

FIG Leaves

Volume 14 Issue 1

January 2005

January FIG Meeting: Tuesday, 25 January 7:00 PM

Morality and the Laws of Evolution: Beliefs, Emotions, and Behaviors.

Kirk D. Little, Psy.D. received his Baccalaureate Degree in Psychology from Brown University and Doctorate Degree in Psychology from the University of Hartford. With his wife Laurie, also a Licensed Psychologist, he owns and operates a busy independent practice in Northern Kentucky. Dr. Little specializes in childhood behavior problems, and talks about Beliefs, Emotions, and Behaviors in Family Therapy on a daily basis. Before moving to Kentucky from New England five years ago, Dr. Little taught Undergraduate, Master's and Doctorate level courses in general psychology, abnormal psychology, lifespan development, and psychological assessment.

Dr. Little's Master's Thesis *Deception as an Evolutionary Adaptive Strategy for Reproductive Success* was ultimately abandoned to transfer to the Doctorate of Psychology Program at the University of Hartford, where his interests in morality and evolution were put on hold to learn his trade, memorize exam-relevant facts, write a dissertation: *An Empirical Self-Psychology of Dreaming*; get married, move to Kentucky, build a practice, and have children. Dr. Little will talk about how our Morality (interpersonal behaviors, feelings, and beliefs about right and wrong) can be explained by evolutionary theory, and better understood in every day life.

February FIG Meeting Tuesday, 22 February 2005

Meeting: **Dr. Gene Kritsky** on *The Darwin Bootlegs*

The total Darwin Archive consists of over 15,000 letters and several thousand bits of papers with notes and observations. These letters and notes reveal aspects of Darwin that were not disclosed in his published writings. This presentation will examine some of these notes to reveal some of the unknown facts about Darwin and his thinking.

Last year Dr. Kritsky, professor of biology at the College of Mount St. Joseph, took time out of his busy schedule as a leading authority on cicadas to give us a wonderful talk about Charles Darwin as a person. We are delighted that he will come back to talk to us about the fruits of his research into Darwin's papers.

Inside	Page
December Meeting by George Maurer	2
Letters to the Editor	3
Dedicated Poem - <i>Idle Worship</i> by Dorothy B. Thompson	5
Vivian Kline's Art	6
Europe's Theo-Cons	7
You do want to die...	8
Too Much Education	9
Science Book Club	10
<i>The Trouble with Islam: A Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith</i> by Irshad Manjii	
Book Review	11

Events - Please Note Schedule changes

January Meeting

Tuesday 25 January 7:00 PM
at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, Ohio

February Potluck

Tuesday 8 February 6:30 PM
At the home of

February Meeting

Tuesday 22 February 7:00 PM
at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, Ohio

March Potluck

Tuesday 8 March 6:30 PM
At the home of

Weather?



Weather?



Fig Leaves



December Meeting

Picking Up the Pieces: The 2004 Election , What It All Means.

Ellen Johnson, President, American Atheists

Ellen Johnson was accompanied on her visit to Cincinnati by Conrad Goeringer, Senior Staff Writer for *American Atheist Magazine*, who handled much of the preliminary arrangements for their stay. Ellen began by recognizing all the people who had made her stay here so pleasant, including Joe and Barbara Levee, Bill and Margaret O’Kain.

Then to show how powerful we are deemed to by the Radical Right, she enumerated a number of things they say we are responsible for such as: increasing drug abuse, teenage pregnancies, and crime rates, the attacks on 9/11, decreasing moralities and moving deities from in and out of public places. However what she really wanted to talk about was what atheists are really capable of doing.

She identified American Atheists as a non-profit, non-political organization dedicated to the absolute separation of state and church, the promotion of the philosophy of atheism, and the protection of the civil rights of atheists.

Since she has taken over as the successor to Founder President Madalyn Murray O’Hair, she has experienced and observed that religion has lost its theological stranglehold on our society: Here are some battles the religion pushers have lost:

- They have lost on evolution, only a rearguard is promoting “Intelligent Design.”
- They have lost on women’s reproductive rights (condoms are now advertised on television).
- They have lost on abortion.
- They have lost on homosexuality –gays have married; they continue to be married; they have television shows; they are making a lot of progress.
- They will lose on stem cell research soon.
- They have lost on the public condemnation of unmarried couples living together.

After completing this enumeration she said:”I think they are losing on all fronts.” The Boston Roman Catholic Archdiocese has had to close one-fifth of its parishes; The Portland Archdiocese filed for bankruptcy last June because of the costs of law suits surrounding priestly sexual abuse cases.

The American people are increasingly loosening and liberalizing moral restrictions. Then question arose: “What is the problem if religionists are losing?” President Johnson replied that while they were losing the battles, in her opinion they were winning the war.



Speaker: Ellen Johnson

In the light of their continuing losses, religious organizations are forced to do what Churches have always done in such circumstances. And that is to seek the support of government. The new emphasis on voting, compassionate conservatism, and tax support for religious charities lead in that direction. Churches need government to support and enforce their backward looking agenda. The American people are not going to do it on their own.

-- Reported by George Maurer



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.

