

FIG LEAVES

Volume 20 Issue 11

November 2011

December FIG Meeting:

Tuesday, December 20, 7pm,
Hannaford Suites in Kenwood

Solstice Celebration and Discussion

For our December meeting, we will have a Solstice potluck and discussion. FIG members are asked to bring food or desserts to share or drinks (beer, wine, etc) to celebrate Solstice Eve. After noshing, we will break into small groups to engage in conversations with other FIG members. Plan on joining us for a fun and thoughtful evening.

FIG Election

We are having an election in December.

Our President, John Welte has been appointed Ohio State Director of American Atheists. With this appointment, John is stepping down from the position of President, but he will remain a Board Member of FIG. Shawn Jeffers has announced that he is running for President. If Shawn is elected, there will be an opening as Program Chair for FIG. Also open is the position of Vice-President. This can be someone already on the board, or someone newly elected. Further, there will be openings for a couple Board member positions. If you are interested in serving on the Board or as Program Chair, please contact John Welte at welte@fuse.net. Please volunteer

A Thanks And Thought Before The Meal

by Herb Silverman

Let us take a moment to think about where the food we are about to enjoy has come from and to acknowledge those who worked to bring us this food. Let us appreciate the earth, the sun, the air, and the water needed to nourish the plants and animals. Let us thank the farmer who cared for the plants and animals and the migrant worker who toiled to harvest the crops. Let us thank the laborer who processed the food, the truck driver who brought the food, and the grocery store workers who displayed it. Finally, let us thank our friends who prepared this meal and have provided us with the opportunity to be together and share each other's company.

A Happy Thanksgiving to all!

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Events

December Meeting/ Celebration/Potluck

Tues. Dec. 20, at 7:00 PM
The Hannaford Suites Hotel
*(There are no other meetings in December -
Spend time with family and friends.)*

Please Let Us Have Your E-Mail Address!

Whenever we send out an e-mail, several rejections are returned. If you want to stay in touch with FIG, please make sure we have your correct and up-to-date e-mail address. We also need your current snail mail address.

To confirm your e-mail and Snail address if it has changed, please send an e-mail to Brian Sellers at bsellers@fuse.net.



October FIG@20 Celebration

The Free Inquiry Group at Twenty

Author's note: Usually I try to write a fairly detailed account of our monthly meetings so that those who couldn't attend will be informed about the topics addressed. This article is by no means an attempt to fill in all you missed if you didn't attend the conference. As they say, "You had to be there."

Gretchen Christina started the conference and got everyone's righteous indignation stirred up by giving her talk, "Why Are You Atheists So Angry?" Though she listed many events and situations originating from religion that raise her ire, she stated that she is not an angry person. She is pretty happy living her life as she chooses without any religious dogma.

Professor Bill Jensen gave a snapshot history of free thought in the Cincinnati area. This turned out to be one of the most talked about presentations of the weekend. People were generally surprised that this area has such a rich free thought history.

During her talk entitled "We Are Not Unicorns," Jamila Bey gave us many useful tips and suggestions on how to diversify our movement by making organizations like FIG more accessible and attractive to African Americans.

J. T. Eberhard, one of the rising stars of the movement, emphasized the importance of rational discourse and free inquiry in his talk entitled "The Primacy of Reason."

Dr. Darrel Ray, who spoke to FIG last year about his book, "The God Virus," laid out the details of his latest project. This was the online survey, "Sex and Secularism." This survey compared the differences in the sex lives of participants before and after leaving their faith. Most were experiencing better sex lives after becoming secular because they no longer felt the pangs of guilt that religion had imposed upon them.

The evening dinner featured short talks by FIG co-founders Joe Levee and George Maurer. It was evident from these speeches that FIG has meant a great deal to these two gentlemen over the course of its twenty year history. Since co-founder Edwin Kagin was unable to attend the conference, his speech was read to the audience by Dave Silverman. Dave called a couple of Camp Quest kids to the stage to help him read the opening line, "Good evening sinners!" resulting in loud laughter from the audience. Dave's impression of Edwin caused a lot of laughter during his remarks. Next to speak was Wolf Roder, the editor of FIG Leaves, who gave a short history of the Free Inquiry Group. That was followed by a slide show featuring many speakers and events from the last twenty years.

