

FIG LEAVES

Volume 15 Issue 8

August/September 2006

August FIG PICNIC: Sunday, 27 August 2:00 PM

*Please note: - There will be no August Meeting
Instead we are having a:*

PICNIC & SWIM PARTY!



Our annual Picnic & Swim Party will be at the home of the Edwin & Helen Kagin on Sunday August 27. Chef Kagin will at once again be at the helm of the grill! Plan to bring a dish to share and don't forget to bring your swimsuit and towel. The backyard pool will be open at 2:PM. Food will be ready later in the afternoon.



September FIG Meeting: Sunday, 17 September, 7:00 PM (note Date!)

The Real Story of the Scopes Monkey Trial

Tim Madigan tells "The Real Story of the Scopes Monkey Trial." The play *Inherit the Wind* has done more than any other work to immortalize the 1925 Scopes "Monkey" trial in Dayton, Tennessee. Yet, ironically, the play was written in 1950 as a comment on the then-current McCarthy anti-communist hearings. In this talk, Tim Madigan will discuss the real story of the 1925 trial -- including information on the key participants, William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow -- and why *Inherit the Wind* is perhaps more relevant today than when it initially appeared on Broadway over 50 years ago.

Timothy J. Madigan, Ph.D., teaches philosophy at St. John Fisher College in Rochester, New York. He spoke at FIG's first program 15 years ago, and has instructed and entertained us many times over the intervening years.

The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup

When: Tuesday, August 15 at 8:00PM

Where: Joseph-Beth Booksellers ; 2692 Madison Rd. Rookwood Pavillion
Cincinnati OH 45207 ; Phone: 513-396-8966

To see who's coming and to see more event details:

http://atheists.meetup.com/90/events/4939320/t/cv1_ve

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Events

(Watch the dates!)

August Picnic

Sunday August 27, 2006
2:00 PM at the home of

September Potluck

Tuesday September 12, 2006
6:30 PM at the home of

September Meeting

Sunday, September 17, 2006
7:00 PM at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, Ohio

Please Note: This issue serves as both the August and September Issues of FIG Leave as your Editor will be un-available for a September Issue.



July Meeting...

The Saga of Freethought and Its Pioneers
 by Fred Edwards, Director of Communications,
 American Humanist Association,
 and Chairman of the Board of Camp Quest

Freethought has a long and ancient pedigree that spans centuries and cultures. First it is necessary to define what a freethinker is. Bertrand Russell gave a definition in his 1957 essay on *The Value of Freethought*:

What makes a freethinker is not his beliefs but the way in which he holds them. If he holds them because his elders told them that they were true when he was young, or if he holds them because if he didn't he would be unhappy his thought is not free. But if he holds them because after careful thought he finds the balance of evidence in their favor, then his thought is free, however odd his conclusions may seem.

By this definition a wide range of people have been freethinkers, not only atheists and agnostics but also deists, liberal religionists, religious innovators and those who challenge the principles of orthodoxy in every field of endeavor, from Science to Politics to the Arts. That adds up to a lot of people and what it tells us is that every great individual in history has to in some way or another think free. That's what makes these people stand out.

Most dictionaries define a freethinker as, "one who has rejected most authority and dogma, especially in religious thinking, in favor of rational inquiry." The term first came into use in England toward the end of the 17th century as a designation for those who inquired into traditional religious beliefs, tested them against their own experience, and dared to draw their own conclusions.

With this understanding in hand we can probe more widely venturing beyond England and Europe to include the whole world, when we do this, we discover, with the dictionary definition in hand, that freethought has a rich and significant history.

Perhaps it began in Egypt, going back to Cheops who built the Great Pyramid at Gizeh who lived around 2550 BCE. We find that there were "Wisdom Schools" for the sons of wealthy men, secular ideas were taught which provided practical instruction in maintaining emotional tranquility, practicing social decorum and getting ahead in politics. Out of this tradition grew the secular songs of the harpist who performed at banquets. Some of these songs brought critical thinking to bear on religious beliefs.