FIG Board of Directors:
President: Margaret O’Kain,
Vice President: Michele Grinoch,
Secretary: George Maurer,
Treasurer: Bill O’Kain,
Program Chair: Joe Levee,
Members: Nurit Bowman,
Helen Kagin,
Inez Klein,
Bryan Sellers,
Philip Ferguson,
Donna Loughry
FIG Leaves Editor: Wolf Roder.

Memberships run from 1 January to 31 December.

One year: \$25
Family: \$35
Subscription: \$10

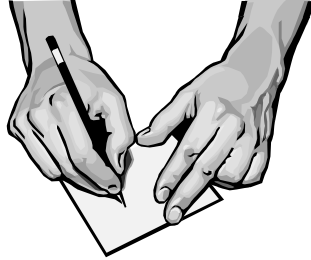
If you join during the year, you receive a \$2 discount for each month that has passed.

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

© copyright 2005 The Free Inquiry Group, Inc.



Letters To The Editor



Sorry to Disappoint, but I'm still an Atheist

by Anthony Flew

Richard C. Carrier, current Editor in Chief of the Secular Web, tells me that "the internet has now become awash with rumors" that I "have converted to Christianity, or am at least no longer an atheist." Perhaps because I was born too soon to be involved in the internet world I had heard nothing of this rumour. So Mr. Carrier asks me to explain myself in cyberspace. This, with the help of the Internet Infidels, I now attempt.

Those rumours speak false. I remain still what I have been now for over fifty years, a negative atheist. By this I mean that I construe the initial letter in the word 'atheist' in the way in which everyone construes the same initial letter in such words as 'atypical' and 'amoral'. For I still believe that it is impossible either to verify or to falsify - to show to be false - what David Hume in his Dialogues concerning Natural Religion happily described as "the religious hypothesis." The more I contemplate the eschatological teachings of Christianity and Islam the more I wish I could demonstrate their falsity.

I first argued the impossibility in 'Theology and Falsification', a short paper originally published in 1950 and since reprinted over forty times in different places, including translations into German, Italian, Spanish, Danish, Welsh, Finnish and Slovak. The most recent reprint was as part of 'A Golden Jubilee Celebration' in the October/November 2001 issue of the semi-popular British journal *Philosophy Now*, which the editors of that periodical have graciously allowed the Internet Infidels to publish online: see "Theology & Falsification."

I can suggest only one possible source of the rumours. Several weeks ago I submitted to the Editor of *Philo* (*The Journal of the Society of Humanist Philosophers*) a short paper making two points which might well disturb atheists of the more positive kind. The point more relevant here was that it can be entirely rational for believers and negative atheists to respond in quite different ways to the same scientific developments.

We negative atheists are bound to see the Big Bang

cosmology as requiring a physical explanation; and that one which, in the nature of the case, may nevertheless be forever inaccessible to human beings. But believers may, equally reasonably, welcome the Big Bang cosmology as tending to confirm their prior belief that "in the beginning" the Universe was created by God.

Again, negative atheists meeting the argument that the fundamental constants of physics would seem to have been 'fine tuned' to make the emergence of mankind possible will first object to the application of either the frequency or the propensity theory of probability 'outside' the Universe, and then go on to ask why omnipotence should have been satisfied to produce a Universe in which the origin and rise of the human race was merely possible rather than absolutely inevitable. But believers are equally bound and, on their opposite assumptions, equally justified in seeing the Fine Tuning Argument as providing impressive confirmation of a fundamental belief shared by all the three great systems of revealed theistic religion - Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. For all three are agreed that we human beings are members of a special kind of creatures, made in the image of God and for a purpose intended by God.

In short, I recognize that developments in physics coming on the last twenty or thirty years can reasonably be seen as in some degree confirmatory of a previously faith-based belief in god, even though they still provide no sufficient reason for unbelievers to change their minds. They certainly have not persuaded me.

*Rationalist International Bulletin # 137. Copyright © 12
December 2004*

Gods and Monsters

From: *The Guardian*: Saturday, 1 January 2005

It is true that science cannot offer the consolations that your correspondents attribute to prayer, and I am sorry if I seemed a callous ayatollah or a doorstepping bogeyman (Letters, December 31). It is psychologically possible to derive comfort from sincere belief in a nonexistent illusion, but - silly me - I thought believers might be disillusioned with an omnipotent being who had just drowned 125,000 innocent people (or an omniscient one who failed to warn them). Of course, if you can derive comfort from such a monster, I would not wish to deprive you. My naive guess was that believers might be feeling more inclined to curse their god than pray to him, and maybe there's some dark comfort in that. But



Fig Leaves



I was trying, however insensitively, to offer a gentler and more constructive alternative. You don't have to be a believer. Maybe there's nobody there to curse. Maybe we are on our own, in a world where plate tectonic and other natural forces occasionally cause appalling catastrophes. Science cannot (yet) prevent earthquakes, but science could have provided just enough warning of the Boxing Day tsunami to save most of the victims and spare the bereaved. Even worse lowland floodings of the future are threatened by global warming, which is preventable by human action, guided by science. And if the comforts afforded by outstretched human arms, warm human words and heartbroken human generosity seem puny against the agony, they at least have the advantage of existing in the real world.

-- Richard Dawkins, Oxford

Dear Editor of Fig Leaves

7 December 2004

What fun it was today to receive *Fig Leaves*, and to see you had put one of my poems in again. I do thank you very much, and hope you'll see fit to use more of my freethought poems.

