: The Chronicles of Favilla, *Les Echos*, 17 March 2009

A large segment of public opinion, Catholic and not, is shocked by two recent episodes in the life of the Church. Recall that the first decision consisted of lifting the excommunication covering members of a fundamentalist community, including the bishop, Williamson, author of "Shoah" denials he has never renounced. The second decision, made at the initiative of the Archbishop of Recife, consisted of excommunicating the mother and doctor of a nine-year-old girl for having undertaken an abortion after the child was raped by her stepfather.

The emotion aroused by these two cases is such that - an extraordinarily rare occurrence - the Pope himself believed he had to write a letter to the bishops in which he acknowledged having committed an error of judgment with respect to Mgr Williamson, while, as for the Brazilian episcopate, it repudiated its Recife representative. Faced with these two affairs, many wonder how it was possible to attain such political blindness with respect to the first point and such human blindness in the second instance. It would be misguided to impute any anti-Semitic grounds to the first case or indifference to human misery to the second. The present Pope is, in fact, one of the most philo-Semitic for a long time, and the Church's many and strong positions against the injustices created by economic and social exploitation show its sensitivity to the issue of human misery.

In truth, the crisis goes back much further. It's a doctrinal crisis. By reopening the door to fundamentalists - and not only the extreme case Mgr Williamson incarnates - the Vatican is privileging an authoritarian concept of religion over the dialogue and humanism the Vatican II Council at the beginning of the 1960s called for. By declaring that the law of God must trump that of man under all circumstances, the Archbishop of Recife clearly expressed that doctrinal option dear to all fundamentalisms. Moreover, this vertical and intangible conception of divine law is not without resonance with the theses of Muslim fundamentalism. Such a conception is obviously incompatible with the horizontal option maintained by democratic societies that emanated from the Enlightenment, which submit religious values to the test of human reasoning. To emerge from this crisis, the Roman Catholic Church will one day undoubtedly have to say clearly which of these conceptions is its own. ☘

Translation: *Truthout* French language editor Leslie Thatcher.



Creationism Is Not Confined To Christians: Turkey's Science Board Censors Darwin.

Huffington Post, Ahu Ozyurt, 16 March 2009

Turkey's "new ruling elite" has a thing against "Evolution". The religious circles that form the intelligentsia of AKP, Turkey's ruling party, just scored another victory against reason, science and research. They managed to censor Charles Darwin off a popular science magazine.

TUBITAK in Turkey, is the equivalent of President's Science and Technology Board in the US. It was formed to pursue independent science policies and encourage technological and scientific research. The appointees up until AKP came to power were mostly chosen according to scientific merit and academic research. Then, things changed. After filling the board of TUBITAK with anti-evolutionists, conservatives, not-shaking-hands-with-women kind of University professors, AKP's cadre of bureaucrats are now pushing the limits of intellectual thinking and research.

The signs were there for years. But it all became crystal clear, last week when the press uncovered that the Co-chair of TUBITAK, Professor Omer Cebeci, after seeing the cover of the popular *Science and Technology Magazine* with Darwin's picture, had decided to kill the cover story. He also fired the editor Ms. Cigdem Atakuman, accusing her for putting Darwin in the magazine. Mr. Cebeci had taught and had done some research at the King Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia for nine years. His specialty was on cement and material engineering.

TUBITAK's *Science and Technology Magazine* was the best selling magazine in Turkey for more than three decades. In a country where the best selling newspaper's circulation is less than 600,000, the magazine had become a source of popular interest for young scientists and aspiring students and had been able to sell more than any magazine, rivaled only by National Geographic. Rural school libraries depended on it for popular science and creating curiosity in young children.

The scientific community in Turkey is outraged. Yet the Chairwoman of TUBITAK, Prof. Nuket Yetis' silence was even more deafening. Her reaction to the scandal shows the level of complacency among some of the AKP appointed bureaucrats, and how far they can go to keep their seats. After five days of silence, TUBITAK issued

a statement claiming that the editor had overstepped her authority by putting Darwin on the cover and having a 15-page story about him.

Scientists from France, England and the USA expressed concern about the incident. The censorship also made it to the pages of Nature magazine's website. Allison Abbott's article on the censorship created a huge discussion forum on the internet among Turkish scientist who are intimidated by the government.

Officials' remarks are even scarier. State Minister in Charge of Science and Research, Prof. Mehmet Aydin told the press, "Darwin made a mistake. But it is wrong to censor this magazine". Prime Minister Erdogan's AKP was never fond of science and intellectual thinking. But this is the final nail in the coffin on Turkey's ruling party's understanding of freedom of expression.