The after dinner keynote speakers were Tom Flynn and Tim Madigan, the first speakers at the first FIG event. They both had interesting and humorous recollections of their part in organizing FIG and their frequent visits to speak here.

The dinner and first day was closed out by Shawn Jeffers, who speculated about FIG's next twenty years.

Sunday started out with a networking brunch in the hotel café. This was a time when people could discuss free thought, their organizations and share ideas about the future of the movement. Some local leaders participated in a workshop during this time. The workshop was facilitated by Dr. Ray and gave leaders of local groups some great ideas about running their organizations and how to deal with potential problems in their groups.



FIG Leaves - Thoughtful articles, letters, reviews, reports, anecdotes, and cartoons are very welcome. Submit in Electronic format via the internet to figmessage at gofigger dot org; or on disk or typewritten via mail to Editor, FIG Leaves, P.O. Box 53174, Cincinnati, OH 45253. Contributions received before the first Friday of the month will be considered for publication that month.

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Memberships run from:

1 January to 31 December.
One year: \$30
Family: \$40

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.



FIG LEAVES



The “State of Free Thought Today” was a panel discussion moderated by Jamila Bey and featured Tom Flynn and David Silverman. A lot of good ideas were thrown out during this discussion. The Q and A was particularly interesting and filled with insightful comments and questions.

Many were surprised to see the name of a Rabbi on the program but Rabbi Barr’s presentation was one of the favorites of the weekend. Entitled “The Creation Museum: Bad Science and Bad Bible,” this talk took the audience on a tour of the AIG “museum.” Rabbi Barr used his extensive knowledge of the bible, photos of the displays and comedy to get across the point that this establishment is not a museum but a sermon that you walk through.

When P. Z. Myers took the stage for the last presentation, he exclaimed that the Rabbi was a hard act

to follow. Professor Myers presented “Storytime.” This talk pointed out that religious texts try to communicate moral values and history by telling stories. Mostly bad stories, he claimed. We as atheists and materialists have better stories to tell and we should make it a priority to tell them. The wonders of our universe and evolution by natural selection are much more awe inspiring than the often irrelevant tales of religion.

All in all this was a stimulating, thought provoking and fun celebration of the first twenty years of the Free Inquiry Group. Thank you to all those who helped to make this event a success.

Photos from the event and a few short videos are posted on the Fig Facebook page thanks to Ensomniak Thefreethinker.

– Reported by John Welte



Shawn Jeffers
Master of Ceremonies



George Maurer
Founding Member



Joe Levee
Founding Member



Wolf Roder
Long Time Member



Camp Quest Campers
with Dave Silverman

*Photographs from
the Evening Dinner
Celebrations taken
by Donna Loughry.*



Tim Madigan



Tom Flynn

Original Speakers for FIG



November Meeting

A Discussion Of FIG Past And FIG Future

At the November meeting, we began by reflecting on the FIG@20 conference. Reminding ourselves of the things FIG has accomplished in its first 20 years: Founding Camp Quest, Wall of Separation and Church and State on Fountain Square, Protesting the Creation Museum's [sic] application to be located next to Big Bone Lick State Park, Rally for Reason against the opening on the Creation Museum, the CinCOR Billboard and the FIG@20 Conference along with all of the monthly speakers and programs that have happened.

Next, we asked FIG Members to take post-it notes and brainstorm new ideas in five areas: Monthly Meetings, Other Programming/Activities, Communications, Fundraising and Community Partnerships. Once everybody finished brainstorming, we broke into small groups and arranged post-it notes into common themes. Over the coming months, FIG will look to incorporate many of these new ideas as we start to plan our next 20 years.