I'm a retired school teacher, age 69 and I take care of my 91 year old mom. So am way too busy in my old age. Writing freethought is very healing for me.

Actually the poem is called *Basic Nature*, rather than Nature, and it appears, not in *My Life and Times on the Third Rock* but in the volume *Blasphemous Satire* (1998) published by Leland W. Ruble. But, no one would notice except I, so it's perfectly ok.

I wish all of you the very best in your work there in Ohio. We were broken hearted by the election, and angry too. Bush is a nightmare, and his horrible bloody war is unforgivable!!

Thanks again ever so much!

Dorothy B. Thompson, Bandon, Oregon

To the Editor of The Kentucky Post: Atheist in Foxholes,

Kevin Elgelbach's front page article of November 12, 2004, "Vets reaffirm: No atheists in foxholes" is an insult to those many Atheists who have served and are serving in our armed forces to protect his freedom to lie about Atheists.

Yes, Kevin, there are Atheists in foxholes. I am one of them. It was offensive to hear you repeat the slander that we do not exist.

America always has had, as now, Atheists in Foxholes. We owe our freedoms to them as much as we do to those Americans who follow one of the many different religious faiths our way of life permit to exist free from the tyranny of an established religion.

Rather than attempting to state your religious views—or the views of others who think a god saved them in combat while killing their companions—as facts, please do us the courtesy as Americans and patriots of informing your audience that there really are honest, decent, hard working, loyal Americans who do not share your apparent belief that all good people, or at least all frightened people under fire, must believe in a god as you seem to do.

Don't worry. There either is or is not a god—whether or not everyone, or anyone, agrees with you. If there is a god, whatever we Atheists think makes no difference. If there is no god, millions chanting the falsehood that there are no Atheists in Foxholes will not change that fact.

Here are two photos taken at the American Atheists sponsored Godless Americans March on Washington, on November 2, 2003, as over 200 real Atheists in foxholes proudly proclaimed that reality before the world.

And here are two photos from the dedication of a monument to Atheists in Foxholes at Lake Hypatia, Alabama:

I was honored to be present at both of these events. So please don't lie about us. It is neither good religion nor good journalism.

--Edwin Kagin,

Kentucky State Director, American Atheists, Inc.
(AMERICAN ATHEISTS is a nationwide movement that defends civil rights for nonbelievers; works for the total separation of church and state; and addresses issues of First Amendment public policy.)



Atheists in Foxholes Monument

Photo Courtesy of Edwin Kagin





Fig Leaves



To the Editors of the Kentucky Post:

I read with interest the article, *Vets reaffirm: No atheists in foxholes* (11/12/2004), in your pages. It seemed to me that the title was not supported by the content. After reading the article twice, I found that no one indicated that atheists were absent from the battlefield. Atheists were not mentioned. Since Hindus, Moslems, Wiccans and Protestants were not mentioned either, perhaps the editor or the author, Kevin Eigelbach, also concluded that these groups were not in foxholes. Surely no one believes such nonsense.

Rather, the persons interviewed indicated that they were religious and felt that some of their experiences confirmed their faith.

Although I am unfamiliar with Father Egbers personal philosophy, it has not been a part of my friendships with several Catholic priests over 50 years that they are disrespectful of my religious views---even when their views differ from my own. Some people are aggressive in their self-righteous assertions, but I saw no evidence within the article to support anyone holding such a view.

Isn't one of the major points of the first amendment---and the reason that freedom of the press is grouped with religious freedom and the freedom to assemble---that we, as citizens of the United States of America, are free to form the foundations of our philosophies as each person sees fit? Aren't the underlying themes tolerance and a search for truth?

And isn't the Kentucky Post gratuitously promoting divisiveness and anti-intellectualism by stigmatizing atheists in this way?

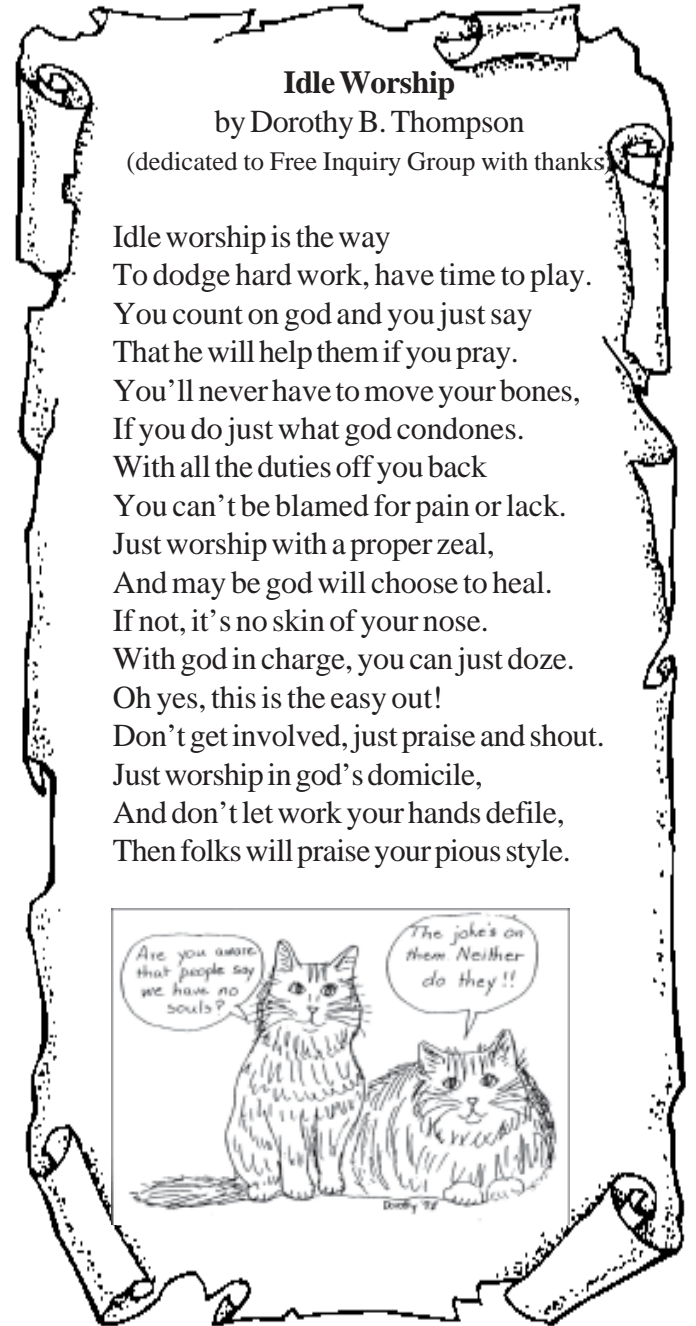
--Robert Riehemann
Bellevue, Kentucky 41073