Ahu Ozyurt is the Washington Correspondent for CNN Turk + Milliyet

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How It Works

Once upon a time a man told a small village, "I will buy monkeys for \$10 each." Since there were many monkeys in the forest, the villagers caught them and sold them to the man.

As the supply of monkeys diminished, the villagers' efforts slowed, so the man offered them \$20 each. They renewed their efforts but the supply of monkeys diminished further, so he increased his price to \$25. Soon no one could even find a monkey in the forest. The man increased his price to \$50, but announced, "Since I must go to the city on business, I authorize my assistant to buy monkeys on my behalf."

As soon as his boss was gone, the assistant told the villagers, "My boss has collected lots of monkeys. I'll sell them to you for \$35 and then, when he returns, you can sell them to him for \$50." The villagers rounded up all the money they could and bought as many monkeys as possible. Then they had monkeys everywhere.... but they never saw the man or his assistant again.

And now you understand the workings of the stock market!

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Leading Climate Scientist:

“Democratic Process isn’t Working”

by: David Adam, *The Guardian* UK, 18 March 2009

Protest and direct action could be the only way to tackle soaring carbon emissions, a leading climate scientist has said. James Hansen, a climate modeler with NASA, told the Guardian today that corporate lobbying has undermined democratic attempts to curb carbon pollution. “The democratic process doesn’t quite seem to be working,” he said.

Speaking on the eve of joining a protest against the headquarters of power firm E.ON in Coventry, Hansen said: “The first action that people should take is to use the democratic process. What is frustrating people, me included, is that democratic action affects elections but what we get then from political leaders is *greenwash*. “The democratic process is supposed to be one person one vote, but it turns out that money is talking louder than the votes. So, I’m not surprised that people are getting frustrated. I think that peaceful demonstration is not out of order, because we’re running out of time.”

Hansen said he was taking part in the Coventry demonstration tomorrow because he wants a worldwide moratorium on new coal power stations. E.ON wants to build such a station at Kingsnorth in Kent, an application that energy and the climate change minister Ed Miliband recently delayed. “I think that peaceful actions that attempt to draw society’s attention to the issue are not inappropriate,” Hansen said.

He added that a scientific meeting in Copenhagen last week had made clear the “urgency of the science and the inaction taken by governments.” Officials will gather in Bonn later this month to continue talks on a new global climate treaty, which campaigners have called to be signed at a UN meeting in Copenhagen in December. Hansen warned that the new treaty is “guaranteed to fail” to bring down emissions.

Hansen said: “What’s being talked about for Copenhagen is a strengthening of Kyoto [protocol] approach, a cap and trade with offsets and escape hatches which will be guaranteed to fail in terms of getting the required rapid reduction in emissions. They talk about goals which sound impressive, but when you see the actions are such that it will be impossible to reach those goals, then I can understand the informed public getting frustrated.” He said he was growing “concerned” over the stance taken by the new US administration on global warming. “It’s not clear what their intentions are yet, but if they are going to support cap and trade then unfortunately I think that will be another case of *greenwash*. It’s going to take stronger action than that.” ☘

Happy Birthday Bertrand!

Bertrand Russell (1872 - 1970) on May 18 he would be 137 years old.

He was a professor of philosophy with an unusual life. He was outspoken against Britain entering WWI; in 1918, he was dismissed from his job at Trinity College, Cambridge. He was jailed for six months for his support of conscientious objection. While in prison he wrote one of his most important books: *An Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*.

After WWII, along with Albert Einstein and Linus Pauling, Russell campaigned for nuclear disarmament. At age ninety, he was sent to prison for taking part in an anti-nuclear demonstration. His *Autobiography* was published in three volumes.

As a young professor, he was sued by a student’s mother, who claimed his teachings would be dangerous to her daughter’s virtue. Her lawyer said his works were “lecherous, lustful, and bereft of moral fiber.” In a typical American witch-hunt, Russell’s works became taboo throughout the entire USA. He lost the court case, leaving him without employment. He was virtually destitute.

He wrote on the education of children, the role of religion, the relationships between the sexes, unjust wars, freedom vs organization. Finally Russell was able to obtain a contract from Simon & Schuster to publish his a new book: *History of Western Philosophy*, which became a best-seller, and a major source of income for many years. And he won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Russell was the most influential philosopher of his time. He wrote about seventy books, more than two thousand articles, and forty thousand letters. His friends and correspondents included among many others: Pauling and Einstein, T.S. Eliot, Joseph Conrad, Pearl Buck, H.G. Wells, Madame Curie, J.B.S.Haldane, Max Born, Julian Huxley, Eleanor Roosevelt, Albert Schweitzer and Vanessa Redgrave.

