

FIG LEAVES

Volume 19 Issue 5

May 2010

May FIG Meeting:

Tuesday May 25, 2010 7:00 PM

What Is Going On In The National Freethought Movement?

Speakers: Amanda Metskas and August Brunzman

FIG is part of a movement of secular Americans interested both in mitigating irrationality and the influence of religious dogma on society and making sure that non-theists are respected voices in public discourse? From Washington, DC to San Jose, California, and hundreds of places in between, attitudes are changing. Atheists, agnostics, humanists, skeptics are becoming visible and getting organized. In February 2010, the Obama administration invited members of the Secular Coalition for America to a public policy briefing on White House grounds. The Secular Student Alliance has grown from a handful of campus groups just a few years ago to more than two hundred today. Camp Quest, started under the wing of FIG, has been replicated in Tennessee, Minnesota, Michigan, Ontario, California, Texas and the UK. August Brunzman, executive director of the Secular Student Alliance and secretary of the Secular Coalition for America, and Amanda Metskas, executive director of Camp Quest, Inc. will provide a whirlwind update of what's going on around the country in freethought at our May 25th meeting. If you would like to know more about the mentioned organizations do check out these webpages:

Camp Quest - www.camp-quest.org

Secular Student Alliance - www.secularstudents.org

Secular Coalition of America - www.secular.org

Meeting Location will be the
Hannaford Suites in Kenwood.

Directions to The Hannaford Suites Hotel,
5900 East Galbraith Rd.

- 1) Take Exit 12 onto Montgomery Rd.
- 2) From the off Ramp at Exit 12:
From the North - Turn Left
From the South - Turn Right
- 3) Continue on Montgomery Rd. to East Galbraith Rd. Turn Left.
- 4) After you go under I-71, turn right into the driveway of the Hotel.



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Events

May Meeting

Tuesday, May 25, 2010, 7:00 PM
the Hannaford Suites (in Kenwood)
5900 East Galbraith Rd.

FIG Community Dinner

Join the FIG Gang for Dinner!
Tuesday, June 8, 2010, 6:30-PM
Bronte Bistro, 2692 Madison Rd.
Cincinnati, OH 45208

RSVP by 6/4 to Donna Loughry
961-7331 or dloughry@fuse.net.

June Meeting

Tuesday, June 22, 2010, 7:00 PM
the Hannaford Suites (in Kenwood)
5900 East Galbraith Rd.

Quote

"...we are not just a Christian nation. We are a Jewish nation; we are a Buddhist nation; we are a Muslim nation; Hindu nation; and we are a nation of atheists and nonbelievers."

– Barack Obama, 18 April 2008

Unquote!



April (May 2nd) Meeting

Dr. Darrel W. Ray on *The God Virus*

On Sunday, May 2nd, Dr. Darrel Ray spoke to the Free Inquiry Group about his book, *The God Virus*. Dr. Ray was raised in a fundamentalist home in Kansas where church attendance several times a week was mandatory and where questioning fundamentalist beliefs could get a young man into trouble. He mentioned an incident where his grandmother smacked him for asking a question that challenged her religious beliefs. She stated that Madelyn Murray O'Hair was worse than Satan because at least Satan believed in God.

After ten years working as a clinical psychologist and seeing firsthand the problems that some people experience with their religion, he became an atheist. He saw the cognitive dissonance created by the opposition of religious beliefs and the natural wants and needs of human beings. He began to see a relationship between religious rituals and requirements and the problems of patients evident in the psychology that he practiced every day.

It all came together for him when he read "Viruses of the Mind," an online article by Richard Dawkins on the subject of memes. A meme is an idea that is passed from brain to brain, sometimes unintentionally. It can be as simple as a popular song or as complex as a set of religious beliefs. Dr. Ray expanded on this idea in his book *The God Virus*, by comparing religious memes to viruses. He points out in the book and in his talk that many of the characteristics of viruses are also present in the religious memes. His thesis is that religion is "an infection of the mind."

To identify the god virus infection in an individual Dr. Ray demonstrated the "exorcist test." He suggested getting a person to talk about something they are interested in or excited about and then switch the topic to religion. Challenge one of the tenets of their dogma and watch the changes that happen in their demeanor. In their expression and body language, you can see the god virus "demon" emerge and change their demeanor. Their eyes glaze over just like the little girl in the movie *The Exorcist* and their gestures and body language become tense and ritualistic. This is the face of the god virus in a defensive response. Go back to the topic you started with that interests them and watch them revert to their former behavior.

Viruses often spread at the expense of their host, sometimes causing the death of the host. Dr. Ray explained as an illustration a virus that causes a mouse to lose its fear of cats because this virus survives in the gut of a cat and spreads through its feces. The host, the mouse, is sacrificed when it loses its fear of cats and is eaten. The virus enters the cat's gut, propagates and is picked up by other mice after excretion. This continues the cycle that only benefits the virus. Viral religious memes also profit from the sacrifice of their carriers in many cases. Millions have died in wars that have been fought in the name of religious memes. Many revered martyrs sacrificed their lives so that their particular god virus could propagate. Religions, like viruses, have evolved to enable them to control the lives of their hosts.

