

FIG LEAVES

Volume 14 Issue 10

October 2005

October FIG Meeting: Date Change!

Wednesday, 26 October 7:00 PM

Is the US Moving Toward Theocracy?

Rabbi Robert Barr, one of our favorite speakers, will return to FIG to talk about the religious and political campaigns to push our country toward theocracy. He commented: "Yes, I want to speak about the Religious Right in the US - I believe it is a serious issue that threatens our nation."

He will talk about the range of social issues being affected by the political influence of the Religious Right, including such current headline topics as the choice of Supreme Court justices and the efforts to overturn the Oregon law permitting physician-assisted suicide. He will discuss the religious challenges to science in such areas as evolution and stem cell research.

Rabbi Barr's previous talks to FIG on the Ten Commandments and on humanistic Judaism were enthusiastically applauded. Ordained by the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, he has been with Congregation Beth Adam since its beginning 25 years ago. Beth Adam presents Judaism with a humanistic perspective.

-- Joe Levee

November FIG Meeting: Date Change!

Sunday, 20 November 2005

This year is the 100th anniversary of the birth of Jean-Paul Sartre. Our old friend Tim Madigan will discuss the life and writings of this influential humanist, controversialist and existentialist, with a special focus on his "immortal" play, *No Exit*.

Since this event will take place on a **Sunday**, we are planning to show existential movies and videos in the afternoon, take a break for dinner, and return for the talk by Tim at our regular meeting time, 7 PM.

For Good Food and Great Talk - Host a Potluck!

This is an opportunity to open your cherished home for up to 20 people on the second Tuesday (or so) of the month from about 6:30 to about 9 PM. Your guests will provide the food if you provide plates (paper is ok), silverware (plastic is okay) and drinks with cups (& ice). The first Tuesday we have open is for December, with more potlucks available for 2006.

If you would like to host a potluck and have additional questions or would like to volunteer, please contact Nurit Bowman to discuss dates and place.

Hosts for Potlucks Needed!

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Events

(Watch the dates!)

October Meeting

Wednesday, 26 October 7:00 PM
at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, Ohio

November Potluck

Tuesday 8 November 6:30 PM
at the home of

November Meeting

Sunday, 20 November 7:00 PM
at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, Ohio



September Meeting...

What is Going on in Humanism

August Brunzman, Executive Director: Secular Student Alliance



Joe Levee & August Brunzman

which are congregationally structured communities. Felix Adler founded this group in 1876. It was originally called the New York Society for Ethical Culture. They support the ethical societies programs for youth.

The next group is the American Humanist Association (AHA). The group was founded in 1941. Their magazine is *The Humanist*. It provides an annual humanist essay contest for students ages 13 and 25. The AHA also funds internships in Washington, D.C. and certifies *Humanist Celebrants* who can perform legal weddings and other ceremonies, such as welcoming a new member to the human race, or functioning at leaving ceremonies at the end of life..

American Atheists (AA) was founded by militant unbeliever Madalyn Murray O'Hair in 1963 after having filed a lawsuit (Murray v. Curlett) against mandatory Bible reading in public schools. Her suit was combined with other cases and became the famous Abingdon School District case. The Supreme Court found that mandatory Bible reading and school directed prayer were both in violation of the constitutional separation of religion and government. She continued to lead American Atheists until 1995 when she, her son and granddaughter were kidnapped and tragically murdered by a greedy employee who stole the group's treasury. After her death the Leadership was taken over by Ellen Johnson. Fig is an associated member of American Atheists. AA was the principal organizer of the 2002 *Godless Americans March on Washington* and spawned the new organization the Godless Americans Political Action Committee (GAMPAC). AA offers an annual college scholarship and also a Gay/Lesbian college scholarship.

The Center for Inquiry (CFI) was founded in 1980 by Paul Kurtz, a former editor of *The Humanist* magazine. CFI includes the Council For Secular Humanism (CSH), and the 1976 founded Committee For The Scientific Investigation Of Claims Of The Paranormal (CSICOP). A new organization, established in 1995 is the Council For Inquiry conceived as a communications arm. CFI-On Campus also is part of the Center. CFI is responsible for a number of publications: *Free Inquiry*, *Skeptical Inquirer*, *American Rationalist*, and *Philo*. The last is the journal of the Society of Humanist Philosophers. CFI has recently been named as a nongovernmental observer, (NGO) at the United Nations.