Monthly Programs

Potential Speakers, Topics, or Activities for our Monthly Meetings

- ⤴ Visit Museums (Art, Museum Center)
- ⤴ Observatory
- ⤴ Library Tour to let staff show what is in their collections
- ⤴ Panel Discussion with reps from other Atheist/Skeptic Groups
- ⤴ Lessons in Logic & Logical Fallacies
- ⤴ Counter Apologetics
- ⤴ Movie Screenings
- ⤴ Debates
- ⤴ Provide Food – Pizza, Beer, Wine
- ⤴ Speakers: Rabbi Barr, Janet Heimlich, Bart Ehrman, Brother Sam
- ⤴ Humanist Chaplains
- ⤴ Create a FIG Library to check out books
- ⤴ Conversations with other FIG Members
 - ⤴ what they think/believe
 - ⤴ discussion of political topics
 - ⤴ discussion groups after speakers to reflect

Other Programming/Activities

Outside of our Monthly Meeting

- ⤴ Organize trips to National Rallies/Conferences
- ⤴ Booth at County Fairs/Community Events
- ⤴ March in Pride Parade or attend Charity Walks
- ⤴ FIG T-shirts
- ⤴ Political Advocacy Committee
- ⤴ Family Friendly Activities/Provide Childcare
- ⤴ Debate with a Christian
- ⤴ Social Gatherings
 - ⤴ Monthly Dinners/Potlucks
 - ⤴ Hiking
 - ⤴ Zoo
 - ⤴ Canoeing/Kayaking
- ⤴ Service Projects
 - ⤴ Clothing drive
 - ⤴ Food Drive
 - ⤴ Blood Drive
 - ⤴ Adopt-a-Highway in front of Solid Rock Church

Communications

- ⤴ Update website to be more interactive
 - ⤴ Podcasts
 - ⤴ Videos
 - ⤴ Discussion Groups
- ⤴ Appoint Social Media Coordinator
- ⤴ Community Calendars
- ⤴ Public Access TV Show
- ⤴ WAIF Radio
- ⤴ Provide option to mail or e-mail FIG Leaves
- ⤴ Google Voice Phone Number
- ⤴ Have a presence at Community Events

Fundraising

- ⤴ Book Sales/Book Raffles
- ⤴ Events
 - ⤴ Bingo
 - ⤴ Happy Hour/Restaurant
 - ⤴ Holiday Child Care
 - ⤴ Gift Wrap at Malls
 - ⤴ Superstition Fair
- ⤴ Silent Auction
- ⤴ Darts
- ⤴ FIG Yard Sale
- ⤴ Atheist Auction



- ⤴ Cookie sales
- ⤴ Dunk an Atheist booth at Church Festival
- ⤴ Grantwriting

Community Partnerships

Who should FIG develop partnerships with?

- ⤴ Freethought Dayton
- ⤴ Local Secular Student Groups
- ⤴ College Biology Depts.
- ⤴ Cincinnati Sceptics
- ⤴ Science Cafe participants
- ⤴ Camp Quest
- ⤴ Rabbi Barr/Beth Adam
- ⤴ Unitarians in Cincinnati/St. John's Unitarian
- ⤴ Service Opportunities/Habitat for Humanity



Come One And Come All!

March 2012: **Reason Rally & American Atheists Convention**, Washington, DC. The next focus for American Atheists is the National Reason Rally to be held on the National Mall in Washington DC on Saturday, March 24. We want to get as many of you to DC for this rally as possible!

Here's an explanation of the Rally from American Atheists president Dave Silverman:

We are now about five months away from the most important large event in the history of the secular movement, the Reason Rally. Fifteen major national organizations are co-sponsoring this celebration, which will be held on the National Mall in Washington DC on March 24th. This rally will be the largest gathering of atheists and freethinkers in world history, and I am privileged to Chair the event.

The rally is not a protest, and it's not about bashing religion. Rather, it's a celebration – a chance for us to rejoice in growing faster than religion in every state in the union. Under the banner of “Celebrating Secular Values”, we will hear live performances by musicians and comedians, as well as short speeches from our movement's leaders, luminaries, and maybe even a politician or two. Our objective is to make this a truly enjoyable and memorable experience for all who attend.

But it's more than just fun. An event of this size has the potential of being a turning point in our movement. If we

bring thousands of new members into our organizations, it will re-energize the movement on the whole and give us all a new level of support as we grow. Even more importantly, a good showing in Washington DC, on television and in front of politicians in an election year, could really highlight the political clout that secular people deserve.