There are papyri in the British Museum dating back to 1300 BCE. Here is a translation from one of these:

Since the time of our ancestors generations have come and gone and been replaced. The gods who lived in former times rest in their pyramids, the dead nobles, too, are buried in their pyramids. And those who built the tombs, their places have disappeared. What has happened? The walls have crumbled and their paces are gone and it is as if they had never been. No one ever comes back from the beyond to inform us about their condition, to tell about their needs or to calm our hearts. Until the time comes when we go where they have gone, let your desires be strong, let your hearts forget funerary rites, follow your desires as long as you live.



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

figleaves@fuse.net;

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

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FIG LEAVES



This is reminiscent of the Arabic wisdom of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam written in 1129 CE. Here are some relevant selections of the 1879 edition of the translation of Edward Fitzgerald:

The worldly hope men set their hearts upon
Turns ashes—or it prospers; and anon,
Like snow upon the desert’s dusty face
Lighting a little hour or two –and is gone

Ah make the most of what we yet may spend,
Before we too into dust descend.
Dust into dust, and under dust to lie,
Sans wine, *sans* song, *sans* singer ,and—*sans* end!

Oh, threats of Hell and hopes of Paradise!
One thing at least is certain –This life flies;
One thing is certain and the rest is lies;
The flower that once has blown for ever dies.

Strange, is it not? that of the myriads who
Before us passed the door of Darkness through,
Not one returns to tell us of the Road,
Which to discover we must travel too.

The sort of secular wisdom schools that thrived in Egypt, thrived in ancient Israel as well. This is evident in a number of biblical proverbs. In the Book of Ecclesiastes written in the 4th Century BCE, we find the same acceptance of the finality of death as sung by the Egyptian harpists. Humanist Biblical scholar Gerald Larue translates Ecclesiastes 4:19-21:

The fate of men and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other; we all have the same breath of life. Man has no superiority over the animals. Both are void of meaning, both go to the same place; all are dust and all return to dust. Who knows whether the life of man ascends upward and the life of beasts descends to the underworld.”

As for humans after they’re dead, Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 tells us, “They know nothing at all and they experience no rewards and ultimately they are not remembered, their love, their hate, their passions are completely perished and nevermore do they have any part in what happens beneath the sun.”

These wisdom teachings of the ancient Middle East weren’t

atheistic. The situation was different on the Indian sub-continent. Some divisions that developed in Hindus were decidedly godless. Breaking off from Hinduism was Jainism, an atheistic ascetic philosophy, which, however, accepts the law of Karma.

Later Siddhartha Gautama became the founder of Buddhism an atheistic system of virtue and resignation. Around the same time Lao Tze in China founded Taoism a quietist system of agnostic mysticism shortly after that Confucius emerged to offer secular wisdom teaching aimed at teaching secular integrity. His ideas were agnostic and humanistic. They did not become widely accepted until about three centuries later when they were merged with system of social regimentation. From that time Confucianism became China’s state religion.

During the same period in Ancient Greece, the pre-Socratic Ionian philosophers were trying out new ways to explain Nature without reference to the gods. They were the Materialists. Among them Heraclitus wrote:”This world does the same for all. Neither any god nor any man shaped. But it exists. And ever was, and ever shall be an ever living fire.” Propounding atheistic concepts, Xenophanes claimed that the gods were created by humans in their own image.

Leucippus and Democritus, who flourished after the year 400 BCE, developed an atomic theory of the universe. Atom means uncuttable and refers to the irreducible, smallest thing. These atomists believed that everything in the universe could be reduced to these particles of matter and were so tiny as to be invisible.

How were these thinkers able to step outside Greek Mythology and offer such conclusions? Perhaps it lies in the nature of Greek Mythology itself. Greeks were less inclined to worship their gods as to make deals with them. They saw themselves, at times, as almost the equal of their gods. Greek Mythology found a uniquely freethinking divinity in the Titan Prometheus, he stands out because he was admired by the ancient Greeks as the one who defied Zeus. He stole the fire of the gods and brought it down to earth and for this he was gutted, and yet he continued his defiance amid his torture. Defiance of god is rarely manifested in other cultures. Yet,





this may be a root of the ancient freethought challenge to authority something that gave permission to the Materialist thinking. Eventually it allowed for the overthrow of monarchy and the creation of democracy.

