

FIG Leaves

Volume 12 Issue 8

September 2003

September Meeting : on Tuesday 9 July

Dying with Dignity: A Humane Choice
Presented by Dr. Faye Girsh

The Free Inquiry Group is changing its September schedule because we have an unexpected opportunity to hear Faye Grish, a national authority on the legal and ethical aspects of dying.

Dr. Faye Girsh is Senior Vice President of End-of-Life Choices, a name recently changed from the Hemlock Society USA. From 1996 to 2002 she was the organizations's President and increased membership from 18,000 to 30,000 and the annual budget from \$600,000 to two million.

Before moving to the organization's headquarters in Denver in 1996, Dr. Girsh was a clinical and forensic psychologist practicing in San Diego. Having earned her doctorate from Harvard University, she taught at Morehouse College and at the University of Chicago. She has published extensively in legal and psychological journals including more than thirty articles on the right to die. She has appeared in numerous media and has spoken in Australia, Switzerland, England and Canada.

In her role of working with the ACLU for litigants in civil and criminal cases, she became involved with the right-to-die movement in 1983 when evaluating a young quadriplegic woman who wished to die through refusal of food and hydration. She will tell us about this case.

Dr Girsh will speak to us on Dying with Dignity: A Humane Choice. She will be talking about what choices people have at the end of life, why assisted dying should be one of them, and what is going on in Oregon. She will tell us how her organization helps people short of changing the law. Her talk will take place at the Vernon Manor Hotel, 400 Oak Street in Cincinnati, at 7 pm on Tuesday, 9 September.

Dr. Girsh will also be speaking at the First Unitarian Church, 536 Linton Avenue, on

.....
• The meaning of DHS' code orange:
• Be scared, be very scared. But go on with
• your lives.
.....
— National Journal
.....

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Events

September Potluck

Note change of date!
Tuesday, 23 September
6:30 PM at the home of

October Potluck

Tuesday, 14 October
6:30 PM at the home of

Angela Seidel Memorial Service
Fig members might like to know, there will be a musical memorial service for Angela Seidel on Saturday, 18 October, at 3 PM at the First Unitarian Church on 536 Linton Avenue. Some of her former students will sing, and we will play several selections from her on tape.



Previews of coming attractions

Tuesday, 28 October

Was Einstein a Humanist? William B. Jensen, Department of Chemistry, University of Cincinnati

Albert Einstein (1879-1955) was more than a famous physicist. He was also a cultural icon, whose prestige and image is still invoked by mystics, liberal theologians, humanists, atheists, and cultural relativists in support of their particular causes. What exactly were Einstein's views on the nature of God and the role of man in the universe, and are his views consistent with the tenants of modern humanism? These and related questions will be explored, based primarily on a review of Max Jammer's 1999 book, *Einstein and Religion*.

Tuesday, 11 November (note date!)

On Robert G. Ingersoll. Tom Flynn, editor *Free Inquiry*

The son of a preacher, Ingersoll (1833-1899) was inspired by Thomas Paine's struggle for political and religious freedom. He admired and followed Paine's major work, *Age of Reason* which laid out the basic thought for unbelief and doubting the Bible. Ingersoll became a lawyer and famous agnostic. Despite denying the tenets of Christianity he became a well known and admired lecturer and orator, who keynoted the 1876 Democratic convention. His birthplace in Dresden, New York, is a museum and memorial.

Other News

Tim Kelly informs me that the Humanist Perspective program on access has been given new time slots. Look for it Fridays a 2 pm on channel 8, and Tuesdays at 7 am on channel 24. A skeptical view of crop circles in Adams county is to be on a program.

The Universe revealed by science shows humanity as an infinitesimal speck in space and time with random chance as an important factor affecting events.

— Victor Stenger, *Free Inquiry* 23 (Summer 2003) p. 40

Uppa U.S., eh?

On behalf of Canadians everywhere, I'd like to offer an apology to the United States of America. We haven't been getting along very well recently and for that, I am truly sorry. I'm sorry we called George Bush a moron. He is a moron but it wasn't nice of us to point it out. If it's any consolation, the fact that he's a moron shouldn't reflect poorly on the people of America. After all, it's not like you actually elected him.