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

figleaves@fuse.net;

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

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Memberships run from 1 January to 31 December.

One year: \$25

Family: \$35

Subscription: \$10

If you join during the year, you receive a \$2 discount for each month that has passed.

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



Another activist group of note is the Freedom from Religion Foundation (FFRF). This group was founded in 1978 by Anne Nicolle Gaylor. An important activity of this group is filing lawsuits defending the wall of separation between religion and government. They also offer an annual essay contest for college students and college bound high schools seniors. Winners essays are published in their membership newsletter.



The International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) is an umbrella organization for national and local humanist organizations founded in 1952 in Amsterdam. In 2004 it created the IHEU-Appignani Humanist Center for Bioethics at the United

Nations which will promote the humanist view on bioethics to diplomats and nongovernmental organizations.

The Humanist Institute (HI) was established in 1982 as the North American Committee for Humanism/Humanist Institute. It was one of the earliest coalition attempts of our movement. HI offers 3-year graduate level courses for people interested in expanding their understanding of humanism and publishes a journal, *Humanism Today*. The Institute for Humanist Studies (IHS) averages \$130,000 in grants to humanist, atheists, and freethought groups in the US and around the world. HIS sponsors the *Continuum of Humanist Education*, which offers online, courses on humanism and provides free web space to humanist groups. The Fig website, <www.freeinquirygroup.org> is hosted by IHS

The World Transhumanist Association (WTA) provides an interdisciplinary approach to understanding and evaluating the possibilities for overcoming human biological limitations through science and technology. Founded in 1998, the WTA has a Transhumanist Student Network, which gives an annual award for a best undergraduate paper.

The Secular Student Alliance (SSA) was founded in 2000. They provide professional organizing support and edu-



cational opportunities to secular and skeptic student groups on campuses across the country. The SSA presents awards to student activist and campus groups at its annual conference.

A Secular Coalition for America (SCA) was organized in 2003 by four national humanist and atheist organizations under the auspices of Herb Silverman. It is working to establish lobbying efforts on Capitol Hill to make the small voice of unbelievers heard in the cacophony of the religious and fundamentalist right.

This list and survey covers most of the major groups and the most active groups. I would point out that many of the founders or activists of these groups have at one time or another addressed Fig as guest speakers.

-- Reported by George Maurer



Atheists Are Everywhere

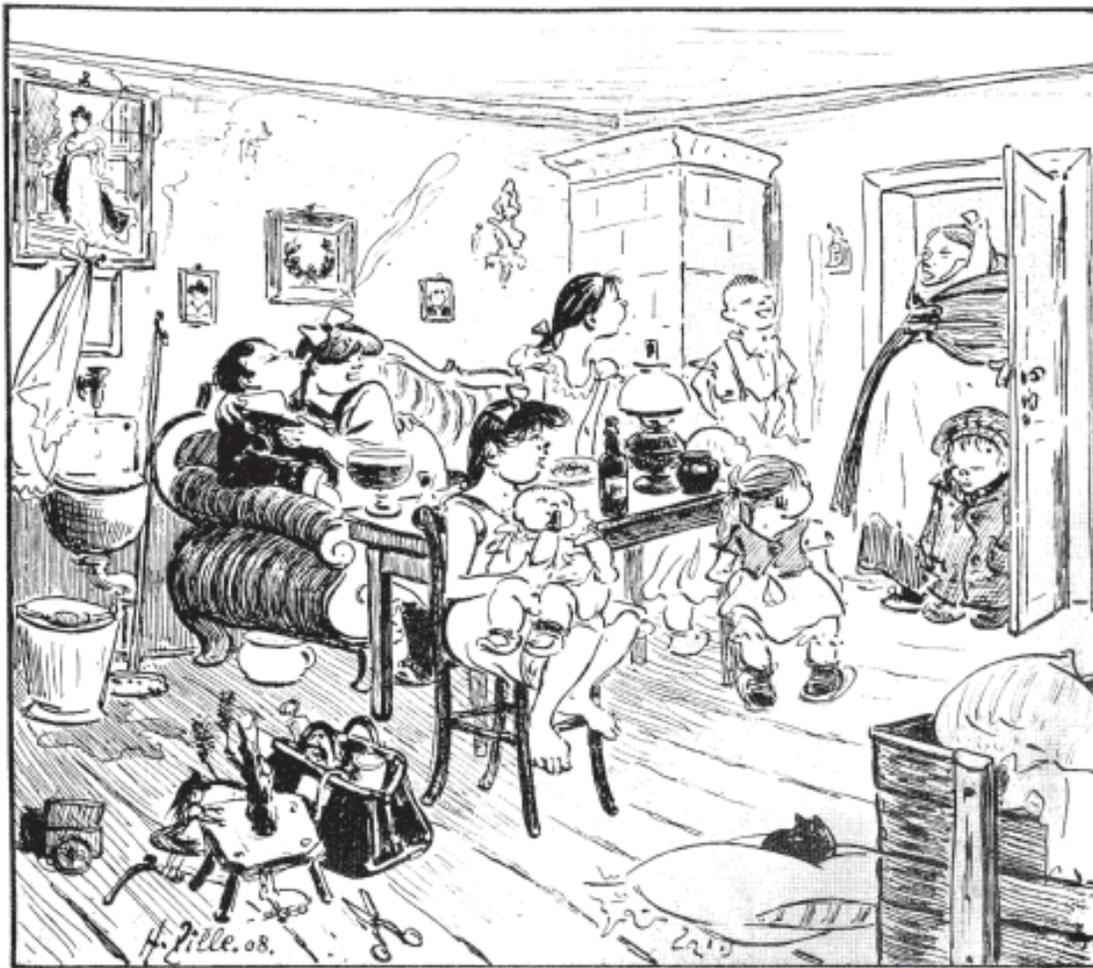
There are Atheists in foxholes,
Atheists in hurricanes;
There are Atheists in all the roles
Denied by your refrains.