Among his books were these titles: *Skeptical Essays; Marriage and Morals; Authority and the Individual; New Hopes for a Changing World; The Analysis of Matter; Our Knowledge of the External World; An Outline of Philosophy; and An Inquiry into the Meaning of Truth*.

He wrote of the guide to his life: “To all, in whatever country, who are still capable of sane thinking or human feeling, I want to find out whether anything could be known, and, to do whatever might be possible toward creating a happier world.”

Bertrand Russell died peacefully and content at age 98 in 1970. He expressed his attitude on how philosophical problems should be approached: “As a scientific philosophy grounded in mathematical logic”.

- contributed by Carolyn Clark ☘



*A Friendly Letter to Skeptics and Atheists:
Musings on Why God is Good and Faith isn't Evil*
by David G. Myers
(San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008)

The author sets out not so much to refute, as to reason with the “New Atheists;” especially with Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens who consider religion dangerous, a delusion, and downright destructive. He intends to show that unbelievers have much in common with a rational, “science-respecting Christian synthesis.”(p. vii). He defends a broad, liberal religion, which accepts the scientific view, evolution, and even gay marriage.

David Myers is a well-known social psychologist, who can draw on extensive work in his science and on survey research to show that religion on the whole is good for you. He provides evidence religion leads to longer and better marriages, less divorce, and fewer criminals. Because religious people smoke and drink less, they enjoy better health and a longer life. Most of all belonging to a religious community brings a better quality of life with less depression, isolation, and loneliness. In this argument he agrees with philosopher Michael Ruse, that atheists and liberal Christians should make common cause.

Pointing to the many universities and hospitals founded by Christians, Myers sees religion as friendly to science. This despite the persecution of Galileo, Kepler, and Newton. To assess if religion or atheism has more evil on it's side of the ledger would require drawing up an enormous, historical accounting. Stalin's twenty million murders against the Inquisition, the Crusades against the wars of the twentieth century. Attempting such a measurement sounds mad.

Myers agrees there is not and can not be a “soul” separate from the body, nor does he expect prayers “to work” in the sense of fulfilling our wishes; nor would he expect the medical prayer experiments of Benson and Byrd to work. He opposed them. You simply “do not manipulate an infinite God.”(p. 40). Whatever science discovers as real, can be regarded as God's work. “God

works through, not apart from, created nature.”(p. 126).

On the positive side, religion helps to provide the individual with meaning beyond every day existence. Religion encourages people to pursue good causes which are greater than their personal needs. Myers asks how does atheism avoid becoming a self-indulgent materialism, concentrated on the mere acquisition of material goods? In contrast, “faith-rooted values give many people a reason to behave morally when no one is looking”(p. 93). God's moral injunction is a powerful idea, which encourages us to act and work in selflessness and charity, in ways which atheism simply can not match.

Myers suggests four reasons why religion works and is good for you. Religion provides the social support of a living community; it gives purpose to life: “Something worth living and dying for;”(p.111); it gives self-esteem as God loves you; and the management of the terror of death through an eternal perspective. This is a good book, the well written explanation of a scientist believer who has won prizes for his writings.

Myers leaves out any approach to the question, is it true, in the sense, does god really exist, or is Dawkins right about a universe of blind nature, of forces without rhyme or reason or the least care for human animals? At one point, p. 123, Myers talks of “both belief systems” referring to atheism and theism as if the two are equivalent faiths. He goes on to suggest, or so it seems to me, that one can just believe in God regardless of whether he exists or not. In the end there is something weird about making Genesis “In the Beginning” conform to the Big Bang of cosmology, or rely on the strong Anthropic Principle for the existence of god. – Wolf Roder æ

Quote

Name something you like. I bet it's not in heaven.
Sex? Sorry, lust is a sin. Can't have it. Your career?
Nope. There's no money in heaven; nobody needs to
work. Besides, as far as I can tell from studying the
scriptures, all you do in heaven is pretty much just
sit around all day and praise the Lord. I don't know
about you, but I think that after the first , oh, I don't
know, 50,000,000 years of that I'd start to get a little
bored.

– Rick Reynolds

Unquote



June 2009 Potluck
Sun. June 14, 2009 2:00 PM



May Meeting
Tuesday May. 26 2009, 7:00 PM



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

FIG

Our Purpose

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

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



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

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

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

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