Vectors carry viruses. In the case of malaria, the vector is the mosquito. In the case of religion, the vectors are priests, ministers, rabbis, imams and other so-called holy ⇒



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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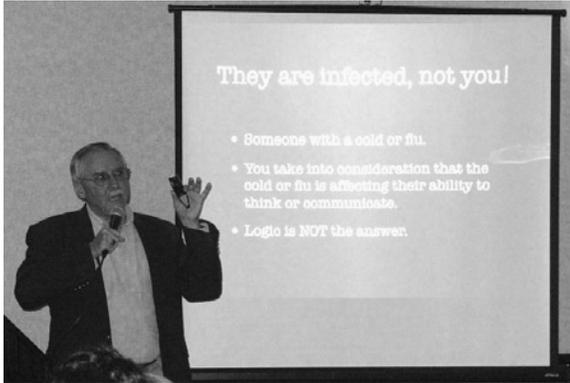
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persons whose job it is to spread the virus. Vectors are valuable to the virus and expensive to train and support. That is why they are rarely banished from religious practice when they commit crimes and immoral acts. Many priests were simply moved from parish to parish after molesting children. Too much investment was made in them to just throw them away. The Catholic Church spent



much time, effort and money to cover up the transgressions of their expensive vectors. Often

you will see a famous minister return to preaching after taking some time off after a scandal is uncovered. Faith healer Peter Popoff is back on TV after having been exposed as a fraud by James Randi.

Dr. Ray noticed that ministers use some of the same techniques that psychologists use in their practices. One of these techniques is hypnosis. The cadence and repetition in a sermon and in prayers serve to relax and open a person up to suggestion. Dr. Ray gave his audience an effective demonstration of this technique by simulating a hypnosis session with one of the members of our group. Though he was working with one individual, many in the room felt the influence of this technique. He also emphasized that the entire church service, including the music, sermon and prayers have evolved towards effectively producing a set of psychological reactions that will inevitably propagate the god virus of that particular congregation. He did a little preaching to illustrate this point.

Religious viruses also produce anti-bodies to other religions, much as viruses mutate and become resistant to antibacterial medicines. By excluding other religions and demonizing them, the god viruses strengthen themselves and make it less likely that another religion will win converts from them. It is almost impossible for a religious person to see the inconsistencies of his own religion but is very clear, because of his indoctrination, about the inconsistencies and fallacies of another's religion.

Speaking openly about our sexuality is a good way

to challenge religious ideas, according to Dr. Ray. Many religious restrictions and requirements are based on sex. If they can convince you that these natural behaviors are sinful and require the forgiveness of the church, you will keep coming back to them for the forgiveness you need to rid yourself of the guilt that you feel because of the religious indoctrination. Dr. Ray calls that the guilt cycle.

Dr. Ray advocates the teaching of comparative religion. Exposure to viral pathogens helps to develop a strong immune system. Exposure to many different religions will help to develop a strong rational immune system. Since religion infects in times of weakness and great stress this exposure and strengthening will help to inoculate against the god virus.

Dr. Ray stated that logic will not work as a deterrent to religion. When confronted with logical argument the religious will become defensive and unable to listen. However, abandoning the tactic of using logic and rational thought is not the answer, in my opinion, as these are our only tools for confronting religious fallacies and inconsistencies. We must be aware of when these tactics are strategically viable. Setting a strong example of how to live an ethical and moral life without religion is the tactic that will work best with extreme fundamentalists.

Dr. Ray emphasized that he is not against religion. His main goal in writing *The God Virus* is to illustrate and highlight the manipulations that all religions use to propagate and maintain themselves. His purpose is to educate theists and non-theists alike about the underlying causes of religious belief and its effects on our lives and culture. He is dedicated to helping people as evidenced by his founding of the Recovering from Religion groups. These are support groups where people come together to share their experiences of leaving religion and support each other through what can be a very difficult time.



The God Virus is available at www.thegodvirus.net

Learn more about Recovering from Religion at www.recoveringreligionists.com.





Biology In The Classroom, Should Atheists Be Allowed To Teach?

a talk presented by Michael Ruse, Professor of Philosophy and noted Darwin Scholar at Florida State University, on 27 April 2010 at University of Cincinnati

Professor Ruse made it clear that he was indeed a much published scholar of Darwin and his science, that he was himself an atheist, and that he had no argument for or against teaching by atheists, or by religious people for that matter. Indeed, his talk was really about the conflict, or the dispute between religion and science. It centered on the question could one be a science person and at the same time keep faith in religion.

Ruse answered the question in the affirmative, though he himself does not believe what he asserts. Among modern proponents of fundamentalism and Intelligent Design, –which he calls fundamentalism lite, – are scientists. Ruse mentioned engineering professor Henry Morris, co-author of *The Genesis Flood* (1961), which revived modern Bible literalism; Professor of Chemistry Michael Behe, author of *Darwin's Black Box* (2003), and physicist Alvin Plantinga, who wrote: *Creation and Evolution* (2001). Many well educated people are Christian or other religious believers, yet also accept science at least to some extent.

Countering Ruse as an accommodationist to religion are some of the “new atheists,” who downright despise Christianity. Ruse wants to reconcile Darwin with Christianity, and insists Darwin himself accepted religion, even if only for the sake of his wife. In contrast authors like Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (2006), and Jerry Coyne *Why Evolution is True* (2009), insist evolutionary science excludes the possibility of religion as real. To them Ruse is merely an appeaser of the seriously misguided faithful believers.

Ruse then briefly examined the question: why is the United States so much more religious than other industrial nations. This republic was not founded as a Christian country, indeed most of the Fathers of the Nation were deists who did not believe in Jesus as God, or in any god active in the Universe. But when the country was new, the expansion to the frontier, required new guides and rules, understandings not available from the old country. Why were Americans justified in crushing the Indians? The second great Christian awakening in the nineteenth century promoted the Bible as this guide, making a literalist understanding of the book widely accepted in the West and South. The Bible also justified and defended slavery. The civil war brought a hardening and entrenching of such literal views.