I'm sorry about our soft wood lumber. Just because we have more trees than you doesn't give us the right to sell you timber that's cheaper and better than your own. I'm sorry we beat you in Olympic hockey. In our defense, I guess our excuse would be that our team was much, much, much better than yours.

I'm sorry we burnt down your White House during the war of 1812. I notice you've rebuilt it. It's very nice. I'm sorry about your beer. I know we had nothing to do with your beer, but I feel your pain.

I'm sorry about our waffling on Iraq. I mean, when you're going up against a crazed dictator, you wanna have your friends by your side. I realize it took more than two years before you guys pitched in against Hitler, but that was different. Everyone knew he had weapons.

And finally on behalf of all Canadians, I'm sorry we're constantly apologizing for things in a passive-aggressive way, which is really a thinly veiled criticism. We sincerely hope that you're not upset over this. We've seen what you do to countries you're upset with. Thank you.

-- Rick Mercer on CBC-TV's "This Hour has 22 Minutes"

FIG Leaves - Editors welcome thoughtful articles, letters, reviews, reports, anecdotes, and cartoons. Submit in Electronic format via the internet - figleaves@fuse.net; 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. All material printed in FIG Leaves may be reproduced in similar publications of non-profit groups which grant FIG Leaves reciprocal reprinting rights as long as proper credit is clearly attributed to FIG Leaves and the authors and do not necessarily reflect opinions of the editor or the Free Inquiry Group, inc., its board, or officers.

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FIG Meeting of July 22,2003

Speaker: Wolf Roder, Professor Emeritus of Geography,
University of Cincinnati

A History of Zionism: The Political Search for a Jewish Homeland.

In the 18th Century, Judaism was strictly a religion. Norman Levitt, paraphrasing Voltaire, noted that: "to the end of the 18th century, the European Jewish community was a very model for the persistence of unthinking faith, suffocating ritual, and rationally unjustifiable cultural habit; Voltaire mocked Judaism as the ultimate bastion of obscurantism, superstition and resistance to enlightenment and clarity of thought." Levitt's purpose in quoting this critical appraisal was to emphasize what a drastic change took place within a hundred years when many of the ideas of the enlightenment were adopted by Jewish intellectuals. This was referred to as *haskalah*, meaning enlightenment. One of the promoters of this change in thought was the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. He encouraged the Jewish community to get beyond the confines of the ghetto. If they could not do so physically at least to rid themselves of the ghetto mentality.

This was the century of the American and French Revolutions. The latter brought emancipation to the Jews of France. Prior to this time, occupations in which Jews could engage were extremely limited; e.g., they could not own land so they could not engage in farming beyond what they could do to feed themselves and many other jobs were restricted to gentiles. At the French Revolution these restrictions were abolished. A similar development occurred in England and Germany at about the same time.

Several options became available to formerly ghettoized Jews. One of these was to modernize the religion, another was to modernize the person by becoming a rational and enlightened individual, and abandon the tenets of the faith without abandoning their Jewishness. Another possibility was baptism in the Christian faith. The composer and musician Felix Mendelssohn chose the latter option. He was the grandson of the Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. Also adopting this option was the great German poet Heinrich Heine.

The *haskalah* did not spread to the Jewish community in Eastern Europe. Until the end of the 19th century most of Europe's Jews lived in the three major empires controlling this part of the world: Aus-

tro-Hungary, Tsarist Russia, and the Ottoman Empire.

There were forerunners to Zionism and it is interesting to note who these were. The first was Rabbi Judah Alkali who lived during the first three quarters of the 19th century. In the 1840's he advocated the physical return of the Jews to Jerusalem. His ideas put him at odds with the orthodox because the return to the Holy land must await the coming of the Messiah. Alkali himself moved to Palestine in 1871. His writings helped to pave the way for Zionism.