Presidential Debates.

California Republican Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger is married to the staunchly Democratic niece of former President John F. Kennedy.



At a lecture in the town of Seaside, Schwarzenegger commented the presidential debates were not a big deal in his house. If he wanted to hear a Republican-Democratic debate, he said, "I just take my wife out to dinner." "Bush and Kerry only had to debate three times," he added, "but I have one every morning over breakfast." Asked what his wife thought about his speech at the Republican National Convention, Schwarzenegger replied, "Well, there was no sex for two weeks." (Monterey County Herald) Well, with the wife at least.



Idle Worship

by Dorothy B. Thompson

(dedicated to Free Inquiry Group with thanks)

Idle worship is the way
To dodge hard work, have time to play.
You count on god and you just say
That he will help them if you pray.
You'll never have to move your bones,
If you do just what god condones.
With all the duties off you back
You can't be blamed for pain or lack.
Just worship with a proper zeal,
And may be god will choose to heal.
If not, it's no skin of your nose.
With god in charge, you can just doze.
Oh yes, this is the easy out!
Don't get involved, just praise and shout.
Just worship in god's domicile,
And don't let work your hands defile,
Then folks will praise your pious style.



Quote

When Bacon and Galileo insisted on putting claims of knowledge to the test with observation and experiment, storytelling as the prime means of understanding the world was so reduced in authority that today it is only children who continue to believe that stories are, by the fact of their being told, true. Children and fundamentalists.

— E. L. Doctorow, *Reporting the Universe* (2003), p. 55

.....Unquote



Fig Leaves



“We are Engaged by the Arts no less than by the Sciences”



L-R: Margaret O'Kain, Vivian Kline

One of the *Affirmations of Humanism* says that we engage and cherish the arts as well as all the others things we do. Fig member Vivian Kline has been a life long artist, and just completed a one person show celebrating her fifty year anniversary of working as an enamelist. We asked her to write a brief explanation of this art form and about her long involvement with this craft. She writes:

When I was in art school in Connecticut and training to become an art teacher in the public schools, we were exposed for one afternoon to the art form of enameling. Although this is an expensive craft, it was then being taught in many art institutes. I became “hooked” and,—basically self-taught,—have been working in this medium ever since that time.

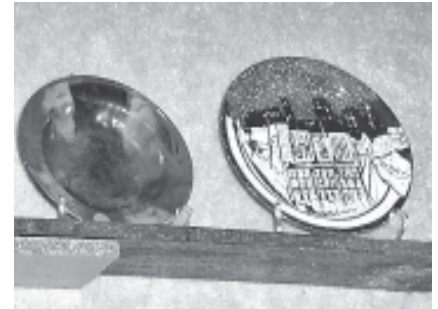
The craft requires fusing colored glass to clean metal in a kiln at approximately 1500 degrees. The metals may be copper, silver, gold, platinum, or steel. And the glass may be applied in powder form, mixed with a liquid, or even made into a paint-tube consistency.

It is an old craft. The Taft Museum in Cincinnati has fine examples of 16th century French work. Perhaps more folks have met with Chinese pieces in which tiny wires keep the colors separated on the finished

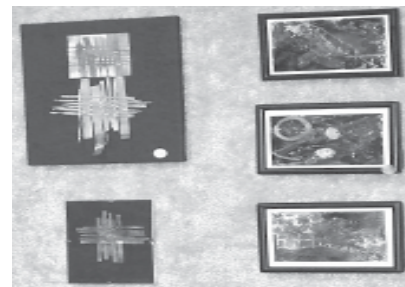


surfaces. Traditionally enameling was employed for religious objects and for jewelry. More recently outdoor murals and even whole wall surfaces have been enameled as they are weather proof and they will, of course, not fade in the light.