The argument today, and throughout the past, is not really about science and whether evolution is true. The disagreement is about social issues, the older folks do not support what they read about the young people in the Sunday newspaper, they

don't like what they see in the theater, movies, and TV. Evolution is merely the symbol, on which they can hang their hat of dissatisfaction. Ruse referred to Phillip Johnson the father of Intelligent Design who wrote *Darwin on Trial* (1991). What bothered this legal scholar more than evolution was abortion, sexual deviance, smoking pot, or as Ruse put it “broads in pants suits.”

On the other side the Darwinists and new Atheists play the same game. As Ruse emphasized, they use science to flay social activity they don't approve of. Such social comment started in Darwin's lifetime with Thomas H. Huxley a supporter and friend of Darwin who invented the concept of *agnosticism* and wrote *Science and Christian Tradition* (1893). Huxley flatly did not approve of the Christian religious and their ways. His grandson, Julian, founder of the “New evolutionary synthesis” and past head of UNESCO felt and acted the same way.

Famous also was Andrew D. White attacking in *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (1896). Dawkins, P. Z. Myers, Victor Stenger and other new atheists are merely doing business at the same stand. The conflict between religion and science is driven by social concerns not by knowledge, it is driven by control over education and promoted by science educated persons on both sides. As Ruse put a syllogism on the overhead:

If Intelligent Design is inherently religion because it presupposes (or implies) God,
is not Darwin's Theory also religion because it presupposes (or implies) no God?

The religious thinkers would like to blame all social problems on evolution, science, or unbelief. In the same manner the atheists tend to lay the Trade Towers attack, the priestly abuse scandals, and our recent wars at the feet of religion. Ruse would prefer accommodation to belief. He mentioned Steven J. Gould's *Rock of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (1999) in which he explains religion and science as two distinct but separate ways to arrive at knowledge of the world. Science and religion are two *Non-overlapping Magisteria*. Ruse would go along with that, except that neither field of thought is willing to concede any part of reality to the other. To show there is need for philosophy and religious thought, Ruse finally suggested four questions science does not or can not ask:

Why is there something rather than nothing?
What are the foundations of morality?
What is sentience?
What is the point of it all?

These he implied, must be left to religion or philosophy.
– reported by Wolf Roder ☞



THINGS TO DO....

THINGS TO SEE...



FIG Is Now On Facebook!

If you have a Facebook account, become a Fan of FIG. To join you can type in this long weblink: <http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Cincinnati-OH/FIG-Free-Inquiry-Group-of-Cincinnati-and-Northern-Kentucky/306015475868> or it is much easier to search for "Free Inquiry Group," it is the first option on the search page.

By being a Fan you can receive FIG updates and meeting notices and RSVP for events such as the monthly FIG Community Dinners.

Science Book Club 2010 schedule All meetings on 3rd Sunday of each month at 2:30 in room 3A of downtown Main Public Library unless otherwise noted.

May 16 - *Power, Sex, Suicide: Mitochondria and the Meaning of Life*; Nick Lane

June 13 - (2nd Sunday) *How to Build a Dinosaur: extinction doesn't have to be forever*; Jack R. Horner

July 18- *Logicomix: an Epic Search for Truth*; Apostolos K. Doxiadis, Christos Papadmitriou

Aug 15 - *Unscientific America*; Chris Mooney

Sept 19 - *The Evolution of Consciousness: of Darwin, Freud, and cranial fire : the origins of the way we think*; Robert E. Ornstein

Oct 17 - *The Roving Mind*; Isaac Asimov

Nov 21- *The Little Green book of Awakening*; James George

Dec 19 - *Physics for Future Presidents: The Science behind the Headlines*; Richard A. Muller



The Cincinnati Atheists April Meetup

Monday, 17 May 2010, 6:30 pm
at Molly Malones, 6111 Montgomery Road
Pleasant Ridge, OH 45213, Phone: 513-531-0700

Meetup Description

Atheists, Agnostics, Humanists and Freethinkers meet here. Regular monthly gatherings are held on the 3rd Mondays. 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.

<http://www.mollymalonescincinnati.com>

They have wheelchair ramp. Good menu - Great food. Best selection of single malt scotches in town. Equal distance from Milford - to the Levee - to West Chester. Located in Pleasant Ridge (Silverton Area) on Montgomery Road.

Parking can be a pain - but they have a standing agreement with the church behind them to use their parking lot after Church hours.

Quote

On Design: He Thought Of Every Thing:

Charles Darwin to American botanist Asa Gray, 1861

"Your question what would convince me of Design is a poser. If I saw an angel come down to teach us good, & I was convinced, from others seeing him, that I was not mad, I shd. believe in design. - If I could be convinced thoroughly that life & mind was in an unknown way a function of other imponderable forces, I shd. be convinced. - If man was made of brass or iron & no way connected with any other organism which had ever lived, I shd perhaps be convinced. But this is childish writing. -

I have lately been corresponding with Lyell, who, I think, adopts your idea of the stream of variation having been led or designed. I have asked him (& he says he will hereafter reflect & answer me) whether he believes that the shape of my nose was designed. If he does, I have nothing more to say."

Unquote





Crescent Over Hyderabad In India

Violent protest led to arrest of three rationalists in controversy over a book with Rushdie and Taslima Nasrin texts. Matcha Laxmaiah, a poet, rationalist and civil rights activist in Andhra Pradesh, who is well known under the pen-name Krantikar, has been arrested in the last week of February for compiling and publishing a book with the title '*Crescent over the World - Boon or Silent Holocaust*'. The book, allegedly hurting the religious sentiments of Muslims, contains articles written by Salman Rushdie, Taslima Nasrin, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Ibn Warrack and other scholars criticising Islam. Following Krantikar's arrest in Khammam (AP), the police also arrested Dr N. Innaiah from Hyderabad, chairman of CFI India, and Andhra Pradesh rationalist leader Subba Rao, whose names were printed as distributors in the book. Dr Innaiah, who has translated and published books by some of these authors in the Telugu language, in a press conference denied any connection to Krantikar's publication, after he was released on bail on 4th March.