Interestingly, the next time we see a truly Promethean character it is Lucifer in John Milton's Paradise Lost, but now he is the devil and evil. Whoever would defy god must be wickedness personified. That seems to be a given in most all religion, the ancient Greeks alone did not agree. Zeus with all his power could still be mistaken. This willingness to stand up to religious tradition shows up in Plato's *Euthyphro* where Socrates shows that god is not necessarily the source of good nor even good himself. Socrates asks is something good because god ordains it, or does god ordain it because it is already good. It was in this spirit during the golden age of Athens that a philosophic circle developed around the politician, Pericles. They included Anaxagoras, Xeno, Protagoras, and Pericles' mistress Aspasia, who seems to have been the real leader of the circle. Socrates declared that she taught him much philosophy. She was by all accounts a freethinker as well as a woman who lived free in a society in which other women

were almost as cloistered as some Muslim women are today.

Socrates is now remembered as the historical exemplar of the unfettered free-

thinker. After the centuries he still stands out, uniquely, among the famous saints, sages and martyrs from antiquity to the present. Every religion has its saints: Judaism has Moses, Zoroastrianism has Zarathustra, Buddhism has the Buddha, Christianity has Jesus, Islam has Muhammad, Mormons have Joseph Smith and Bahai has Baha'ullah. Everyone of these individuals claimed to know the absolute truth. It is Socrates alone among famous sages who claims to know nothing. Each devised a set of rules and laws. Save Socrates. Socrates devised a method for questioning the rules of others, a method of cross-examination and philosophic irony, Socrates didn't die for truth. He died for freedom and the rule of law. For these reasons, Socrates is the quintessential skeptical freethinker. He stands as the symbol of Greek rationalism and the humanist traditions that it inspired. And no really recognized saint or sage has joined his company.



-- Reported by George Maurer



Widow Weldon's Miracle

Widow Weldon's house burned down
 Praises ring all over town.
 Yes, it's true, and she will swear it on the book!
 But for angels she'd be dead.
 Fire burned up her chairs and bed.
 But, oh what a miracle god undertook!
 All the angels that she had
 Saved from the fire, and she's so glad.
 Praise the wonders that the lord performed that day!
 He was so nice to take the time
 Since there's so much death and crime;
 So just why he blessed the widow I can't say.
 She had angels made of clay,
 Glass and fine papier maché.
 Since not one was burnt, that shows the savior cares.
 But, the earth is full of woe,
 And help is always slow,
 So, it seems to me god answers *stupid* prayers!
 - Dorothy B. Thompson

Quote

The Last Czar now a "Saint"

The last Czar of the Russian empire, Nicholas, an autocrat who repressed his nation, has been declared martyr and saint by the Russian Orthodox Church in a recent ceremony. His family including Empress Alexandra, Tsarevitch (Crown Prince) Alexei and Princesses Olga, Tatyana, Maria, and Anastasia were also declared martyrs and saints. The church council decided a week ago to canonize the family and hundreds of others who it said had died for their belief in the church. Independent historians criticize the Czar for overseeing the 1905 "Bloody Sunday" massacre by Imperial Guards, who opened fire on peaceful strikers carrying his portrait, an event contributing to the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. Nicholas and his family were shot by Bolshevik revolutionaries in 1918.

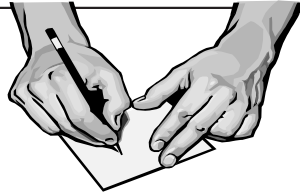
How does the average Russian view the last Czar now? A recent poll showed that many Russians continue to view the Czar with hostility for his autocratic rule. A survey showed 46 per cent disapproved of his canonization while 31 per cent backed it and 23 per cent were uncertain.

-- SOURCE: *Rationalist International Bulletin* # 45, (27 August 2000)

Unquote



Letters To The Editor



Even if it were true, it would be irrelevant.

From reading skeptical and religious sources, I can see that unbelievers and Christians agree on at least one thing: *The DaVinci Code* is bogus. I've read the book several times, seen the movie and studied or heard reviews. There are questions to consider about this argument beyond its factual misrepresentations.

The question posed by *The DaVinci Code* is: who are the true successors of Jesus: Peter and the Popes or Mary Magadene and her descendants? According to *The Code* the Catholic Church through Opus Dei is desperately trying to cover up alleged proofs of a Jesus marriage with descendants to the present day. The plot supposes that this knowledge would cause people to drop belief in the Catholic Church with its rule by men in order to embrace a Mary Magdalene Church including worship of "the sacred feminine."