The next forerunner was the Rabbi Zvi Khalischer who was born in Pozen in 1795 and lived until 1874. He lived on the boundary between the enlightened western Jews and the more backward eastern Jews. He wrote in Hebrew and his watchword was "self-redemption." He meant by this that Jews should not wait for the appearance of the Messiah to redeem themselves. Khalischer looked around and asked to which nation do Jews belong. He found that Jews belonged to the nation in which they lived. They were Prussians, Germans, Russians, or Poles. The emancipated ones took on the language of the country in which they lived.

The third forerunner was Moses Hess who was born in western Germany and wrote in German. He was a collaborator of Marx and Engels but later broke with them. He continued as a revolutionary and was sentenced to death in the revolution of 1848 but the sentence was not carried out. He was greatly influenced by what happened in Italy in 1862 when the revolutionaries liberated the Papal States from the rule of the Pope and created a secular united Italy. This so impressed Moses Hess that he wrote *Rome and Jerusalem*, in which he advocated liberation should come to Jerusalem.

Wolf then shifted direction to discuss the rise of nationalism and imperialism and its effect on the rise of Zionism. The 19th century was the time when nationalism began to emerge. In South America the countries threw off Spanish colonial rule between 1815 and 1830 (except Cuba which remained under Spanish rule until 1897). In Europe the independence of Greece was aided by volunteers, the most noted of whom was the English poet, Lord Byron, who died during the fight for independence of the Greeks from the Ottoman Turks.

The nation was defined as a territory in which the inhabitants spoke a common language. Many of the nations we know today were formed during that

time, viz., Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, etc. However, the Jews had neither a common language nor a common territory.

The latter part of the nineteenth century also saw the rise of imperialism. A good example of this growth is illustrated by our own United States from the time of the purchase of Louisiana and the Northwest Territory from the French in 1803 to the march westward under the banner of Manifest Destiny. The march westward went from the Appalachians to the Pacific Ocean and beyond to Hawaii and the Philippines.

While we were marching our way across the North American continent, the Russians were doing much the same thing across Asia through Siberia and even beyond onto the North American continent. That portion we eventually got back with the purchase of Alaska. England, France and Germany divided up Africa. In effect the European powers had divided up the rest of the world. This was the age of imperialism. In all this expansion no one ever asked the native peoples what their wishes were.

Wolf emphasized that Zionism is Jewish liberation and nationalism. But it also incorporated the 19th century imperialism which allowed Europeans to occupy the world and treat the natives as sub-humans.

In the 1880's a series of pogroms rolled over the Jewish lands. The Tsar's soldiers were encouraged to sweep into Jewish settlements to kill and burn and to drive the inhabitants out. A flood of refugees poured into western Europe and the United States. A smaller numbers began trickling into Palestine. These traditional, eastern Jews were received with hostility and fear by their compatriots in western Europe. Assimilation was difficult and slow. In the United States, because of the melting pot tradition, the immigrants found more acceptance and help among their co-religionists.

In 1896 Theodor Herzl emerged as an advocate of Zionism with his book *The Jewish State*. Herzl was born in Budapest and thus an Austrian. Living in an empire with nine official languages, it was easy to think of the Jews as a nation. The state he envisioned would be modern, western, democratic and not necessarily in Jerusalem. As a European of his time his advocacy completely ignored the likelihood that natives might live wherever he thought to plant a colony.

Herzl convoked the First Zionist Congress in 1897. Many western European Jews flatly rejected Zionism. They feared being marked as foreigners and

lose the recently acquired equal rights.

Some Orthodox Jews rejected the idea of Palestine and preferred waiting for the Messiah, but would accept a refuge anyplace else. Herzl became the ambassador of Zionism. He negotiated with the Foreign Minister of Russia for a place and to get the pogroms stopped. He talked to the Turks about Palestine, and to the British about apart of Egypt or any place in their empire.

Eventually, in August 1903 the British offered the Zionist Congress almost five thousand square miles in the highlands of Kenya. This is part of the region which later became the notorious White Highlands settlements. It is known to history as the Uganda Affair, because the British were looking for economic activity along the railroad they had constructed from Mombasa to the Uganda colony. I took the Zionist Congress until 1906 to reject the Uganda offer by a narrow vote. Native rights were not the issue. When all was argued and debated, the Zionists wanted Palestine and nothing but Palestine.