I am often asked “what can I do to help?” and nowadays I always give the same answer: Come to the Reason Rally, even if this is the only activist thing you do all year. Come to Washington and be seen, be counted, and be surrounded by thousands of other secular people. The sponsors are all investing money and time into this event, and we need humans on the Mall to make it worthwhile. There will be no video streaming -- we need people to come to DC, physically, and be a part of this event.

You have the ability to positively affect the movement while engaging your memberships by arranging for your group to come to this epic event. The experience itself will strengthen your group, and you can advertise outside of your group to the local atheists to coax them into going with you, which will further aid in your membership recruitment. The Reason Rally is providing discounted bus charters, airline tickets, and hotel rooms to help you defray costs.

For those who want more, the rally is followed immediately by the American Atheists National Convention in Bethesda MD (on the DC Metro). Our theme this year is “Come out, come out, wherever you are”. Speakers Richard Dawkins, Taslima Nasrin, and PZ Myers will be joined by former preachers and other experts who will target their talks on coming out of the closet to friends and family. We also include events like a vlogger panel (starring Aron Ra and Thunderf00t), comedy night and costume dinner to make the convention well-rounded, educational, motivational, and fun for all ages.

This weekend is going to be epic, but only if people come. We need you, our friends and affiliates, to do whatever you can to get your members to DC so this event can achieve its fullest potential, and truly shift this movement into the next gear. Please help us make this happen by advertising, organizing a trip, and most importantly, attending this most important occurrence. I look forward to celebrating our secular values with you, and thousands of other secular people, in Washington DC. See you there.0

– signed by Dave Silverman, for American Atheists



THINGS TO DO....

THINGS TO SEE...



Atheist Meetups

18 November

Skepticon IV

I just booked a room for Friday and Saturday nights at **Skepticon IV**, in Springfield, Missouri, coming up November 18-20. The convention itself is free, but free-will donations are encourage/accepted. It's just me so far, so I have room in my car. *The meet-up-poster*

21 November

6:30 PM Monthly Monday Meetup @ The Washington Platform

Washington Platform Saloon 1000 Elm St, Cincinnati, OH 45202

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

01 December

7:00 PM *NEW* First Thursday @ The Hofbräuhaus Hofbrauhaus Newport 200 East 3rd Street, Newport, KY 41071

Atheists, Agnostics, Humanists and Freethinkers meet here. Regular monthly gatherings are held on the 1st Thursday. New people join every month, and we all wear name tags (no quizzes). Check the Message Board for current hot topics.



Privatization

A fellow from the American Enterprise Institute, observed that the government could raise billions of dollars to retire that pesky deficit, the National Debt, simply by selling our interstate highway system. Americans would then have to pay tolls forever to the corporate owners, but hey, he exclaims, remember that tolls "work for the River Styx, why not the Beltway?"



Women in Secularism

A CFI Conference

Feminism and secularism. Given the role religion has played in the repression of women, they would seem like natural allies, and, indeed, many feminists have been outspoken and influential secularists. However, the relationship between secularism and women's issues remains largely unexamined.

Until Now.

Join us **May 18-20, 2012**, for the "Women in Secularism" conference, sponsored by the Center for Inquiry (CFI). This historic conference will discuss and celebrate the many contributions women have made to the secular movement while critically examining both the successes and failures of secularism in addressing women's concerns.

The conference will be held in the Crystal City Marriott at National Airport, just steps away from fantastic restaurants, theaters, and shops, and a short Metro ride away from Washington, DC. Room reservations can be made at a steep discount by calling 1-800-228-9290 and mentioning the "Women in Secularism" conference or by booking online using Group Code: CFICFIA.

For more information, email dc@centerforinquiry.net or call 202-543-0960.

General Admission for the three-day conference: \$219

CFI Member Discount Admission: \$195 (Become a member!)

Saturday Night Dinner and Entertainment: \$75.

Science Book Club

All the meetings are held at the downtown Cincinnati Library in Meeting Room 3A at 2:30 on the third Sunday of each month with the following exceptions:

Schedule for 2011:

November 20 - *The Denial of Death* by Ernest Becker, Pulitzer Prize, 1973, 314pp

December 18 - *The Dependent Gene: Fallacy of Nature vs. Nurture*, David S. Moore, 2002





THINGS TO DO....