Atheists are your fellow citizens
People who love and laugh and cry.
Atheists are your relatives and friends;
Don't insult them with a lie.

Atheists in many foxholes served
And some have had to die;
Give Atheists the thanks deserved;
Don't dismiss them with a lie.

Atheists are all around you;
They work, they help, they care,
And no matter what you think is true
Atheists are everywhere;
And no matter what you think is true:
They do not want your prayer

by Edwin Kagin, 12 September 2005



Stork lady at rest.

“Don’t count on Mama for this one. She’s been weeks in the slammer, already, for making miscarriages.

Heinrich Zille(1908)



THINGS TO DO....

THINGS TO SEE....



New Exorcism Film Highlights Deadly Rituals.

A new film about exorcism is set to be released on September 9. *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, starring Laura Linney and Campbell Scott, is about a priest accused of negligence resulting in the death of a nineteen-year-old woman during an exorcism. While demons, devils, and exorcisms are obviously great grist for horror films, *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* is interesting because it shows (however fictionally) the potentially dangerous consequences of exorcisms.

As the film opens across the country, a Romanian priest stands accused of just such a crime in real-life.

To Read More about this film visit: www.csicop.org and <http://www.csicop.org/specialarticles/exorcist-rituals.html>

Teaching Children Today About Good and Evil: Children’s Testimonies from the Holocaust

Shawn Jeffers, Education Coordinator
The Center for Holocaust and Humanity Education,
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

Will talk on **Thursday, October 20, 4:30-6:30 pm**
Mayerson Hall Auditorium on the campus of Hebrew Union
College, 3101 Clifton Ave, Cincinnati

Shawn Jeffers, trained at Auschwitz Jewish Center in
Oswiecim, Poland.

Sarah Weiss, trained at Yad VaShem International
Educators’ Seminar, Jerusalem, Israel.

Together, Shawn and Sarah will be presenting fascinating insights into teaching children around the world and in cross-cultural environments shared from their personal international experiences.



Scopes 2005: Design Theory Faces Legal Test

by Suzanne Sataline, *The Wall Street Journal*, 22 September 2005, p. B1

suzanne.sataline@wsj.com

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Debates about the boundaries of science and religion that marked the famous Scopes trial in 1925 are likely to unfold next week at a Harrisburg, Pa., federal courthouse in the first legal test of an anti-evolution doctrine known as “intelligent design.”

Aided by the American Civil Liberties Union, 11 parents of Dover, Pa., schoolchildren have filed a federal lawsuit against that town’s school board, accusing it of violating the principle of separation of church and state. The school board requires that at the beginning of the 9th grade unit on evolution, teachers are supposed to read a statement to a biology class: “Because Darwin’s theory is a theory, it continues to be tested as new evidence is discovered. The theory is not a fact...Intelligent Design is an explanation of the origin of life that differs from Darwin’s view.”