-- George Maurer

Quote.....

Ethical Systems

The idea that ethical systems may be constructed as mere human artifacts, in recognition that the very existence of our species is merely a matter of blind chance, is a rarefied notion. It is an intellectual exercise that may appeal to a sophisticated elite deeply attuned to enlightenment values, but it is not easily swallowed by most people. Even those without sectarian doctrinal commitments quail at the idea that morality is simply an arbitrary product of human whim rather than a code of universal and objective laws. Despite a litany of denial from liberal religionists and conciliatory biologists alike, evolutionary theory, presented soberly and honestly, subverts the foundational view of morality. This metaphysical corrosiveness haunts the exposition of evolutionary ideas, even if it is never explicitly pointed out. Distressed parents who harp on this point are, perhaps, more perceptive than the scientists who seek to calm their fears. On one side is the terror of Dostoevsky— "If there is no God, then all things are possible!"-- on the other, the nihilistic arrogance of the Marquis de Sade.

-- Norman Levitt, *Prometheus Bedeviled* (1999) p. 71

.....Unquote:

From the Editor:

We are printing the Massimo Pigliucci's essay on the topic of "Brights" in this issue. He explains the intention to call or label the collection of people who go by the various terms unbeliever, rationalist, skeptic, agnostic, atheist, secular humanist, naturalist, materialist, freethinker, with one collective noun, Bright. Which immediately raises the question what are all the other people? Non-brights, dulls? There has been a fair amount of discussion on the topic in the press and on the internet. Michael Shermer and Daniel Dennett have written in support of the issue.

We probably shall need to discuss the subject sometime in the future. Meanwhile, you may want to comment on being a Bright by writing the editor of FigLeaves. You can do that with pen on paper, or by e-mail to <figleaves@fuse-net>.



Are you a bright?

By Massimo Pigliucci, no 41,
September 2003

It is time for me to come out of the closet... I am a bright. No, I didn't say "I am bright," that would be too blatant even for my notoriously inflated ego. Rather, I am following the suggestion of Mynga Futrell and

Paul Geisert to use "bright" as a noun, not an adjective. Let me explain.

Futrell and Geisert are long-time activists for what most people refer to as secular humanism, freethought, or atheism. They put a lot of effort in defense of the rights of what often are referred to as the "godless," or the "unbelievers." The problem is, look at that list of words I just laid out for you. Most of them have a negative connotation, or sound so threatening that they inspire a knee-jerk reaction from most people, including your neighbors.

"Unbeliever"? But we do believe in a lot of things, except they do not include a benevolent deity looking over our shoulders (and, it seems, particularly interested in what we do in our bedrooms). "Godless"? Would you refer to somebody who doesn't believe in unicorns as "unicornless"? "Atheist"? That, in the classical and most benevolent meaning of the term, means a-theist, without a belief in a deity. But, again, how many people feel compelled (not to mention proud) of labeling themselves as "a-unicornists"?

You get the point. Futrell and Geisert wanted a word to label their stance that has a positive feeling, something that could make you proud to say "I am ..." in other people's company, and — even better — that would make your company ask: "what's that?" I have to admit that when I came across the bright movement (www.the-brights.net) I was a bit skeptical, and just a tiny bit annoyed at the possibility that the word bright would be used to imply that we are smarter than other people. Yet, reading some of the essays posted on the brights' web site quickly changed my mind. After all, not all "gay" people are gay in the sense of being happy, easy-going fellows, right?

Indeed, part of the inspiration for the name "bright" did come from the consciously positive use of the term gay by homosexuals. The idea is that brights are in fact a bashed minority in this country and around the world, and the last such minority — at least in Western democracies — that is ok to bash! President Bush the First is on record as saying that he didn't think brights (he didn't use that term, obviously) are real American citizens, and perhaps should not be afforded the rights that go with that privilege. Bush the Second hasn't been more friendly on that respect. Yet, not even the Bushes dare attack gays or African-Americans, or women (the latter, of course, are not exactly a minority...), at least not in public.