Reality is likely different. Even if authentic documentary and DNA proof of this marriage and descent line were found, religious believers would disregard such, denounce it as "false," and cling to their traditional faith. There is no evidence anyone is changing their beliefs as a consequence of reading the book. We hear nothing about a "Mary Magdalene Church" being founded. So where is the perceived threat of this book and movie?

As some reviewers have pointed out, the book represents a wild goose chase. After desperately recording and tracking down clues the principal characters of the novel find a Mary Magdalene worship community already in being grouped around the Roslyn Chapel in Scotland. This group has preserved the documentary proof of the Jesus–Mary Magdalene marriage, and protects the burial place of the wife. So there seems little reason to leave written clues in the Louvre or in the safety deposit box, when there exists already a community of believers who know and guard the secret and its proofs. There simply is no secret, the Mary Magdalene cult exists and is safe.

Even if it were true that Jesus had descendants with Mary Magdalene, is that relevant? So what if Jesus had been married, a husband, and father, this would be totally unrelated to his mission in the Bible. Which may explain why these

personals are not mentioned in the Gospels. The religions of Christians are based on faith and conversion, not on lineal descent. Any children and other descendants of Jesus would be no different from other church members.

– Andrew O. Lutes

"Democracy demands that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal, rather than religion-specific, values. It requires that their proposals be subject to argument, and amenable to reason," Obama said July 28 in a talk to the Call to Renewal group. Principles must be "accessible to people of all faiths, including those with not faith at all."

"Now, this is going to be difficult for some who believe in the inerrancy" of sacred scripture. "But in a pluralistic democracy, we have no choice. Politics depends on our ability to persuade each other of common aims based on a common reality. . . . At some fundamental level, religion does not allow for compromise. It's the art of the impossible. If God has spoken, then followers are expected to live up to God's edict, regardless of the consequences. To base one's life on such uncompromising commitments may be sublime; to base our policymaking on such commitments would be a dangerous thing."

– Jim Hoagland reporting in *Washington Post National Weekly* (10-16 July 2006) p. 5

Benjamin Franklin on George Bush II

In *Silence Dogood*, No. 9, of July 23, 1722, Franklin addressed the question of whether religion makes officeholders more or less effective in executing their duties. At either end of the spectrum, he considered on the one hand "hypocritical Pretenders to Religion" and on the other the "openly Profane." Franklin considered the hypocrite to be the more dangerous in public office. First, he argued, the hypocrite was able through a "few savoury Expressions" of his religious beliefs and moral concerns to obtain among the voters an "Opinion of Goodness," especially in a land "noted for the Purity of Religion." By satisfying those who put him in office with a steady stream of pious words, the hypocrite "every day deceives his betters, and makes them the Ignorant Trumpeters of his supposed Godliness: They take him for a Saint, and pass him for one, without considering that they are . . . the Instruments of publick Mischief out of Conscience, and ruin their Country for God's sake."

– Frank Lambert, *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America* (2003) p. 186



Dr. Dino arrested for tax fraud

Young-Earth Creationist Kent Hovind (see Shermer's article, "Then a Miracle Occurs: An Obstreperous Evening with the Insouciant Kent Hovind, Young Earth Creationist and Defender of the Faith" (originally published in the *Reports of the National Center for Science Education* and archived in *eSkeptic* for Monday, May 10th, 2004), whom I called "the fastest talker I have ever met, with a voice like Ross Perot and a finish to each sentence that bespoke 'so there!'"

Well, according to the *Pensacola News Journal*, Hovind (also known as Dr. Dino, who built his Dinosaur Adventure Land in Pensacola), has been arrested on charges related to tax evasion. The God of Heaven may be omnipotent in his dealings with sin in the next life, but the God of the Government prefers to handle sinful matters in this life.

This also means that Hovind is not likely to be paying the \$250,000 he owes Adam Kisby, for meeting Dr. Dino's challenge to "prove beyond reasonable doubt that the process of evolution is the only possible way the observed phenomena could have come into existence." Kisby met Hovind's challenge in *Skeptic*, Vol. 12, No. 1, although admittedly Kisby didn't exactly expect Hovind to accept his proof.