Having enjoyed a progressive John Dewey education, I have, over the years, allowed both curiosity and experimentation to lead me into new ideas. I have used basic materials in many unusual ways: weaving the metal first; electroforming the surfaces, or making subject matter on 18 gauge copper for representational or abstract pictures.



Working in this art form has greatly enriched my life in many ways. Every two years I am able to meet with an



international group of enamelists for cross stimulation of ideas and techniques. I have traveled to enamel with fellow artists in Hungary, Germany and England, and I have shown my slides in South Africa

when visiting with a group of enamelists there. A magazine called *Glass on Metal* keeps artists working in this craft informed. It is published in Bellevue, Kentucky, by the Thompson Enamel Company, which is also where many of us get the necessary supplies.

My work is always on view on the final Friday of each month from 5:30 to 9 PM at the Pendleton Art Gallery at 1321 Pendleton Street in the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood. People may also call me for an appointment.

Photos courtesy of Joe Levee

Quote
• Every humanitarian disaster is a golden fund raising opportunity for the charities. Africa may be the world's poorest place but it is rich in men of God. It's unfortunate that the Africans no longer boil them up in pots and serve them for dinner.

— Aidan Hartley, *The Zanzibar Chest* (2003) p. 371

.....**Unquote**



Europe's *theo-cons* rally their forces. As secularists dominate public life, experts expect backlash.

Ian Traynor in Vienna and John Hooper in Rome

The Guardian: Friday, 3 December 2004

From the committee rooms of Vienna to the classrooms of Paris, from the streets of Amsterdam to the chapels of Rome, battle is being joined over God's place in the new Europe. In disputes about the EU constitution and commissioners and the right to parade religious affiliations in public, secularists have the upper hand. But a backlash is predicted.

The schism opened during the writing of the new constitution. Despite the protests of at least eight of the 25 member states and lobbying by the Vatican, the text finds no place for Christianity and its role in shaping Europe, just a bland formula referring to the "cultural, religious, and humanist inheritance." This is one of several successes chalked up by secularism; indicators perhaps of the cultural divide between the new Europe and George Bush's America, where religious and moral values are seen to have played a key role in the Republican election victory.

Michael Mertes, a speech writer for Helmut Kohl when he was chancellor of Germany, and a former editor of the liberal Catholic Rhineland newspaper *Rheinischer Merkur*, says: "Given the different national traditions in the EU, rigid secularism has become a lowest common denominator." The new commission led by Jose Manuel Barroso stumbled when the liberals and secularists dominating the parliament took exception to the arguably reactionary views on women and gay people of the Italian nominee Rocco Buttiglione.

From Spain to Poland a new secularist ascendancy is sweeping all before it. In Spain, José Luis Zapatero's Socialist government is seeking to roll back the influence of the Catholic church. France, Europe's secular citadel, has banned Muslim headscarves in state schools. In the Netherlands, a new breed of populist and militant secularists has emerged, personified by the assassinated Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh, paradoxically dedicated to defending secularism and tolerance through increasingly intolerant views and policies, particularly on Islam and immigration. In deeply Catholic Poland, there is widespread fear that EU membership will bring godless bureaucrats from Brussels bent on denying the Poles the most restrictive abortion laws in the EU.

And in Austria, where more than 90 percent are nominally Catholic but where fewer than 12 percent regularly attend mass, the Christian right seems to have lost a constitutional fight for God. The government party, the Christian Democrats, wanted a preamble stressing the centrality of Christianity. It has been scaled down to a

reference to "the Creation", and the Social Democrats and Greens want it scrapped altogether.

But if the secularists are winning all the battles, many experts fear they may yet lose the war, not least because of the growing influence in the EU of the new east European states, inoculated by communism against too much church bashing. Even the Czech Republic, which can lay claim to being the least religious country in Europe, wanted God in the EU constitution. And the admission of ten countries in May pushed the Catholic population, nominally at least, to almost 60 percent. "For Poland," says Aleksander Smolar, head of a Warsaw thinktank, "this extreme secularism dominating life in the EU is completely indefensible".

At a meeting of European intellectuals in Vienna, Jozsef Szajer, deputy head of the main Hungarian opposition party, reacted bitterly to the Buttiglione humiliation. "Why is it that a Catholic man can't become an EU commissioner, while a former communist can?" he asked. Edward Best, at the European Institute of Public Administration in Maastricht, in the Netherlands, is all in favour of keeping God out of politics, debate and constitutions. But he fears a mobilisation of the religious right in response to the domination of liberal political correctness. "We're probably going to get a bit of a backlash. I'm worried about the Poles and the Italians."

The New York sociologist Jose Casanova is even gloomier. Writing about the culture clash in Europe, he warned of a

new "intolerant tyranny" of the secular majority, which assumes that its views are "progressive, liberal, and modern" while its opponents are "reactionary, fundamentalist, and anti-modern".

Joseph Ratzinger, the German cardinal who is one of the most powerful men in the Vatican and an aide to the Pope, seems to see the Buttiglione affair as the thin end of the wedge. He complained that secularism was "starting to turn into an ideology that imposes itself by way of politics and does not leave space in public life for a Catholic and Christian vision." "A struggle does exist," he told the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* last month. "It seems almost indecent to talk about God in public life, as if it were an attack on the freedom of those who do not believe."