As Richard Dawkins put it in an article on the brights movement published in *The Guardian* (and I don't often agree with Dawkins, so read this!), it is a matter of raising awareness of the problem. Gays did it effectively during the past decades, so did feminists. Most people are careful these days when using words that imply male chauvinism: we now tend to talk of chairperson, no chairman; we use "she" almost as frequently as "he" when referring to a hypothetical individual. This may be awkward, or even aesthetically unpleasant, but it means that the problem of sex discrimination has been raised to the level of general consciousness, as it should be.

Similarly with brights. A bright is defined simply as a person with a naturalistic worldview. That means a worldview that is free of supernatural and mystical elements, and this worldview extends to ethics and morality. Simple enough, no? Many more people than you think are in fact brights, even though several may not realize it, or may not wish to "come out" (as for gays and feminists). Brights don't have a common political

agenda except when it comes to the defense of themselves as a bashed minority. The same goes for gays and feminists, whose range of opinions on any other subject is as wide as that of the population at large. What brights want is to be as respected by the community, politicians, and authorities as much as anyone who freely label themselves as Jew, gay, feminist, Baptist, or Catholic. Nothing more, but — crucially — nothing less.

According to a 2002 survey of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, about 27 million Americans are brights. That's a staggering number, and they vote! In other Western countries our numbers are significantly higher, and I suspect there are many of us even in Muslim countries around the world. What on earth makes it right to deride our beliefs and ethical convictions? Why would anybody feel threatened by meeting or talking to a bright? There is no reason, and it's time to tell the world about it. If you are a bright, go ahead, use the name and talk to people about it. Not in order to "convert" them, but to stimulate their awareness. If you are not a bright, be decent to us, in the same way in which — one hopes — you are decent to gays and African Americans even if you are not black and you have a heterosexual orientation. It simply is the decent thing to do.

Quote

Disturbing Trend
There seems to be an emerging spirituality in conservation that is disturbing for three reasons. First, the notion seems to be that in order for one to be a concerned thinker, spirituality is required. This is wrong. So it was disappointing that there were no atheists interviewed for the Spring 2003 article "Portraits of Faith." Second, the environmental crisis that we are now experiencing is a direct result of a thousand years of religious and spiritual thinking and is therefore a cause and not a solution. Third, our best opportunity to solve the environmental crisis is through sound science, not spirituality.

— letter to the editor by Randy K. Bangert to Nature Conservation (Summer 2003)

Unquote

Quote

During the First World War, the British promised the Arabs independence, the Jews a Homeland, and secretly agreed with the French to divide the Turkish provinces of western Asia.

Britain and France paid a price for their role in the peace settlements in the Middle East. The French never completely pacified Syria, and it never paid for itself. The British pulled back in Iraq and Jordan as quickly as they could, but they found they were stuck with Palestine and an increasingly poisonous atmosphere between Arabs and Jews. The Arab world as a whole never forgot its betrayal and Arab hostility came to focus on the example of Western perfidy nearest at hand, the Zionist presence in Palestine. Arabs also remembered the brief hope of Arab unity at the end of the war. After 1945, those resentments and that hope continued to shape the Middle East.

— Margaret Macmillan, Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World, (2002) p. 409

Unquote

The Pale Grey Cloud
by D.S.Loughry

Half asleep, as I drive along,
Nothing on my mind but some old song,
In front of me the new risen sun,
Pink streaks surround it promising fun.

The rest of the sky is turning blue,
Brightening from black to a lighter hue.
Nothing is moving up in the sky,
Until a movement catches my eye.

A wispy, flowing pale grey cloud,
Swaying, dipping, flowing around.
Sweeping through the brightening sky,
Like sentinels of wind from on high.