—Michael Shermer

President chooses superstition over science!

On Wednesday, Mr. Bush vetoed the *Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act*. The first veto of his presidency was exercised to protect surplus embryonic stem cells in fertility clinics from research, thus preserving their "dignity" so they can be put out with the garbage. He did so on the grounds that using them in research would be "murder." This is based on the ancient belief in a "vital life force," or "soul," which is said by some Christians to be assigned at conception. The first sign of differentiation in embryonic cells occurs in about eight weeks. Jews, however, say that infants don't get a soul until they draw their first breath. They cite Genesis: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." On the other hand, superstition may not be the best guide. Why not turn to science?

— *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 21 July 2006

Growing up secular in thirties Brooklyn:

My parents weren't religious. I did not attend the synagogue on Fourth Avenue, about a mile from where I lived. Some non-Jewish kids in the neighborhood and their parents would sometimes ask me to join them at their religious services. I looked on it as a social occasion. Maybe their purpose was what they considered an altruistic attempt to save my soul? At one time or another I attended Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, Greek Orthodox, Methodist, as well as Jewish services. To tell the truth, I was never convinced by any of them. They all seemed to ignore the reality of life going on about them --like the war in Ethiopia, the pogroms against the Jews in Germany and the people starving right in front of them on the streets of Brooklyn --and appeared to spend their time praying for some amorphous being to do something about it rather than taking the responsibility upon themselves to solve the problems.

— Robert L. Hilliard, *Surviving the Americans*, (1997) p. 36

Quote

Surprising as it may seem, there was little sustained opposition to Darwin's book on the grounds that it directly challenged the account of creation in Genesis. Learned biblical study since the Enlightenment had encouraged Christians increasingly to regard the early stories as potent metaphors rather than literal accounts. The real challenge of Darwinism for Victorians was that it turned life into an amoral chaos displaying no evidence of a divine authority or any sense of purpose or design.

— Janet Browne in *The Guardian* (22 July 2006)

Unquote

Foreign Affairs?

Paradoxically the September 11, 2001 al-Qaeda suicide attack on New York further improved the international community's view of Sudan. In the months following September 11 President Bush was sorely in need of "good Arabs," and Khartoum was quick to understand that for a born-again Christian president a repented sinner would be more valuable than a routine ally. In addition US diplomacy was thrown into confusion when it became known that in 1996, before Osama bin Laden left the country to go back to Afghanistan, Khartoum had offered to deport him to Washington. Suddenly, in a world growing increasingly manichean, the "young men" in Khartoum looked like "good guys" and the Clinton administration like bunglers. President Bush and his aides quickly saw the benefits, both practical and ideological, to be derived from a change of policy towards the Sudan, and Washington began collaborating closely with Khartoum on the issue of terrorism.

— Gérard Prunier, *Darfur: The Ambiguous Genocide*, p. 89



David Koepsell on Reclaiming Moral Authority

Thomas Friedman, with whom I reluctantly sometimes agree, recently stated it best when he said that the Bush administration has plenty of “moral clarity” but no “moral authority” in the current crisis in the Middle East. That is to say, the current phase of the ongoing crisis in the Middle East. Indeed, years of not-so-benign neglect of lingering and rising tensions in the area, combined with a foreign policy that has alienated most of the world and an even greater percentage of the countries involved in the present conflicts, now prevent us from being an “honest broker” in any peace settlement. Even while our chief diplomats urgently and publicly plead hope for a cease fire, we lack any ability to structure one, to act as a mediator in one, or to enforce one, much less a full-blown lasting peace initiative.

Simply put: it is clear that we don’t care. When we declared the current “war on terrorism,” we chose a course of action that ruled out numerous more moderate and more likely successful options. The Iraq invasion clinched it, and closed off anything but a full-bore military strategy against terrorism. Problem is, such a strategy is doomed to failure. We were drawn into a trap, we took the bait, and we now serve as the world’s largest, most successful recruiting tool for radical Islamists. As long as we continue to wage this kind of “hot” war against an enemy that grows stronger with each blow, there can be little hope of secularizing and thus pacifying the Islamic world. Four years later, we are still fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan, with no clear end in sight. Three years later, civil war between two Islamic sects wages in the world’s newest Islamist state. Having abandoned their secular constitution, the new Iraq now breeds more radical Islamist warriors, bent on destroying western, secular values.