Other leading Catholic clergy and lay people are embittered by what they term the new "leftwing clericalism" dominating the EU. "This is a *Kulturkampf* [conflict of cultures] dressed up as liberalism and tolerance," Cardinal Friedrich Wetter, Archbishop of Munich, said of the Buttiglione debacle. "Today it would not be possible for the Christian founding fathers of a united Europe, Konrad Adenauer, Robert Schuman, and Alcide de Gasperi, to become EU commissioners."

Mr Buttiglione, chastened by his roasting by MEPs, is promising to begin a European project or movement, probably backed by the Vatican: a vehicle for Christian values still shrouded in uncertainty whose adherents have instantly been dubbed the "theo-cons". "Lots of people



Fig Leaves



are calling me, from Italy and also from Spain, Britain and Germany, asking me not to let these issues drop but to carry them forward with political and cultural initiatives. I too am convinced of the need,” he told the *Corriere della Sera*.

Mr Smolar thinks the war of ideas will get nastier. “Europe is the only utterly secularised continent on earth. It’s the exception.”

-- *Guardian Unlimited* © Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004

Quote

Missile Defense.

A missile interceptor was emplaced in a silo at Fort Greeley. “It marks the end of an era during which we could not defend our caribou against long-range ballistic missile attacks,” General Persiflage told reporters at a Missile Defense Agency briefing. Alas, I was the only one there; everyone else was covering the campaign. “But is it true,” I asked, “that the interceptor has not been tested?” “Of course,” he snapped, “the whole purpose of a missile defense is to sow doubt in the mind of any would-be attacker. All testing would do is remove the uncertainty.”

— Robert L. Park, *What’s New* (Friday, 30 July 2004)

Unquote

12 December 2004 *The (London) Times*
Interview: Jasper Gerard meets Baroness Warnock
You do want to die before you get old?

She is our philosopher queen. Whenever Britain is in a royal mess over some fiendishly tricky quandary, we beseech Queen Mary for her counsel. And so it is that we head to her palace — well, a tiny cottage in a picturesque Wiltshire village of thatched terraces — to learn what she decrees on euthanasia. For not only is Baroness Warnock our pre-eminent medical ethicist who has sat on more committees than Frankie Dettori has horses — on subjects from vivisection to special needs children — she was also a wife and mother forced to decide what to do with an ailing husband.

As medical science advances, society is left bitterly divided over what to do with the terminally ill. A judge has just allowed a sick woman to travel to Switzerland to end her life and this Tuesday parliament will debate whether to give living wills statutory force — which critics have said is euthanasia by the back door. There are no easy answers.

So I head off to ask Mary Warnock for her words of wisdom — and, it turns out, controversy: for not only does she

now think assisted suicide should be legal — before she didn’t — she also feels the very frail should slink away, like elephants, to die quietly. She reckons doctors, when asked to assist in this, bang on too much about their consciences rather than their patients’ interest. Oh, and she suggests that if parents want to keep premature babies with unviable lives on life-support machines, they should stump up the cost. Gulp.

These are bracing sentiments, but then the baroness — one of whose earlier reports led to the legalisation of embryo research — declares firmly there is no place for spiritualism or sentiment in the law. Over wine on a biting cold night by her crackling fire we mull over the dilemmas, and I feel much like generations of Oxford students in her tutorials: privileged, but nervous. For though Warnock is 80 and charming, she is sharper than a Jonathan Ross suit.

Warnock explains that she has changed her public position on euthanasia because the public has changed its position. But shouldn’t she tell us what to think rather than declare: “I’m their philosopher, I must follow them”? “I know it sounds Machiavellian, but I have come to believe in a distinction between personal consciences and public policy. If you change the law it must be enforceable.”

“People are much better informed than they were 50 years ago, so the more they are entitled to have their views heard. There is tremendous danger in thinking there are moral experts who know what is right.” The public was moved on the euthanasia issue, she thinks, by the case of Diane Pretty, who died by suffocation as she feared she would, denied the assisted suicide she had campaigned for. “That really moved me to think we must change the law,” she says.

I agree with her wholeheartedly. I was the last journalist to interview Pretty and her husband and I came away from them wondering how anyone could look into those eyes of pain and deny them their final wish. “She died in the way she most feared and that is appalling.”

And Warnock knows whereof she speaks. Her husband, Geoffrey, was saved at the last from a similarly gruesome death by what Mary considers a doctor’s mercy in upping his painkillers. “He had, in the nicest possible way, been written off. He had an absolute horror of suffocation, of gradually being denied air and turning blue, similar to Diane Pretty.” The doctor’s actions saved him from that. If it had been necessary, would she personally have helped him into the night? She struggles to answer: “Killing someone is very difficult. If I had been able to get hold of a tremendously large number of sleeping pills, I think I would have been prepared to put them in his reach. And if he’d had them I think he would have used them.”



From *Counterpunch*, 28 December 2004

It's Happened to a Lot of Good Christians: Be Careful Not to Get *Too Much* Education

By Dr. Teresa Whitehurst

I've been giving a lot of thought lately to a conversation I overheard at Starbucks in Nashville last winter. I was distracted from my work on that cold and rainy night by two young men who sat down in upholstered chairs next to my table. One was talking and the other was listening, in what appeared to be an informal college orientation.