Krantikar did not obtain bail and is still in jail. The charge sheets against him and the two alleged distributors are expected on 11 March 2010 in Khammam. Meantime, in Khammam, the police seized some thousand copies of the two volume book from different places. The police commissioner announced, they would try to get hold of all copies already despatched to other districts as well.

The arrests followed massive and violent protests by fundamentalists in Khammam and in Hyderabad. It is alleged that the book contains excerpts from Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* and Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja* as well as some of the controversial Danish "Mohammed-Cartoons." The *Satanic Verses* are banned in India, *Lajja* (though claimed to be banned) is not. The issue was raised in the AP state assembly by the fundamentalist All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM, 'Council of United Muslims'). Congress Chief Minister K. Rosaiah – with an eye on the Muslim electorate – submitted to their demands and gave the green light for "stern action". Though the radical AIMIM is small in the national scale, it is wielding considerable power in Hyderabad. The base for the single seat in the Indian Parliament they have been holding for twenty five years, is their stronghold in the

Charminar area of the Muslim old city of Hyderabad. Here, they have an absolute majority, around 75 per cent of the votes.

The AIMIM has recently made Hyderabad a dangerous place. In August 2007, three MLAs of the AIMIM led a physical attack on Taslima Nasrin with bouquets, flower pots and chairs during a book launch at the Hyderabad Press Club, organized by Dr. Innaiah. To prevent fresh outbreaks of violence, the police sounded an alert on Hyderabad and Khammam and deployed additional forces in Hyderabad's old city, where 'imams' (ie. clerics), condemned the author and those who supported him during their Friday sermons.

Source: *Rationalist International Bulletin*

 Editor's Comment: The Bengali writer Taslima Nasrin has spoken to our group. The books: *Meyebela: My Bengali Girlhood* (1998) by Nasrin, and *Infidel* (2007) by Ayaan Hirsi Ali were reviewed in this newsletter.

Stephen Hawking's Brief History Of Space Travel.

They are out there somewhere, and the computer of the world's most famous physicist says in a vaguely Norwegian accent that we should keep low so they won't notice we're here. In a new documentary for the Discovery Channel, Hawking says, "To my mathematical brain the numbers alone make thinking about aliens perfectly rational." That depends on what you think about them. He suggests that aliens might raid Earth to take our resources. Actually, our resources are draining away into the Gulf of Mexico. Or maybe the aliens analyzed the Hubbert oil peak and decided we weren't worth the trouble. "We have only to look at ourselves to see how intelligent life might develop into something we wouldn't want to meet." I'm sure the series will be a great commercial success, but this is totally irresponsible. All this paranoid society needs is the world's most famous scientist telling us that the obesity epidemic was engineered by the space aliens to fatten us up for the feast. Not only is Prof. Hawking profiling with a totally imaginary profile, he screwed up the mathematical physics. Let's run the numbers for him: we aren't going there, and they are not coming here.

Every September on the first day of class I ask my new freshman physics majors if they think humans will ever travel to another star. Almost all say "sure, eventually." "Okay," I tell them, "let's start planning the trip."



We set a few minutes aside in every class session to work on the plan. How far is it to the nearest star? It's 4.2 lightyears to Proxima Centauri. How long can we take to get there? We agree on a working lifetime, 50 years. Multi-generational space travel would raise ethical concerns. At that velocity we can use Isaac Newton's 300-year-old laws of motion. Indeed, until his retirement last year, Stephen Hawking occupied the Lucasian Chair of Mathematics at Cambridge, once held by Newton. Anyway, my class couldn't agree on how many frozen pizzas we would need on the trip so we settled for calculating the energy per gram, 317 GJ/g, that's GigaJoules per gram. Can that be right? If it is we just solved the Fermi paradox. These hideous aliens are lusting for Earth women, but don't have enough stuff to make the trip.

- *What's New* Robert Park, 30 April 2010

Would The President Obey The First Amendment Or Appeal The National Prayer Day Ruling?

One week ago Pres. Barack Obama proclaimed May 6, 2010 to be a National Day of Prayer in accordance with his responsibilities under Public Law 82-324. I heard no pealing of church bells yesterday, nor were throngs of the faithful seen gathering to give thanks. The only indication that yesterday was National Prayer Day was a full-page ad in the *New York Times* announcing that Federal District Court Judge Barbara Crabb had ruled that the law is an unconstitutional call to religious action. However, Judge Crabb put enforcement of her ruling on hold pending appeal, allowing already scheduled prayer events to go on. The ad in the *NYT*, and perhaps in other newspapers as well, was placed by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, which initiated the court action by suing. It is no accident that the Bill of Rights begins with the establishment clause; many of the framers of the Constitution, having seen the pernicious effects of state religions in Europe, were determined to produce a religion-free document. They would have been shocked that the Rev. Billy Graham, a Southern Baptist evangelist from North Carolina, could show up at the United States Capitol 164 years later and instruct Congress to pass a law directing the President to urge citizens to pray; Congress dutifully obliged. Moreover, although the law was a clear violation of the establishment clause of the First Amendment, it was allowed to stand unchallenged for 58 years. It required the President of the United States



to set aside a day each year as a National Day of Prayer and every President since has meekly complied; it would be political suicide to do otherwise. Likewise, the President can not publicly thank U.S. Federal District Court Judge Barbara Crabb for upholding the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. I'm not the President, but

What's New thanks her.