THINGS TO SEE...



Make Plans Now to Attend the Next Council for Secular Humanism/Center for Inquiry Conference, March 1-4, 2012, in Orlando!

Bask in the splendor of the world-class Hyatt Regency Orlando International Airport. No shuttles or taxis to contend with—just collect your luggage and ride the escalator straight to the hotel lobby of our full-service conference hotel. Free broadband Internet access in guest rooms. Easy access to Disney World, Universal Studios, and all other Orlando attractions. Stay up to three days before and after the conference at the exclusive discounted conference rate.

Florida will host one of 2012's most dramatic church-state battles. In response to a Council for Secular Humanism lawsuit, a measure on Florida's November 2012 ballot would amend the state constitution to jettison language that forbids state funding of religious institutions. The national implications: more than thirty-five other states have similar constitutional provisions (often called "Blaine Amendments") that bar state aid to religious groups in language stronger than the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment. At "Moving Secularism Forward," you'll learn about the Florida face-off and what you can do to help defend Florida's Blaine Amendment—and much, much

To obtain conference hotel room rates, it is preferred reservations are made online here or by phone at 1-888-421-1442. Be sure to use the pass phrase C F S H 3-1-12 to secure the discounted conference rate.

For more information, call toll-free at 855-417-9930 during business hours Eastern Standard Time. Or log onto www.orlandocon.secularhumanism.org or e-mail us. ☼



Those-dying then,
Knew where they went-
They went to God's right hand-
That hand is amputated now
And God cannot be found

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)



Catherine House and Polly Alakija, ***A Stork In A Baobab Tree:*** *An African Twelve Days of Christmas*

Set in Africa during the Christmas season, this is the story of a village preparing for a celebration - the birth of a child. The story is told in verse inspired by the traditional carol *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, but in this version by the author Catherine House the gifts are:

- 1 stork in a baobab tree,
- 2 thatched huts,
- 3 woven baskets,
- 4 market traders,
- 5 bright *khangas*,
- 6 women pounding,
- 7 children playing,
- 8 wooden carvings,
- 9 grazing goats,
- 10 drummers drumming,
- 11 dancers dancing and
- 12 storytellers.

This is a Christmas steeped in the atmosphere of African village life, including descriptions of the objects and activities mentioned in the text. A *khang* is a piece of cloth wrapped as a skirt and/or head and shoulder covering.

At The Housefly Planet

Upon the housefly planet the fate of the human is grim:
For what he does here to the housefly, the fly does there unto him.

To paper with honey cover, the humans there adhere,
While others are doomed to hover near death in vapid beer.

However, one practice of humans the flies will not undertake:

They will not bake us in muffins nor swallow us by mistake.

- Christian Morgenstern (1871-1914), trans. Max Knight



Contradiction Corner

By Dennis Davis



Over the last year I have written several articles demonstrating biblical contradictions; however, you are not likely to gain much traction with bible believers by showing them these scriptures. They will almost certainly counter with one of several logical fallacies given to them by pastors or Christian apologists. Over the next few articles I will discuss the most common logical fallacies committed by biblical believers and this knowledge may aid you in overcoming these arguments or at least prevent you from being taken in by their faulty logic.

By far the most common logical fallacy committed by fundamentalist Christians is a tautology, commonly known as "Circular Logic". A tautology involves creating a set of unproven statements that uses its own conclusions as a founding premise. The person taken in by the fallacy is fooled by the implied security of the self-integrated system not realizing that none of the original beliefs is proven. This generally takes the form of "We know the Bible is true because God wrote it, and we know that God wrote it because the Bible says so." There is no proof that the bible is anything other than a collection of human written documents, knowing that collapses the entire argument.

A very common version of circular logic is the ever popular "no true Scotsman" fallacy. Often religious people will claim that they are more moral so you counter with the fact that the vast majority of criminals in American jails are Christian. Most often you will hear the reply, "well, they aren't real Christians." Effectively they are saying that no Christians act immorally because they redefine Christian to be someone who only acts morally.