"The only trouble with Lipscomb {a conservative Christian college nearby} is that old man Lipscomb made a rule that the college couldn't have a football team, so that's a bummer. But it's a great school, and you're gonna love it.

"Now you do have to be careful about one thing," he said more quietly, coming closer and speaking in hushed tones, "My professor told me that you have to be careful not to get too much education, because you could lose your foundation, your core values."

The neophyte nodded solemnly, his eyebrows raised with worry.

"If you get a bachelor's degree," the seasoned student reassured, "you'll probably be okay. But my professor said that when you get a master's, and definitely if you go beyond that, you can lose your values. He said that college students have to be watchful because if you get too much education, you could turn-LIBERAL. He's seen it happen to a lot of good Christians."

The young men paused for a moment, shaking their heads at the dangers that lie ahead.

I found it hard to concentrate after that, my mind returning again and again to one question: "What will happen to higher education in America if this fear of "too much education", and this presumption that liberal views are the devil's snare rather than natural consequences of uncensored exposure to science, philosophy, literature and diversity, becomes widespread?"

Too late-it's already happening, and with Bush installed for a second emboldened term, the campaign to remodel our universities is growing like wildfire. Professors are feeling the chill, but in the long run it's America's youth who'll pay the price. Justin Pope describes the anti-liberal movement to "balance" college courses with the politically correct and religiously correct rightwing views (justified by research or not), but not just on conservative Christian college campuses:

"Leading the movement is Students for Academic Freedom, with chapters on 135 campuses and close ties to David Horowitz,

a onetime liberal campus activist turned conservative commentator. The group posts student complaints on its website about alleged episodes of grading bias and unbalanced, anti-American propaganda by professors - often in classes.

"Instructors need to make students aware of the spectrum of scholarly opinion," Horowitz said. "You can't get a good education if you're only getting half the story." That "other half" of the story may not be factual, but doctrinal. As the young man in Starbucks said just before he and the incoming freshman got up to leave,

"You have to be careful what you pay attention to. My professor said that a few faculty members might lead you astray without meaning to, by bringing in ideas that aren't biblical. He said that if you're ever taught anything that sounds questionable, you should talk about it with your minister to see if it's right."

Even as a Christian raised in the evangelical tradition, this shocked me. I suppose it shouldn't have. The Southern Baptist Convention recently considered a proposal to urge all parents to pull their children out of public schools to prevent their exposure to ideas that conservatives may consider "godless" but that are in fact essential. Non-biblical, non-conservative ideas run rampant in fields like medicine, physics, archeology, literature, philosophy, history, astronomy, psychology, theology-in short, everything.

Religious Takeovers are Never Good for Business

What will happen to that innovative American spirit if radical "conservatives" have their way with our educational system? How will the US fare in the global marketplace when certain ideas, or entire fields, become off-limits to students who've been indoctrinated to consult their ministers before learning new information?

What will happen to medical research, for instance, if this movement proceeds to its logical conclusion: outlawing the scientific method, a method notorious for its emphasis on unfettered and unbiased inquiry? How long until scientists are obliged to first consult with their ministers to see if their hypotheses, methods or conclusions are right?

I fear men like Horowitz because uncensored education is essential to our democracy, our people's well being and the nation's long-term survival. The "conservative" movement that he's spearheading reminds me of the news reports coming out of Iran in the months just prior to the conservative religious takeover of that country when its professors were warned to present the "correct" views in class.

This movement pretends to be about "balancing" liberal with conservative views, but the reality is a lot uglier than that. As the conversation I overheard suggests, this movement isn't about balance, it's about censorship-or even better, *self-censorship* that's easily achieved by frightening students with social rejection, hellfire or





Fig Leaves



both. Either way, scholarship is degraded in the process. According to the article,

“many educators, while agreeing that students should never feel bullied, worry that they just want to avoid exposure to ideas that challenge their core beliefs - an essential part of education. Some also fear that teachers will shy away from sensitive topics or fend off criticism by “balancing” their syllabuses with opposing viewpoints, even if they represent inferior scholarship.”

Whether through self-censorship or junk education, our country’s children are paying the price for the political aggression of the far right. Robert Frost once wrote, “Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper.”

But as I’ve written before, tempers are short in today’s increasingly aggressive “conservative” America, and the emboldened radical right is in no mood to listen to anyone. Dr. Teresa Whitehurst is a clinical psychologist and writer. Her most recent book describes the nonviolent guidance of children, *Jesus on Parenting*, Baker Books, 2004.

You can contact her at <DrTeresa@JesusontheFamily.org>

Over the recent holidays, many of us were “treated” to 13 inches of white beauty. Some of us were “treated” to 5 inches of glistening beauty. But all of us were affected. So I wrote the following poem expressing my displeasure with fate.

The fickle finger of fate,
Pointing to me on this date.
All best laid plans have gone awry,
Buried so deep in snow I could cry.
Furnace on the fritz, so I’m in the cold.
Car locked in ice, is getting old.
Please dear fickle finger of fate,
Turn somewhere else, if it’s not too late.

by Donna Loughry

As broadcast by Tim Hedrick on his *Rain or Shine Weather Rhymes* on Channel 12 on Monday 3 January 2005 on the 6 pm news.

Quote

It’s a very weak argument to rubbish astrology when we rely on the Sun going round the Earth and its influence on us, and the Moon cycles are known to affect tides and women.