Can we reclaim our moral authority and disentangle ourselves from the current conundrum? We could, if we

embraced firstly the principle of secularism as necessary to any constitutional democracy. Next, we could acknowledge our mistakes in the current crisis in Iraq, and our disengagement in Israel and Palestine. Neither of these would assure peace, but it would be a good start. The roots of moral authority are in honesty, and we have not been honest about our goals in the region. Even were our stated goals honest, our methods have failed, and the fundamental error of believing that terrorism can be fought on the ground must be acknowledged. Terrorism must be fought in the mind and in the heart, and we have lost most of our appeal as a beacon for freedom and hope, democracy and progress. It was our status as this beacon that won the Cold War, as much as the failure of the communist system to meet these human needs, and we should revisit those lessons as we try to move ahead.

David Koepsell is the executive director of the Council for Secular Humanism and an assistant research professor at the University at Buffalo.

As Washington is run today, major issues of public policy are bent to the desires of those who control the Congress with their money. Time and time again socially desirable legislation in the public interest--whether having to do with health care, public safety, environmental protection, preservation of our natural resources, or any other issue of clear relevance to the entire society--is defeated, or sabotaged with statutory language into its perverse opposite. This is the recurrent truth in Washington, so rhythmically repetitive as to be its heartbeat. Business entities that pit themselves against the manifest needs of the American people, according to the issues that arise, take turns as enemies of the people. Nothing else on Capitol Hill occurs so reliably and regularly. This political fact of life is hardly news. It has been a long, long time since it was news. It is now only and obviously the way things are.

—E. L. Doctorow, *Reporting the Universe* (2003), p. 103

Science Book Club - Schedule for 2006

Science book club as in past years plans on meeting at the Cincinnati Downtown Library on the 4th Sunday of each month at 2:30pm in Room 3A, except on the 3rd Sunday where conflicts with holidays occur as noted below and in May in Room 3B because of a room schedule conflict.

Aug 27 - *On Intelligence* Jeff Hawkins

Sept 24 - *Economics in Perspective, A Critical History*: John Kenneth Galbraith

Oct 22 - *The “God” Part of the Brain*: Matthew Alper

Nov 19 (third Sunday)- *Black Holes and Time Warps: Einstein’s outrageous legacy*: Kip Thorne

Dec 17 (third Sunday) - *Science of Aliens*: Clifford Pickover

– Bryan Sellers





A Wife-swapping Disaster?

By Reginald V. Finley

[Reginald V. Findley Sr. is known as *The Infidel Guy*. His Internet radio program, *The Infidel Guy Show*, airs every Wednesday and Friday at 8:00 pm EST. His website may be accessed at <http://www.infidelguy.com>. The following is a recounting of his experience as a freethinker on the “reality television” program, *WifeSwap*, on which husbands temporarily exchange wives.]

When my family was first asked to appear on ABC’s *WifeSwap*, we had serious reservations. We knew that many of those “reality TV” shows are setups, staged, or just complete lies. However, my listeners and fans would not let my wife, Amber, and me say no. They figured our appearance on the show would be very good for freethinkers everywhere. And I must admit that even I figured that we were too smart to fall for those setups. So, finally, we gave in and responded to the e-mail we’d received from their casting director, informing them that we were willing to shoot the episode.

After a few months, filming finally began, and it was a nightmare! “Move over here! Move over there!” “Oops. We forgot that shot. Can we do it again?” There was no end to their demands. What was worse, however, was that during the entire filming, I simply did *not* live up to the crew’s expectations. They expected an in your-face atheist, someone rude and mean, someone cold and uncaring. They did not get that kind of person, so they created one.

I eventually realized what was going down and how they were trying to portray my “new wife,” Kelly—an unwitting accomplice—and me. At one point, I did break down and cry on the program, but of course, they manipulated the context of that event as well. At that moment, I realized that it did not matter what I said—the context could be changed in editing. The story that they put together in the editing room was one of many angles they had preplanned to exploit based on information we had given them beforehand.