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park Friday, 7 May 2010



Consolations

Only the lonely
 Know the way you feel tonight?
 Surely the poorly
 Have some insight?
 Oddly, the godly
 Also might,
 And slowly the lowly
 Will learn to read you right.

Simply the pimply
 Have some idea.
 Quaintly the saintly
 Have got quite near.
 Quickly the sickly
 Empathise
 And prob'ly the knobby
 Look deep into your eyes.

Rumly, the comely
 Will understand.
 Shortly the portly
 Will take your hand.
 Early the surly
 Dispraised and panned,
 But lately the stately
 Have joined your saraband.

Only the lonely
 Know the way you feel tonight!

Singly the tingly
 Conceive your plight,
 But doubly the bubbly
 Fly your kite...
 And lastly the ghastrly
 Know the way you feel tonight.

Kit Wright



Pledging Allegiance to God

by Stephen Rohde in *The Daily Journal* (16 March 2010)

In 1954, at the height of the cold war, Congress amended the phrase “one Nation indivisible” in the 62 year-old Pledge of Allegiance to read “one Nation, under God, indivisible.” Last week, over a blistering 160-page dissent, the Ninth Circuit held that the state-directed, teacher-led, daily recitation of the amended Pledge by children in public schools did not violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

The original version of the Pledge (without any reference to God or religion) was written by Francis Bellamy in 1892, although many mistakenly assume the founders wrote it. (Sarah Palin once wrote that if the Pledge “was good enough for the founding fathers, its [sic] good enough for me.”) In 1942, the Pledge (again without any reference to God or religion) was officially codified by Congress.

1. But in 1954, one day after Rev. George M. Docherty, a highly regarded Presbyterian minister, delivered a sermon attended by members of Congress, urging that the Pledge be amended to add “Under God,” several resolutions were introduced in the House and Senate to do just that.

Soon, members of Congress were piously declaring that “without these [new] words ... the pledge ignores a definitive factor in the American way of life and that factor is belief in God,” that there “should be embodied in the pledge our allegiance and faith in the Almighty God,” that “we are officially recognizing once again this Nation’s adherence to our belief in a divine spirit, and that henceforth millions of our citizens will be acknowledging this belief every time they pledge allegiance to our flag,” and that Congress was engaged in “a sacred mission” to achieve a “victory for God.”

On June 14, 1954, as he proudly signed the joint resolution amending the Pledge to add the phrase “under God,” President Dwight D. Eisenhower solemnly declared that “[f]rom this day forward, the millions of our school children will daily proclaim in every city and town, every village and rural school house, the dedication of our Nation and our people to the Almighty. To anyone who truly loves America, nothing could be more inspiring than to contemplate this rededication of our youth, on each school morning, to our country’s true meaning.”

To celebrate, according to the Congressional Record, the victorious legislators recited the newly minted Pledge of Allegiance to “our Nation [and] to the Almighty,” while a bugle played “Onward, Christian Soldiers.”

In the face of such overwhelming evidence (and much more recounted in

detail in the dissent filed by Judge Stephen Reinhardt) establishing the predominantly religious purpose behind the amendment, Judges Carlos T. Bea and Dorothy W. Nelson in *Newdow v. Rio Linda Union School District*, held that, instead, the predominate purpose was “to inspire patriotism” and convey the secular principle that our nation is founded on “the concept of a limited government.”

Mincing no words, Reinhardt wrote that “[t]o put it bluntly, no judge familiar with the history of the Pledge could in good conscience believe, as today’s majority purports to do, that the words ‘under God’ were inserted into the Pledge for any purpose other than an explicitly and predominately one: ‘to recognize the power and the universality of God in our pledge of allegiance’; to ‘acknowledge the dependence of our people, and our Government upon the moral direction and the restraints of religion,’ 100 Cong. Rec. 7590-91 (1954); and to indoctrinate schoolchildren in the belief that God exists, id. at 5915, 6919.”

Reinhardt goes on to bemoan the fact that “[w]e should indeed have had more faith in our country, our citizens, and Constitution than we exhibited at the peak of the McCarthy era when we enacted the religious amendment to our Pledge of Allegiance, in part to inculcate in our children a belief in God. In doing so, we abandoned our historic principle that secular matters were for the state and matters of faith were for the church. The majority does so once again today, sadly, by twisting, distorting, and misrepresenting the law, as well as the issues that are before us.”

Reinhardt proceeds in detail to demonstrate how the addition of “under God” to the Pledge violates all three of the Es-

tablishment Clause tests established by the Supreme Court, to wit: the Lemon test, the Endorsement test and the Coercion test. As persuasive as this trenchant and authoritative analysis is, it is Reinhardt’s compassionate examination of the damaging and corrosive impact of the amended Pledge on our schoolchildren and those who do not believe in God that should persuade the entire Ninth Circuit to reverse this decision on en banc review.

The plaintiff is a five-year-old child compelled by law to attend school, where “her teacher, a state employee, leads her and her classmates in a state-directed exercise explicitly designed to inculcate a religious belief in each of them - a belief in God.”

The Supreme Court has expressed special concern for “young impressionable children.” A study conducted 20 years after the Pledge was amended to include the words “under God” found that for grade school children the most important part is “talking about God” and, as one child put it, “We better be good cause God is watching us even if he is invisible.”

The very nature of coercive activity, the Supreme Court has repeatedly held, is that it exerts enormous “pressure upon religious minorities to conform to the prevailing officially approved religion.” Reinhardt points out that 766,000 Hindus, one million Buddhists, 106,000 adherents of Native American religions, “not to mention our two million atheists, agnostics, humanists, and secularists and quarter million other believers in some other form of spiritualism” in America might take issue with the “explicitly monotheistic nature of the Pledge and its reference to a “superintending God.”