Yes, I'm awake now as I strain to see,
The something up in front of me,
Trying to put into so many words,



BOOK REVIEW

Blood Diamonds: Tracing the Path of the Worlds
Most Precious Stones
by Greg Campbell
(Westview Press, 2002)

I don't think you will want to read this book, for it is replete with graphic images of the most abominable atrocities. Worse than murder, it describes chopping off hands, feet, noses, ears on adult men and women, and the same mutilations on children. You also learn a great deal about the mining, trade, cutting, and commerce of that most precious of stones the diamond, a simple crystal of the element carbon.

Most of the world's diamonds are mined in southern Africa, in the countries of South Africa, Botswana and Namibia. They are produced under strict but healthy industrial conditions in gigantic enterprises. Some 65 percent of all raw diamonds are traded by the De Beers Group, a company of such monopolistic power they are not permitted to operate in the United States under our anti-trust laws. American purchasers of raw diamonds have to travel to London to pick the selection De Beers will allow them to view and purchase. Diamonds are cut into gem stones in a small number of centers. The most important cutting and polishing center is in Israel, others are in Belgium, New York, and Brazil. A large majority of gem diamonds are sold in the United States, where almost every bride expects a diamond engagement ring. As the hardest material known, diamond chips and dust find a wide application in industry as a grinding, sawing, and polishing medium.

A small proportion of world diamond supplies comes from three African countries in the throes of civil wars, Angola, Congo, and Sierra Leone. Illegal and forced diamond mines finance these murderous wars, and may perpetuate them for the profit of some insurgents. Once a diamond leaves the field, it is virtually impossible to identify where it came from; cut into a gem no power on earth can tell its origin. Thus there is nothing preventing blood diamonds from entering regular trade channels.

Campbell reports on the civil war in Sierra Leone. His is not a systematic description of the causes of war between shaky governments and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the role of peace keeping

forces of other African nations, the intervention of the United Nations, and the many attempts to come to a peace settlement. Rather, Campbell gives us graphic descriptions of the dust and blood and fire of the war itself. He interviews and introduces some of the many victims, the men and women without arms or legs, who had them hacked off by the RUF. Sierra Leone is today estimated too have the world's largest proportion of amputees. Campbell meets some of the RUF officers, and describes a force for whom war and money from diamonds has become an end in itself. He reports on *médicins sans frontières*, the organization of medical doctors which tries to cope with the devastation. And always the children who are pressed or seduced into the armed forces, or else have their limbs chopped off.

Campbell does his best work tracing and re-tracing the path of diamond sales, smuggling, and corruption, which involves several neighboring countries, and their officials. He shows how easy it is for the killers to sell their ill gotten diamonds, and he leaves no doubt that they quickly enter legitimate channels of trade. Most of the blood diamonds today grace the fingers of American brides and matrons.

In tracing the path of diamonds through Monrovia in Liberia, Campbell reports that the violent Palestine organization Hezbollah, and bin Laden's Al Qaida were buying. He suggests they converted some of their asserts into diamonds before 9/11, presumably to keep it out of banks and out of the reach of the US Treasury and the FBI.

The United Nations and its various organizations made the Sierra Leone civil war their single largest and most costly intervention. After many tries and deadlines ignored, the final disarmament took place in January 2002. Sierra Leone has been quiet for the past year and security has improved significantly. Hope remains

It appears we have two types of religion here. One is a solitary Texas politician who says, "I talk to Jesus, and I am right." The other involves millions of people of all faiths who disagree.

-- Paul Moore Jr, retired Episcopal bishop of New York, speaking from the pulpit on 24 March 2003
(deceased 1 May 2003 at age 83 of cancer)

From: Dave Locke <chimera@flashmail.com>



**September Potluck:
Tuesday 23th 6:30 PM**

**September Meeting:
September 9, 2003**



FIG Leaves
P.O. Box 19034
Cincinnati, OH 45219

FIG

Our Purpose

The Free Inquiry Group, Inc. is a non-profit organization founded in 1991. FIG is allied with the Council for Secular Humanism and an affiliate of the American Humanist Association. Our members are mostly secular humanists. However, 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 figleaves@fuse.net, or leave a message at (513) 557-3836. Visit our web site at gofigger.org