— David Tredinnick, M.P.

Unquote

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.

Jan 9 (2nd Sunday) - *Structure of Evolutionary Theory* by Stephen Jay Gould, 2002

Jan 30 (5th Sunday) - *What Makes Us Moral?* by Neil Levy, 2004

Feb 27 - *The Life and Death of Planet Earth : How the New Science of Astrobiology Charts the Ultimate Fate of Our World* by Peter D. Ward, Donald Brownlee, 2003

March 20 (3rd Sunday) - *The Ages of Gaia : a Biography of Our Living Earth* by James Lovelock, 1988

April 24 - *The Ancestor’s Tale: a Pilgrimage to the Dawn of Evolution* by Richard Dawkins, 2004

May 22 - *Opening Skinner’s Box : Great Psychological Experiments of the Twentieth Century* by Lauren Slater, 2004

June 26 - *Prime Obsession : Bernhard Riemann and the Greatest Unsolved Problem in Mathematics* by John Derbyshire, 2003

July 24 - *Facing up : Science and its Cultural Adversaries* by Steven Weinberg, 2001

Aug 28 - *Godel, Escher, and Bach* by Douglas Hofstadter, 1979

Sept 25 - *The Electric Meme : a New Theory of How We Think* by Robert Aunger, 2002

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

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

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





The Trouble with Islam: A Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith

by Irshad Manji

(New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003)

Irshal Manji is a woman and a lesbian, and both of these facts play a role in the book. As a woman and feminist Ms. Manji protests the anti-female and women oppressive dogma of Islam. As a homosexual the author is labeled an outcast and irredeemable sinner by her religion. As a woman who refuses to knuckle under to the demands of religion and men, she is regarded as an apostate.

One reason Irshad Manji can refuse to accept the restrictions of her faith, can protest, and write and agitate for reform of Islam, is because she lives and works in free and tolerant Canada, and is a Canadian citizen. A fact she celebrates repeatedly throughout the book.

Irshad Manji has never lived in a Muslim country. She was born in the small Indian community of Uganda in eastern Africa, where her family were well to do automobile dealers. After Idi Amin drove the Indians out of the country, her family settled in an Asian neighborhood of Vancouver in Canada. Her experience of Islamic domination is thus limited to the oppression of a local community, the Mosque, and a patriarchal father and family. Yet, it was enough to struggle against in her growing up, and led her to read widely about Islam as well as about other faiths. As a journalist she has broadened her understanding, and has been able to meet with and make friends among many different people. She often compares and contrasts the actual behavior of Christians and Jews with that of Muslim.

She describes Islam as a tribal desert religion suitable for and invented by Beduin Arabs. It has never changed its simple minded, primitive views. Fundamentalist Islam was suitable for the small Arab tribes, when communities were small and in essence large extended families. Perhaps the daily struggle for survival made the harsh control of wives and dissidents necessary. That kind of Islam is no longer suitable for a modern society with its great number of life paths and work requirements. Nor is it able to foster a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society. Islam, as the author describes it, is clearly not able to tolerate those who think and behave other than what orthodoxy prescribes.

Irshad Manji recalls reading the Koran for herself as an adult. In translation of course, which no good Moslem is supposed to do. By insisting on the Koran only in the original Arabic, it is as if only the Arabs own it. It also makes it difficult for non-Arab Muslim, — the vast majority, — to enter into the discussion of interpretation. And the interpretation has remained basically unchanged since the end of the golden age of Islam, about 900 to 1250 AD. She tells how the fundamentalist imams have acted as gate keepers against innovation, against the printing press until 1745, in support of the slave trade and the veil for women in the Ottoman period among many others.

The author calls for a reformation of Islam. Perhaps she would like to see an Islamic Martin Luther or John Calvin. But surely, she does not understand the upheaval, the cost in blood and warfare, and the time it required for the Reformation and Counter-reformation in Europe. She hopes for the wide use of the concept of *ijtihad*, the Koranic injunction to think for oneself. Thinking for oneself makes it quickly clear the Koran is as full of contradictions as other holy scriptures. Thinking freely can only lead to a variety of interpretations of the Koran, something the mullahs, imams, and ayatollahs are trying to prevent. She also hopes for the enterprise and commercial acumen of the Muslim to lead again, as it has at some times in the past, to new understandings of the needs of humans and ways in which these are not seen as contrary to the Koran. Finally, she places considerable hopes on the western Islamic communities. These emigrants from Muslim countries in Europe and North America have freedom to think, write, and agitate for a more diverse interpretation of the Koran.

The arguments of Irshad Manji are not new. Other dissidents have said the same things. Among others she quotes Salman Rushdie, Taslima Nasrin, and Ibn Warraq. Her comments are pointed, because infused with her own struggles and experiences. — Wolf Roder

Quote
• Religious faith depends on a host of social, psychological
• and emotional factors that have little or nothing to do with
• probabilities, evidence and logic. This is faith's
• inescapable weakness. It is also, undeniably, its greatest
• power.
• — Michael Shermer, *Scientific American* (July 2004)
.....
Unquote



January Meeting Tuesday, 25th 7:00 PM

February Potluck: Tuesday, 8th 6:30 PM



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 as well as an affiliate of the American Humanist Association and of the American Atheists. 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