“The very fact that the religious beliefs now embodied in the Pledge is antitheti- ➔



cal to the beliefs of millions of Americans, religious and irreligious alike,” Reinhardt wrote, “is why the Constitution prohibits the government from taking sides, and certainly from coercing schoolchildren to adopt and proclaim an officially prescribed belief.”

Reinhardt concluded by pointing out the regrettable truth that the “majority opinion will undoubtedly be celebrated by a large number of Americans as a repudiation of activist, liberal, Godless judging.” Nevertheless, he pointed out that by reaching the result the majority does, “we have failed in our constitutional duty as a court. Jan Roe and her child turned to the federal judiciary in the hope that we would vindicate their constitutional rights. There was a time when their faith in us might have been well placed. I can only hope that such a time will return someday.”

Judge Reinhardt has done his part. For the sake of the Constitution, we can hope that a majority of the Ninth Circuit or a majority of the Supreme Court will do their part. But upholding the Constitution, in general, and separation of church and state, in particular, are not only the responsibilities of judges. Popularly elected members of Congress converted the Pledge of Allegiance into a religious exercise in 1954 and Congress can return it to its secular origins.

But that will require the people to speak out, people who are deeply religious or not religious, who understand the genius of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison when they guaranteed that we must keep the state out of the church and the church out of the state.

It will require us to lobby our elected representatives, telling them that in a free country religion can thrive without indoctrinating children in public school to espouse religious beliefs they may not believe and that it demeans religion itself to dilute the sacred concept of God by pretending that it’s not religious.

Over a half-century ago, Justice Robert H. Jackson warned us that “[i]f there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism [or] religion.”

Stephen Rohde, chair of the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation of Southern California, is author of “American Words of Freedom and Freedom of Assembly.” ☘

The Remarkable Story of Professor Antony Flew - The World’s Most Notorious Atheist Who Changed His Mind

On April 8, 2010, the British philosopher Antony Flew passed away after a long life in academic philosophy, having taught at Oxford, Aberdeen, Keele, and Reading universities. For most of his career Professor Flew was one of the world’s most outspoken and prominent atheists, until he changed his mind in the closing years of his life, apparently impressed by the arguments from Intelligent Design creationists, most notably with regard to the complexity of DNA. In 2004, Flew co-authored a book entitled *There is a God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*. The co-author was Roy Abraham Varghese, who became the center of controversy when the *New York Times* published an article alleging that Flew was in serious mental decline and that the book — and by implication the conversion itself — was perhaps contrived or highly influenced by Varghese.

In this week’s *eSkeptic*, we present the following article by Kenneth Grubbs, which was written before Flew died and aims to get at the truth of Flew’s conversion. Kenneth is a long-time skeptic and freelance writer living with his family in Southeast Michigan. Kenneth also writes for the free-thinking website *Isacc’s Rainbow*

Antony Flew, 1923-2010 Following the Argument Wherever it Leads

a tribute by Kenneth Grubbs

A bristling chill swept the dimming colorless sky over Reading, England one evening earlier this year. In weather uncannily, perhaps even poignantly, similar it was my profound pleasure to speak at length with the delightful and charming

Annis Flew, wife of the now notorious Antony Flew who, after almost 70 years vigorously defending atheism apparently

changed his mind. Today, at the age of 87, Flew considers himself a *deist*. At least that is what Annis made clear to me when we spoke in January.

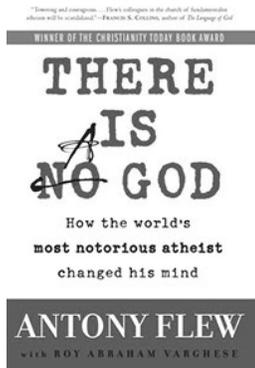
Flew, The Man

At the University of Oxford, during the war-ravaged 1940s, a group of undergraduate students, presided over by C. S. Lewis, gathered each Monday evening below ground in the Junior Common Room of St. Hilda’s College to passionately debate Christianity and atheism.

This elite group, known as *The Socratic Club*, was the “intellectual hub of Oxford.” At its core is the Socratic maxim to “Follow the argument wherever it leads,” a principle that would guide Flew his entire life. It was here at the Socratic club in 1950 that a 27-year old Flew presented his first relevant work, *Theology and Falsification*. It was

also here at Oxford that he would meet Annis, the woman who would become his wife and lifelong friend and the woman with the kind and steady voice I would speak with on a crisp January evening, some 60 years later.

Professor Flew authored more than 35 books and essays on such diverse philosophical topics as free will and determinism, crime, evolution, logic, ethics, and language. His landmark works include *God and Philosophy* (1966), *The Presumption of Atheism* (1976), and now, of course, *There is a God: How the World’s Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind* (2007). I tried to gain access to Professor Flew for this story, but he was in an Extended Care Facility in Reading, England, tired, confused, and in the paralyzing grasp of advanced dementia. He had been there for well more than a year, ⇨



Annis Flew, wife of the now notorious Antony Flew who, after almost 70 years vigorously defending atheism apparently



and Annis informed me that “Tony is rarely aware of his surroundings anymore.” There would be no interview. **Flew, The Book**

There is a God was published in 2007 by Harper One, the imprint of Harper Collins focusing on predominantly religious and spiritual works. The book is “about why I changed my mind,” Flew writes. His name appears in large print on the jacket. Below it, in considerably smaller type, it reads “with Roy Abraham Varghese.” From the jacket we also learn that the book is the “Winner of the *Christianity Today* Book Award.” This is a curious honor, given that deism shares almost nothing with Christianity, nor any other religion; but far more importantly, Annis informed me without hesitation that “Tony never came to recognize *any* of the revealed religions.”