I don’t know why I expected the show’s directors, producers, and editors to be fair. I think their idea of “fair” is making both families look bad. I had forgotten that it was “just entertainment,” as one representative from RDF Media reminded me. However, it was entertainment at the cost of the truth.

In the episode’s introduction, my wife, Amber, was pegged as an uncaring mother who loves video games more than her children. Dorian, my oldest son, was depicted as my very own personal slave. And I was portrayed as a man who indulged in a fruitless hobby while my

children suffered without their father.

With a quick, critical glance, one could see right away that something was amiss about the entire show. Facial expressions, comments, and scenes were obviously pasted together and taken out of sequence (for example, one would be surprised to see how quickly I changed my clothing between shots). Yet I received hundreds of hate messages from non-believers and some believers, accepting everything the show presented to them about my family and me. **Reality TV is most definitely *not* reality.** The editors pulled off a miracle to have the final edit air as it did. I complained to ABC and RDF Media about the episode and didn’t even receive a reply. They knew it was fiction. If I were in their shoes, I wouldn’t have returned my call either. We felt as if we had been used and discarded.

If you don’t believe that the camera lies, you are right—it doesn’t. But listen to what the announcer says. That’s the key to distorting the story. The announcer plays off the footage, and the audience is taken for a joyride. Here’s a brief example of how one can remain silent yet still look like a horrible person:

Scene: my wife brings me a sandwich and a drink at lunchtime. The children are in school and at daycare, and Amber is about to go to work.

Notice that this scene seems rather benign. There’s nothing to worry about there, right? Now let’s dub the announcer’s voice over the scene: “No time for family meals; Reggie is at his

desk, working another late night. Amber brings him some food and later goes back to playing video games.

Yep, it’s that simple.

The footage that was captured of Amber and me actually engaging in thought provoking discussions with our new spouses was completely cut out. I discussed Christian morality, the “problem of evil,” and my personal favorite, the “argument for atheism assuming the Christian god exists.” Amber rebutted many bits of misinformation about science and the naturalistic worldview that the audience never got a chance to hear.

I guess that it goes without saying that my wife and I will never do anything like this again. We volunteered to carry the burden, because we have so much in common with other families. The exception, of course, is that we simply do not believe in God. That was what I was hoping to convey to the world.

Perhaps a few good things did arise out of the episode, though. Many believers of various faiths recognized us from the show. They were apologetic and made mention that the episode changed their lives for the better. One woman in particular said that she never realized what a bigot she had been and how unfairly she had treated non-Christians. To hear such things from people on the street is encouraging. I hope that many others out there feel the same way. Perhaps my goal was met after all. It wasn’t my goal to kick butt and take names. We just wanted to show the world that atheists are people too. ☩



BOOK REVIEW

Galileo's Children: Tales of Science vs. Superstition
edited by Gardner Dozois
(Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2005)

It has been nearly four centuries since Galileo Galilei lost his legendary showdown with the Catholic Church's Court of the Inquisition. Threatened with imprisonment, torture and certain death, Galileo backed down — officially, at least — from his outrageous claim that the earth and the planets orbited the sun (a claim which he had the audacity to support with — gasp! — data, meticulously gathered and brilliantly analyzed).

Since Galileo's time, science has marched messily forward and superstition has been forced to retreat; although lately superstition has engaged in some clever stalling tactics. The ancient Catholic Church could enforce its will through military force and terror; in 21st century America, the more loosely organized Protestants simply outmaneuver scientists by dominating school boards and swarming the halls of Congress. Evangelical hegemony has replaced outright theocracy.

While nobody fights about the structure of the solar system anymore, the current front in the Science-Superstition Wars is in the realm of biology; specifically, Darwin's theory of evolution. Nearly 150 years and several monkey trials later, religionists in the United States still refuse to surrender the field to the purveyors of evolution. Creationism has been soundly defeated, but its adherents have recently transmogrified it into "Intelligent Design" — and readers of this newsletter know the rest.

So what better time for science fiction to step into the fray? Pyr, the new science fiction and fantasy imprint of Prometheus Books, has just published *Galileo's Children: Tales of Science vs. Superstition*. This retrospective, pulled together by acclaimed editor Gardner Dozois (who published *Asimov's Science Fiction* magazine for nearly 20 years), provides a taste of how the genre has reflected the perennial clash between the worlds of science and religion. *Galileo's Children* contains a baker's dozen of short stories by many of the greatest names ever to write science fiction.