In our discussion above we also exposed another fallacy known as "Moving the Goalpost." A good example of this fallacy is the worn out argument creationists leveled against evolution saying that there were no examples of fossils in transition. Once archeologists discovered the first actual transitional fossil, the creationists instead complained that there were holes in the fossil record, that the transitional fossil was actually a different species that shared characteristics of the other two. Instead of recognizing the transition, they instead said there were two holes in the record instead

of one. And of course, as they found more transitional species so that we had three steps between the original species, they focused on the now four holes between them. Remember that whenever you hear a creationist mention the numerous "holes" in the fossil record.

I have had friends give me books written by Christian apologists and by far the most common arguments I've read in these books are "Straw Man" fallacies. A straw man fallacy is a method of attacking your enemy by falsely portraying them with words, ideas or characteristics they don't possess and then tearing down this false image of the person to discredit them. For example I've heard Christians say: "atheists are full of hate because they blame God for something bad that happened to them." Of course we know that the vast majority of atheists were either never religious or came to that position over a long process of thought and reflection. While there are a few atheists that may fit such a characterization, it is far from accurate and an unfair labeling of all atheists.

Another very common fallacy is the "Slippery Slope" argument. This is an adherence to a position (usually erroneous) with the belief that anything less will result in an obvious absurd position. For example Senator Rick Santorum argued that allowing same-sex marriage will mean that we will have to allow incest, pedophilia and bestiality to be legalized as well. Other variations of this fallacy include the old "taking prayer out of the schools has led to the downfall of America" tirade.

Finally, I will discuss the "Post-hoc ergo propter hoc" fallacy which is basically a mistaken assumption that just because one thing happens before another than it caused it as well. An example of this is when Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson said that the 9/11 attacks were because America doesn't persecute gays and allow women control over their own sex lives.

I do not write these articles out of the vain hope that a religious believer will be deconverted by a contradiction or biblical error, because being a former fundamentalist minister, I know it doesn't happen that way. But what you can do is plant a seed that may start them thinking, wondering and questioning and that is how the change occurs. ☘





CFI Condemns "In God We Trust" Resolution

As you may have already heard, the U.S. House of Representatives yesterday approved a resolution reaffirming "In God We Trust" as the national motto. The non-binding measure, H. Con. Res. 13, also promotes the display of "In God We Trust" in public schools and other public buildings. It passed 396-9, with 2 abstentions.

The Center for Inquiry (CFI) strongly condemns this resolution as a hollow, divisive, and unnecessary gesture toward monotheistic faith. It is irresponsible and shameful for lawmakers to use faith as a political tool to divide the nation along religious lines, especially at a time when America is confronted with multiple pressing national issues.

Congress only adopted "In God We Trust" as the national motto in 1956, when American leaders sought to distinguish the United States from the communist Soviet Union. Yet the motto ignores and reinforces the outsider status of the nation's many nonbelievers, as well as members of minority religions that do not recognize a monotheistic god (including, for example, Buddhists and Hindus). Polls show that 16 percent of Americans have no religious identity, while over 40 million Americans do not identify with a monotheistic God.

A far better motto for the nation is the Latin motto adopted in 1782 as part of the national seal: "E Pluribus Unum," or "Out of many, one." America's original motto accurately describes the nation as a unity comprising people from many religious and nonreligious perspectives.

H. Con. Res. 13 now moves to the U.S. Senate. CFI will track its progress and lobby against its passage. Source: ©2011 Center for Inquiry | Office of Public Policy P.O. Box 26241 · Brooklyn, N.Y. · 11202; (347) 586-9491

San Francisco Fire:

If, as they say, God spanked this town
For being much too frisky,
Why did He burn
His churches down
And save Hotaling's Whiskey?

Charles Kellogg Field (1873-1948)

Steve Jobs: A Little Science Might Have Helped.

Never a scholar, Steve Jobs didn't understand, or didn't believe, the first law of science: "Every observable effect has a physical cause." Perhaps the most profound insight of all time, causality is a total rejection of the supernatural. According to his biographer, Walter Isaacson, whose book, *Steve Jobs*, will be out Monday, Jobs declined surgery when the cancer was detected and relied instead on acupuncture, herbs and other "alternative therapies." Eventually he regretted his decision, but by then the cancer had spread. A week after the world mourned the death of Steve Jobs, the body of 70 year old Dennis Ritchie was found in his New Jersey home, where he lived alone. The developer of the Unix Operating System, Ritchie made Steve Jobs possible.