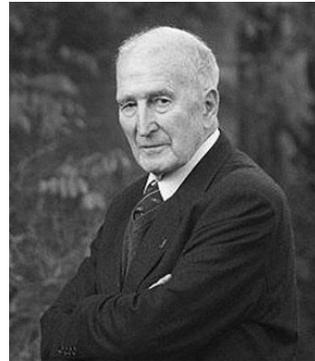
Roy Varghese penned the 18-page Preface. The Introduction is written by Flew, spanning four and one half pages. In it comes the thunderous recant, “I now believe there is a God.” There are two Appendices. Roy Varghese writes the first. Its 22 pages consist of one part “New Atheist” bashing, and two parts tiresome argument. Bishop N.T. Wright, an Oxford New Testament Scholar, writes the second appendix. Before Wright begins his 28-page essay, “*The Self-Revelation of God in Human History: A Dialogue on Jesus*,” there is a brief paragraph by Flew inviting Wright to contribute, an odd invitation from a *deist*.

Flew, The Controversy

In December of 2004, 54 battle weary years after *Theology and Falsification* was first introduced at the Socratic Club, a lifetime of work was forever fractured when the Associated Press released the story that Antony Flew, famed British philosopher and atheist, “now believes in God.” In 2007, not long after Flew’s book was released, Mark Oppenheimer wrote an essay in the *New York Times* magazine (“The Turning of an Atheist,” November 4), for which he interviewed both Flew and Varghese. I spoke with Mark in February, who told me that Professor Flew informed him with no ambiguity that he did *not* write the book. “This is really Roy’s doing,” Flew said, “He showed it to me and I said OK.” When Oppenheimer interviewed Varghese, *he too* stated that the book was *his idea*, and that he (Varghese) “did all the original writing,” but that the “substantive”

material came from Flew’s previous work. Oppenheimer describes Varghese as a Christian apologist as well as a “crusader for (and financial backer of) those who believe that scientific research helps verify the existence of God.” Varghese met Flew at a conference in 1985.

Subsequent to Oppenheimer’s story, Varghese wrote a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* magazine: “First the good news: Antony Flew is alive and well (physically and mentally)” (“Doubting Antony Flew,” November 5, 2007. This letter was written just *one year* prior to Flew’s *dementia* requiring hospitalization).



Antony Flew

When I spoke with Mark he reminded me that Harper One wasn’t entirely satisfied with Varghese’s prose, so they asked Bob Hostetler, an evangelical pastor, to *re-write* many of the passages, “To make it more reader friendly,” according to Varghese himself. So the ghostwriter had a ghostwriter!

In essence then, two-thirds of Antony Flew’s book is actually Roy Varghese writing *for* Flew, with some undefined portion written by Bob Hostetler writing *for* Varghese. The remaining one-third of the book is Varghese writing *as* Varghese, taking puerile whacks at the “New Atheists” in Appendix A; and Bishop Wright in Appendix B, writing *as* Bishop Wright, presenting his 28-page Christian dissertation. As Annis said, “All those Christians [were] trying to pull him to their bosom.” Yet almost unbelievably, nowhere in *There is a God* is any of this information disclosed. The omissions alone are disturbing. “The most disappointing thing to me,” Oppenheimer told me, reflecting back with clear candor, “is the cynicism of the publishing industry. They knew they made a mistake, and never took the opportunity to correct it.”

Roy Varghese declined my request for an interview. He did email me a written statement to highlight three points. First,

he explained that the statements made in the book have been made by Flew in other forums as well. Second, Flew signed off on the book’s manuscript multiple times. And third, Varghese arranged a special meeting attended by himself, Professor Flew and Professor Richard Swinburne, famed Christian apologist and long time friend of Flew. The expressed intent of the meeting was for Swinburne to assess Flew’s genuine views, as well as his capacity. Swinburne wrote a testament proclaiming Flew’s grasp of the material, suggesting that Flew’s position was “most of the way toward Christianity.” (Varghese was kind enough to send me a copy of Swinburne’s statement).

The fact that Varghese felt the need for a third party confirmation regarding Flew’s capacity raises concerns. And having decided that such a confirmation was necessary, it would have been more persuasive had a truly independent third party, rather than a Christian apologist, conducted it.

Of the three important points Varghese wanted me to know, point number three negates points one and two. If Flew’s capacity is questionable to Varghese, then the credibility of expressing his newfound views in other forums and signing off on manuscripts is not compelling.

At this juncture then, having reviewed the controversy, having considered Flew’s age and capacity, and having considered the potentially biased motives of those around him, our story finally intersects with its purpose. Simply put, *these antics are of no relevance to us here*. Why? Because the Socratic maxim so dear to Flew’s heart is not to follow *the man*; it is instead to follow *the argument*. Professor Antony Flew affirms that he is a *deist*; so stipulated. We will follow *the argument* and see where it leads.

Flew, The Argument

When someone abandons lifelong convictions, *changes their mind*, and writes a book to explain it all, we should expect new and dramatic reasoning. Let’s follow the argument spelled out in *There is a God*.

“Science spotlights three dimensions of nature that point to God,” the argument begins in earnest, summarily invoking the authority of science. “The first is the fact that nature obeys laws. The second is the dimension of life, of intelligently organized and purpose-driven beings, which arose ⇨



from matter. The third is the very existence of nature.”