Science teachers balked and many Dover parents were angered as well. The plaintiffs are asking the court to void the intelligent-design policy in the class.

The intelligent-design doctrine asserts that some natural processes are so complex and ingenious that they must have been created by an intelligent or supernatural cause -- perhaps God -- rather than the randomness of natural selection.

Kitzmiller et al. v. Dover Area School District is expected to draw national media attention as well as expert witnesses from Brown University and other prominent institutions. The trial, slated to last five weeks, will be monitored by scientists, educators and politicians around the country. The trial will not be televised.

The outcome is likely to influence state school boards in Kansas and Ohio, which have moved toward allowing teachers to critique Darwin’s theory, as well as policies in many individual school districts. “The results of the Dover trial will be extremely significant for American public school education,” said Eugenie Scott, executive director of the nonprofit National Center for Science Education, based in

California, an organization that advocates teaching evolution and advised the plaintiff’s team on science matters.

“If the judge rules in favor of the plaintiffs, then this will truly throw sand in the gears of efforts to get intelligent design taught at the high school level,” said Ms. Scott. “If the judge rules...for the district, I think this will give a green light to school districts that would like to introduce some form of creationism in the classroom.”

The Seattle-based Discovery Institute, the leading backers of intelligent design, say they are delving into scientific mysteries to explain such biological developments as the workings of cells. “We don’t say God designed,” said John West, associate director for the institute’s Center for Science and Culture. “It’s not about trying to reconcile science with some religious text. It’s about this longstanding question in biology about the appearance of design.”

The trial also has potential ramifications for public higher education, where the evolution-creation dispute is heating up. The University of California at Berkeley faces a lawsuit from students at Christian private schools who say they can’t go to the prestigious campus because the science courses they took -- based on anti-evolution textbooks -- don’t fulfill its admission requirements. At Ohio State University, a review of a doctoral dissertation in science education by an intelligent-design proponent was put on hold this spring after faculty protests. And at Iowa State University, where a faculty member who teaches astronomy wrote a book contending that the Earth must have been created by design, more than 120 faculty signed a petition this year saying that intelligent design is not science.

Critics of intelligent design, who include most mainstream biologists, say it is religion masquerading as science -- essentially, the latest evolution of creationism. But Christian educators and intelligent-design backers were heartened last month when President Bush said that both sides of the origins debate should be taught. “It is a legitimate controversy among scientists and credible scientists believe that intelligent design is a better explanation for complex biological systems than we have seen,” said Richard Thompson, defense attorney for the Dover school board and chief counsel with the not-for-profit Christian law group, the Thomas More Law Center.

The Dover Area School District was the first in the nation to include a mention of intelligent design in the science curriculum. For now, the theory isn’t actually taught.

“The intent [by Dover officials] is to systematically destroy the theory of evolution because the theory tells the



A Roman Catholic Homily

I am persuaded that we are stuck with an adolescent God. She is in fact a teenager, a couple years older than the inestimable Fiona [his acolyte]. As to the question whether She, God that is, not Fiona, will ever grow up, I regret to have to report to you on this Lenten Sunday in February that such an eventuality seems most unlikely.

I argue this position based on the observation that no one in our experience is more exuberant, more energetic, more playful, more outrageous, more fanciful, and more excessive than young women of our species. Succinctly, who is more inclined in our experience to show off than a teenage girl person? Who, it might be added, has more reason to show off?

How, gentle souls, can we avoid the conclusion that Our God is an exuberant and incorrigible show-off? Consider the wild variety of species that inhabit our tiny speck of solar dust. Consider the inordinate and totally unjustified number of solar systems and galaxies, black holes and quarks, protons and weak forces, great attractors and star clusters which constitute the universe as we know it. Who could possibly deny that this display is excessive?

An exercise, I insist, in adolescent excessiveness.

This adolescent God of ours knows more math than the brightest of our mathematicians—an allowable phenomenon. Surely, nonetheless, it was immoderate to design our universe so it fit formulae which the mathematicians are only now deriving. I put it to you, that is like an adolescent saying, “I know more than you do, nah! nah!”

Moreover, I understand that the world operates according to the principles of quantum mechanics, which no one really comprehends and which are highly uncertain anyway. If quantum mechanics and statistics are not a hilarious and indeed atrocious joke of a comic God, they seem utterly pointless.