- *What's New*, Robert Park, 23 October 2011

An Interesting Survey Finding

One-sixth of Americans are wrestling with the role of church and religion. In total, 15 percent of Americans said their experiences with religion have caused them to question God, a sentiment that was most common among twenty somethings, college graduates, unmarried adults, non-Christians, and unchurched adults. Similarly, 16 percent of Americans said they have been hurt by experiences in churches. This perception was most common among women, Boomers (the generation born between 1946 and 1964), and divorced adults.

- The Barna Group, a religious survey company

Quote

There is now enough evidence for most scientists to conclude beyond a reasonable doubt that God does not exist. At least that is the conclusion reached by the elite of our scientific community through their studies of astronomy, physics, mathematics and other related disciplines. These conclusions are not new, of course, but they have received wider publicity since the appearance of Edward Wilson and James Watson, one a Nobel laureate, on the Charlie Rose show, December 13, 2005—a program that has been rebroadcast at least once. Their point is this: if you understand the workings of the universe, explanations involving a supreme being are not required.

- Henry F. Tonn, *American Atheist* (April 2008) p. 12

Unquote



God On Lawn Care

GOD: “Frank, you know all about gardens and nature. What in the world is going on down there on the planet? What happened to the dandelions, violets, milkweeds and stuff I started eons ago? I had a perfect no-maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand drought and multiply with abandon. The nectar from the long-lasting blossoms attracts butterflies, honeybees and flocks of songbirds. I expected to see a vast garden of colors by now. But, all I see are these green rectangles.”

ST. FRANCIS: “It's the tribes that settled there, Lord. The Suburbanites. They started calling your flowers 'weeds' and went to great lengths to kill them and replace them with grass.”

GOD: “Grass? But, it's so boring. It's not colorful. It doesn't attract butterflies, birds and bees; only grubs and sod worms. It's sensitive to temperatures. Do these Suburbanites really want all that grass growing there?”

ST. FRANCIS: “Apparently so, Lord. They go to great pains to grow it and keep it green. They begin each spring by fertilizing grass and poisoning any other plant that crops up in the lawn.”

GOD: “The spring rains and warm weather probably make grass grow really fast. That must make the Suburbanites happy.”

ST. FRANCIS: “Apparently not, Lord. As soon as it grows a little, they cut it-sometimes twice a week.”

GOD: “They cut it? Do they then bale it like hay?”

ST. FRANCIS: “Not exactly, Lord. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags.”

GOD: “They bag it? Why? Is it a cash crop? Do they sell it?”

ST. FRANCIS: “No, Sir, just the opposite. They pay to throw it away.”

GOD: “Now, let me get this straight. They fertilize grass so it will grow. And, when it does grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?”

ST. FRANCIS: “Yes, Sir.”

GOD: “These Suburbanites must be relieved in the summer when we cut back on the rain and turn up the heat. That surely slows the growth and saves them a lot of work.”

ST. FRANCIS: “You aren't going to believe this,



Lord. When the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it, so they can continue to mow it and pay to get rid of it.”

GOD: “What nonsense. At least they kept some of the trees. That was a sheer stroke of genius, if I do say so myself. The trees grow leaves in the spring to provide beauty and shade in the summer. In the autumn, they fall to the ground and form a natural blanket to keep moisture in the soil and protect the trees and bushes. It's a natural cycle of life.”

ST. FRANCIS: “You better sit down, Lord. The Suburbanites have drawn a new circle. As soon as the leaves fall, they rake them into great piles and pay to have them hauled away.”

GOD: “No!?! What do they do to protect the shrub and tree roots in the winter to keep the soil moist and loose?”

ST. FRANCIS: “After throwing away the leaves, they go out and buy something which they call mulch. They haul it home and spread it around in place of the leaves.”

GOD: “And where do they get this mulch?”

ST. FRANCIS: “They cut down trees and grind them up to make the mulch.”