Notice that these points are nothing more than observations for which science is *seeking* evidence. They are, in and of themselves, *not* evidence per se, nor do they “point to” anything, despite the semantic implications to the contrary.

The argument continues, “How did the laws of nature come to be? How did life as a phenomenon originate from non-life?” And lastly, “How did the universe, by which we mean all that is physical, come into existence?”

The three *scientific observations* preceding these questions have been carefully crafted into questions from which the inferences, according to the authors, can only be *God*. Put more simply, the unspoken conclusion we are to infer is, *what else could it be, but God?* This is the backbone of the argument for deism. The enigmatic truth that biology and cosmology remain confounded by these questions has been creatively reconstituted into would be articles of evidence.

Flew/Varghese argue that, “Perhaps the most popular and intuitively plausible argument for God’s existence is the so-called argument from design.” Having now read hundreds of pages of masterfully constructed arguments from this classically trained Oxford philosopher, in my opinion Professor Flew would shudder at the notion of employing “popular” or “intuitively plausible” statements as arguments for or against anything. They write, “What I think the DNA material has done is that it has shown, by almost unbelievable complexity of the arrangements which are needed to produce life, that intelligence must have been involved.”

Consider this passage from *God and Philosophy*, written by Flew in 1966: “Certainly it is proper to feel the awe in the contemplation of the human eye or of the single living cell. But no exploitation, however breathtaking, of the limitations and potentialities of materials would give good ground for inferring Omnipotence.” So what changed? Did complexity become *more complex*? Did design become *better designed*? Is Flew’s qualification, “however breathtaking,” invalidated by the complexity of DNA?

Another cornerstone of any argument for deism is the Anthropic Principle. Flew/Varghese submit the weight of electrons, the

speed of light, and gravitational constants to demonstrate that the universe is too “fine tuned” to be accidental. Again, these observations contribute nothing substantive — they are simply statements about the universe, not packets of data’ — save the same misleading implication *what else could it be, but God?* The authors conclude: “The only satisfactory explanation for the origin of such ‘end-directed, self-replicating’ life as we see on earth is an infinitely intelligent Mind.” The logic proffered fails as an argument because it requires us to accept the *lack* of knowledge *as knowledge*, and the *lack* of evidence *as evidence*. This is *Argumentum ad Ignorantiam*, or, appeal to ignorance. It is also the Burden of Proof Fallacy, which states that if we cannot prove X to be false, then X is true; the inability to disprove X *becomes the proof* of X. The argument is of course invalid.

Bertrand Russell was fond of suggesting that a teapot orbited the sun just beyond Mars; no one can disprove his claim, therefore it is true. If we follow the this line of reasoning we must accept the conclusion that the *more evidence we lack ... the greater the likelihood that God exists*. The argument beckons for *God* to be defined as “*the sum of all knowledge yet acquired*.”

This was the reason Flew wrote *The Presumption of Atheism* back in 1976. It was written to mirror the legal maxim, *Ei incumbit probatio qui dicit, non qui negat*, or “The onus of proof lies on the proposition, not on the opposition.” Flew noted in that book: “If it is to be established that there is a God, then we have to have good grounds for believing that this is indeed so. Until and unless some such grounds are produced we have literally no reason at all for believing.” The *absence of evidence* hardly qualifies as “good grounds” for anything, much less god, and thus our expectations for some epiphanic insight to leap from the pages of this book and help us understand the basis for Professor Flew’s recantation have been thoroughly dashed.

The landscape of science has changed in almost unrecognizable proportions since Flew’s early life. However, it is unreasonable — irrational even — to suggest that Flew’s original position *opposing* complexity as an argument for a Divine Mind was only a matter of *degree*. If complexity is a poor argument for the existence of God (and it is) then the *degree of complexity* is an irrelevant

attribute.

Flew, The Conclusion

As a species our hunger for answers is insatiable. So desperate are we to understand the universe around us that for untold centuries we have refused to accept any “gap” in that understanding. Unexplained phenomena are the spawning grounds for ghost stories, sea monsters, grassy knolls, and a Divine Mind.

Antony Flew understood this as well as anyone. He devoted a lifetime of vigorous intellectual argument *against* presuming God. Today we are asked to accept that he has changed his mind. With asterisks in hand, we accept.

Could we make a cogent argument “pointing to” his age and capacity as factors that might mitigate a change of this magnitude? We could. Are there uncertainties that could warrant a tenable challenge to the motives of those individuals surrounding Flew, with regard to his “conversion” and the curiously construction and authorship of the book? There are. Should the publishers bear any responsibility for preventing misperceptions concerning the disclosure of would-be ghostwriters? They should.

There is little hope of ever reconciling the Antony Flew of 87 years with the Antony Flew of 27 years. Did he change his mind, or did his mind change him?

History will record Antony Flew as a deist; Annis Flew confirmed that for us all. History, I fear, becomes an unwitting conspirator, forever defiled.

With so many varied aspects to this story, it is easy to forget that which matters most. Antony Garrard Newton Flew, philosopher, professor, author, atheist pioneer, and devoted husband, is now gone. For more than 60 years this thinker, this man of great intellect, marched to a different drum and followed the argument. We owe him much.

The last of the old guard, Professor Flew’s festschrift deserves to be written with admiration and respect for a distinguished philosopher. As Annis said to me, her accent reminiscent of British Royalty and her voice never wavering, “I am so very proud to have known him.” ❧





FIG Community Dinner
 Tuesday, June , 2010 6:30 PM
 Bronte Bistro (RSVP Needed by 6/5)



May Meeting
 Tuesday, May 25, 2010, 7:00 PM
 Hannaford Suites Hotel



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

FIG

Our Purpose

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

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



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

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

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

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