I am told by astronomers, a species of scholar whose erudition awes me, that it is likely that our universe is one of millions and perhaps billions that this youthful comedienne has fashioned so that by laws of chance one or many of them (who knows) would eventually sustain rational life.

I have an image of Herself playing with a cosmic matchbox, striking one match after another and clapping Her hands joyously when one of Her many big bangs actually produces a cosmos on which in due course playmates for Her, a crowd with which She can hang, will come into existence.

How can we possibly deny that this is the kind of fun and games we expect of adolescents and especially adolescent women?

Will she grow up? Will she mature? Will she settle down and “act right”?

It is dangerous to make predictions about God. Yet I can observe that She’s had an eternity to mature and shows no sign of doing so. It’s probably too late.

I’m engaging in God talk, as you doubtless perceive, metaphorical approximations which give us a hint of Who God is and What She wants. My metaphors, however, are not exaggerations. Quite the contrary, they underestimate the exuberance of our excessive, playful, and show-off God.

It has been remarked by those who must deal with young women on a full-time basis, their mothers to be blunt, that I cannot possibly be comparing God to young persons who desperately lust for an expensive new dress and then, upon finding in the mall—the normal habitat of such beings—that it has been marked down, promptly lose all interest in it.

Metaphors are not strict comparisons. Nonetheless I insist that such behavior, trying as it is to those who must tend to these charming if on occasion feckless creatures, does represent an unpredictable exuberance which may be revelatory.

I suggest to you that reflection on this image of our ever-youthful God, a God for whom it is always spring, and early spring at that, might just see us through to the end of a Chicago February.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

— Andrew Greeley, *Wages of Sin* (NY: Jove Books, 1992) pp. 42-45

Quote

Dawkins’s collection is really interesting and does raise absolutely crucial issues. In recent years, his attention has swung from writing about science for a popular audience to waging an all-out attack on Christianity. In the name of Darwinism, he has become the scourge of the religious, the atheist’s answer to Billy Graham. At every opportunity, he preaches the hard truth—there is no God, religion is a superstition, and Darwin proves just this.

— Michael Ruse in a review of *A Devil’s Chaplain: Reflections on Hope, Lies, Science, and Love* (2003) in *Reports of the National Center for Science Education* (Mar/Apr. 2004) p. 39

.....Unquote



Planetary Humanism: *What Does This Mean?*

By Bill Cooke

Over the course of the past century, humanism has been given various prefixes, from “scientific” to “evolutionary” to “secular.” None, however, matter as much as the current prefix: “planetary.” It places us fairly and squarely on our planet, our pale-blue dot, which astronauts say is indescribably beautiful when seen from space. And by speaking of planetary humanism, we give full recognition that we are all on this planet together. It’s not just about humans. All species on the planet are inextricably interwoven in complex webs of interdependence. We are only beginning to grasp the significance of this.

Planetary humanism was given its finest expression in the Humanist Manifesto 2000. Building on earlier statements of humanism, including the Declaration of Interdependence (1988), Humanist Manifesto 2000 outlined the central importance of understanding that planetary problems can only be solved at a planetary level, and then went on to offer a practical charter for the realization of that vision. As part of outlining a new global agenda, the manifesto called for:

- backing the United Nations as the principal coercive agency of the world;
- recognizing overpopulation as one of the most fundamental causes of world distress;
- support for the existing international conventions regarding human rights;
- fighting tax avoidance among the largest multinational corporations;
- developing a suitably transnational system of international law; and
- greater effort to raise awareness of and to combat environmental deterioration.

In order to put this agenda into effect, the Humanist Manifesto 2000 advocated:

- an effective global governance based on popular elections;
- a workable international security system;
- increasing the powers of the World Court;
- the creation of an effective planetary environmental monitoring body;
- planning an international system of taxation for the sole purpose of assisting the underdeveloped nations;
- development of global institutions to monitor and regulate the behavior of multinational

corporations; and

- keep alive the free market of ideas.

Humanist Manifesto 2000 was a visionary plea for rationality, common effort, and global governance. It was signed by a wide variety of some of the most reputable academic and other leaders in the world at the time.