GOD: “Enough! I don't want to think about this anymore. St. Catherine, you're in charge of the arts. What movie have you scheduled for us tonight?”

ST. CATHERINE: “*Dumb and Dumber*, Lord. It's a story about....”

GOD: “Never mind, I think I just heard the whole story from St. Francis.”

Source: From the internet via e-mail.



The gods are dead, but in their name
 Humanity is sold in shame.
 While (then as now!) The tinsel'd Priest
 Sitteth with robbers at the feast,
 Blesses the laden blood-stain'd board,
 Weaves garlands round the butcher's sward,
 And poureth freely (now as then)
 The sacramental blood of men.

Robert William Buchanan (1841-1901)





BOOK REVIEW

The Hidden Reality

by Brian Greene

(New York: Alfred R. Knopf, 2011)

a book review by James N. Gardner

Best-selling science author Brian Greene is a professor of physics and mathematics at Columbia University and is highly regarded in the scientific community for a number of conceptual breakthroughs in superstring theory. (Superstring theory proposes that subatomic particles such as quarks, electrons and neutrinos are really just different modes of vibration of tiny one-dimensional filaments of energy, oscillating furiously in hidden fragments of 11-dimensional spacetime.)

Greene's first two books – *The Elegant Universe* and *The Fabric of the Cosmos* – covered the history and essential features of superstring theory. In *The Hidden Reality* Greene shifts his focus from the infinitesimally small—strings are thought to measure only about 10^{-33} centimeters in length—to the inconceivably vast: the theoretical ensemble of all possible universes that cosmologists have dubbed the multiverse.

In the good old days of classical physics that culminated in Einstein's general theory of relativity, it was assumed that there was only one universe. The dictionary definition of "universe"—the totality of all things that exist—was thought to coincide with the physical reality of the cosmos. Then came the stunning discovery that what we regard as the universe was born in a stupendous burst of energy known as the Big Bang about 13.7 billion years ago. That discovery sparked a series of revolutionary developments, including the mind-boggling idea that multiple Big Bangs are detonating constantly in a process called eternal inflation, birthing new baby universes that will be forever inaccessible from our corner of the multiverse.

This is the exotic cosmic terrain through which Greene provides expert guidance. We learn, for instance, that in an infinite multiverse there will necessarily exist more-or-less exact duplicates of earthlings, living out

their lives on a spooky mirror version of our planet:

If space extends infinitely far, a proposition that is consistent with all observations and that is part of the cosmological model favored by many physicists and astronomers, then there must be realms out there (likely way out there) where copies of you and me and everything else are enjoying alternate versions of the reality we experience here.

Greene's speculations on the possible existence of a vast thicket of parallel universes concludes with two fanciful possibilities—first, that a super-advanced civilization might actually be able to fabricate a new baby universe artificially, and second, that such a civilization could conceivably decide to forego the messy chore of launching a process of artificial cosmic inflation and instead simply develop a software simulation of a new cosmos so sophisticated that it would be indistinguishable from the real thing. If that were possible, Greene asks provocatively, how would we know that we are not, right now, hooked into a cosmically extended version of SimCity?

But even this is not the final word on the outlandish possibilities inherent in the idea of parallel universes. That honor is reserved for what Greene calls the Ultimate Multiverse, which is a mega-conglomerate that consists of all possible universes. In one corner of the Ultimate Multiverse is the strangest universe of all—a universe that consists of absolutely nothing. No space. No time. No matter. No energy.

This is a notion, Greene notes, that answers 17th Century mathematician Gottfried Leibniz's famous question—"Why is there something rather than nothing?"—in a precise and novel way: "the Ultimate Multiverse, a universe consisting of nothing does exist. ☚"



"Faith" is a fine invention, when gentlemen can see
But microscopes are prudent, in an emergency.

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)





January FIG Meeting
TBD



December FIG Meeting
Tuesday Dec. 20 at 7 PM
Hannaford Suites Hotel



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Our Purpose

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

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



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

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

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

For more information, write the Free Inquiry Group at the address above, e-mail - [figmessage at gofigger dot org](mailto:figmessage@gofigger.org), or visit our web site at gofigger.org or freeinquirygroup.org.