As if choreographed, the Humanist Manifesto 2000 appeared only shortly before the United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan announced the Millennium Development Goals, an ambitious program for the eradication of poverty. The MDGs were announced on September 8, 2000, and all 191 member-nations of the UN have agreed to ratify these goals by 2015. The goals are:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.
2. Achieve universal primary education.
3. Promote gender equality and empower women.
4. Reduce child mortality.
5. Improve maternal health.
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.
7. Ensure environmental sustainability.
8. Develop a global partnership for development.

These goals are not simply a set of fine words, although they could easily end up as little more than that if the will to implement them falters. The United Nations has been devoting as many resources as it has available to bringing these goals about. It is coordinating the work of inter- and nongovernmental organizations around the world to bring these goals to fruition. Needless to say, many of the governments which have signed their assent to these goals are less than conspicuous in realizing them. Mike Moore, former head of the World Trade Organization, has noted how modest the cost of implementating the MDGs would be, if the will to do so existed. Each of these goals could be achieved at about the same cost of the subsidies the European Community provides each year to insulate their farmers from cheap imports.

The United Nations decided, very wisely, to come together five years later to see how the Goals were progressing, and which needed extra attention. This happened at the UN World Summit, held in New York in September 2005. Five years on, and with ten years left to go to implement the goals, it is apparent there is a massive amount of work still to do. As if we need to remind us of the relevance of these points, the UN has issued a report card of progress. It notes that someone dies of starvation every 3.6





seconds (Goal 1); 115 million children receive no education of any sort (Goal 2); two thirds of the world's illiterate are women (Goal 3); four million babies die each year before they are a month old (Goal 4); a woman dies in pregnancy or childbirth every minute (Goal 5); over three million people (500,000 being children) died of AIDS in 2004 alone (Goal 6); 940,000 square kilometers of forest were destroyed in the 1990s alone (Goal 7); and 61 percent of aid from the G8 nations never reaches the target recipients, being chewed up in goods and services from domestic suppliers or administrative costs (Goal 8). Sustainable development and world peace are clearly not possible with such conditions. As part of their pledge, all developed countries have promised to raise their development aid budget to 0.7 percent of gross national income by 2015. This modest level was originally promised in 1970 and has still to be met by most countries. On the face of it, the promise by the G8 nations to cancel all debts held by the poorest nations is a major step in the right direction. It turns out, however, that the debts have not actually been cancelled, it is just that the G8 countries have assumed the repayment burden. It will be worthwhile to watch whether this expenditure is accounted for as development assistance.

The Millennium Development Goals are clearly compatible with the principles of planetary humanism and the vision outlined in Humanist Manifesto 2000, so that working toward their successful implementation is one of the best

ways to give practical expression to twenty-first century humanism. Given this, generating public knowledge of and support for the MDGs should be seen as a priority for humanists over the next ten years. No better practical application of the vision of the Humanist Manifesto 2000 could be conceived.

Bill Cooke is Asia-Pacific Coordinator for the Center for Inquiry and a senior editor of *Free Inquiry* magazine. He is a signatory of the Humanist Manifesto 2000.

So the damned shuttle was a mistake!

This week, NASA Administrator Michael Griffin told USA Today that both the space shuttle and the International Space Station were mistakes. His candor is admirable, but after all, these were not Bush initiatives, and Griffin's opinion of them was known before he was tapped for the top job. What is disturbing is that Griffin pledged to complete the ISS before the shuttle is retired in 2010. There are no plans to send a shuttle to service the world's greatest telescope, but the schedule calls for 18 shuttle flights to finish the ISS, plus 10 ISS supply missions that's an average of 5.6 shuttle flights per year. Anyone who would bet on getting 28 flights out of these rickety-old jalopies has been living on some other planet. Even with a crew of just five, that's 140 rolls of the dice. That's a big gamble to support a space station that is now acknowledged to be of little value.

-- *What's New*, Robert L. Park, 30 September 2005

The Science Book Club schedule for 2005

We will continue to meet in room 3A at the Cincinnati downtown library at 2:30 on the 4th Sunday of each month except where noted.

Sunday Oct 23 - *Where Mathematics Comes From* by George Lakoff and Rafael Nunez, 2000

Sunday Nov 20 (3rd Sunday) - *Eyes on the Universe : a History of the Telescope* by Isaac Asimov, 1975

NOTE: meeting place: Buffalo Jack's Restaurant is located at 137 S. High St. in Covington, Ohio, 30 miles north of Dayton. Take exit 74 off I-75 at Troy and go 8 miles NW on SR-41. This runs into S. High St. in Covington. For those who would rather car pool than drive on their own, we are planning on meeting at the Rave Cinemas shopping center parking lot at 1:15. just off the Union Center Blvd exit , the first exit off I-75 north of I-275. If anyone needs more information about this meeting or others, please call Bryan at (513) 385-6795.

Sunday Dec 18 (3rd Sunday) - *The Science of Good and Evil : Why People Cheat, Gossip, Care, Share, and Follow the Golden Rule* by Michael Shermer, 2004





BOOK REVIEW

The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic by Chalmers Johnson (New York: Henry Holt & Co. 2004)

President Bush claims, "our nation is the greatest force for good in history." At least he said so in a speech on 31 August 2002. In contrast, Chalmers Johnson sees our country as, "a new Rome, the greatest colossus in history, no longer bound by international law, the concerns of allies, or any constraints on the use of military force." (p. 3). The United States has become a militaristic empire, with 725 plus army and navy bases around the world, with fleets of warships stationed in every major sea and ocean, and the ability arbitrarily to enforce our wishes anywhere on the globe. Indeed, the author may be said to characterize the United States as an "evil empire."

Instead of disarming since the collapse of the Soviet Union, as was done by every other major industrial power, the United States has insisted on enlarging its arsenal of weapons of aggression and mass destruction. What is more, instead of reducing our overseas bases from Okinawa to Germany we have held on to these "Cold War" structures, and added more throughout the world. Our political elites and our military appear to wish to dominate other peoples and control regions merely because they think we can. The Pentagon constantly invents new reasons for keeping and even enlarging bases which have long outlived their original objectives. The creation of new bases then requires the acquisition of more new outposts to protect the existent bases. Students of history will recognize the models of the Roman and British Empires of the past.

Since the dismembering of the Soviet Union we have waged wars rather freely and without hindrance. Our ostensible reasons or propaganda have often been unpersuasive or even deceptive. Chalmers Johnson claims these wars were in fact imperialist wars, defended as humanitarian interventions, even for women's liberation, or to resist unconventional weapons. At the same time we have acquired new bases and expanded our forces from old allies (e.g. Germany, Turkey) to autocratic monarchies and dictatorships, (e.g. Qatar, Kuwait, Uzbekistan.)

The author speculates on the reasons for our aggression on Iraq, accepting that weapons of mass destruction and the overthrow of the dictator were mere excuses. He suggests four possibilities which are not mutually exclusive. (1) We simply want to control the sources of oil, strategically and imperially to counter potential challenges from Europe or China. (2) We attacked Iraq to further the interests of the Israeli right, who have a long range interest in maintaining their regional military superiority. (3) The attack was a political ploy to bolster Bush's questionable legitimacy and to insure his re-election. (4) It is an imperial and military strategy to acquire long term bases in the Middle East and to dominate the region. The last explains the lack of an exit strategy, as we plan to create permanent military bases there, which will allow us to dominate neighboring Iran and Syria. This also helps to explain the continuing insurgent resistance to our occupation.

Chalmers Johnson describes an empire that is overreaching itself. An empire which has combat troops stationed and is fighting wars from Korea to Central Asia to southeast Europe to Colombia. A country which is insisting on economic globalization fashioned to its own advantage and interest. An economy which is indifferent to the interests and suffering of the third world. Moreover, we are in the process of wrecking our economy and industry by becoming the export market for the rest of the world, while wasting our substance on wars of control. We arm the Saddam Hussains and Talibans when it seems in our interest, then to make war against them when that pleases us. When we have made the entire world our enemies, they will band together to defeat us.

Is Chalmers Johnson right? Of course not, his is an extreme view which is probably held by many thinkers outside the United States. Is this book worth reading? It is most certainly an important counter to the self-satisfied image of the "good" country we are all prone to indulge in.

- Wolf Roder

:Quote.....
I was reading about how the Eisenhower Administration made "In God We Trust" the national motto and made it mandatory that our nation print this slogan on all our currency. Well, that seems perfectly natural. Why not print a profession of faith directly onto the face of the god in which most believing Americans place their faith.
-Tom Keller, a Christian
.....Unquote:



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FIG

Our Purpose

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

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



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

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

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

For more information, write the Free Inquiry Group at the address above, e-mail figinfo@gofigger.org, or leave a message at (513) 557-3836. Visit our web site at gofigger.org.