Now, it would be incredibly boring if all the stories were mere parables of ignorant or corrupt church leaders

persecuting saintly researchers in lab smocks — but this anthology casts a wider and generally subtler net.

Several entries, while perfectly enjoyable, can't resist this predictable stereotype. In "The Stars Below" by Ursula K. Le Guin, a Galileo-esque astronomer is burned out of his home by a superstitious mob and forced to flee to a nearby silver mine. A citizen of a post-apocalyptic New Orleans begins to suspect forgotten truths about the earth in Edgar Pangborn's "The World Is a Sphere." Another Louisiana-based tale, "The Last Homosexual" by Paul Park, envisions a state where genetic presuppositions are used to root out unwanted minorities, and Brendan DuBois's "Falling Star" (published only last year) sees a geriatric astronaut booted out of his small-town, small-minded community.

Mike Resnick, on the other hand, almost makes us feel sorry for displaced shamans. "When the Old Gods Die" follows the decline of a respected elder who lives in a far-future Utopia trying to recapture the idyllic peace of pre-colonial Kenya. He fears — and rightly so — that the inevitable encroachment of technology will have a corrosive effect on his naïve constituents.

Other stories see faith in crisis with itself. Arthur C. Clarke's all-time classic "The Star" (originally published in 1955), describes a priest's anguish when he realizes the supernova that created the Star of Bethlehem also destroyed a highly advanced and enviably gifted civilization. George R. R. Martin, who's been wowing the fantasy world lately with his *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels, offers up "The Way of Cross and Dragon." A thousand years in the future, a human Inquisitor is sent by his alien archbishop to investigate a heresy that has elevated Judas Iscariot to sainthood. The notion of an alien archbishop is intriguing in and of itself, but Martin strikes out in a different direction, positing a hidden organization that manipulates philosophical/religious paradigms.

It's also possible that knowledge can be misunderstood, thus leading to more ignorance. In Robert Silverberg's "The Pope of the Chimps," researchers teaching sign-language to a colony of chimpanzees inadvertently pass along notions of God and the afterlife. And in James Tiptree, Jr.'s poignant "The Man Who Walked Home," a bizarre time-travel experiment creates its own folklore and — eventually — its own superstitions.

Often we can learn more by looking back at possible pasts rather than peering forward into possible futures. Keith Roberts's "The Will of God" wonders if inventions like the



FIG LEAVES



telegraph, the phonograph and the telephone might have been created under different circumstances — hindered all the way by narrow-minded mysticisms, of course.

Perhaps the strongest tales are those involving technologies that are cutting-edge by today’s standards. Chris Lawson’s “Written in Blood” puts a human face on Islam and postulates a genetic procedure in which the whole of the Koran can be encoded in an supplicant’s bloodstream. (One need only look around at the ubiquity of tattoos and body piercings in the present to guess what the adventurous of the future might do with their DNA.)

One of the best overall entries in the anthology is James Alan Gardner’s “Three Hearings on the Existence of Snakes in the Human Bloodstream.” Not to spoil it for the uninitiated, but it’s more or less a fable about the Protestant/Catholic schism, only this time the divide occurs over misinterpretation of a medical discovery, which over time becomes a tragically self-fulfilling prophecy. Another strong entry is Greg Egan’s “Oracle.” Set in an alternative-reality Britain, a gay researcher — assisted by a time-traveling android — takes on both MI6 and a pious fellow professor (who bears a passing resemblance to C.S. Lewis) to see just where the bounds of human reason might lay.

Fans looking for Arthur C. Clarke’s all-time classic “The Nine Billion Names of God” will be disappointed. In fairness, it has been reprinted and reprinted *ad infinitum*; besides, Clarke’s “The Star” is fitting enough.

Galileo’s Children isn’t the best science fiction anthology ever produced, but it’s quite good given its self-imposed restrictions. Skeptics and freethinkers will find something new and stimulating by reading it, and they’ll derive hope that America’s current socio-political climate is a mere pause before the cause of human progress surges forward, front-and-center once again.

Reviewed by John C. Snider, who is the editor of the online science fiction magazine *scifidimensions*.

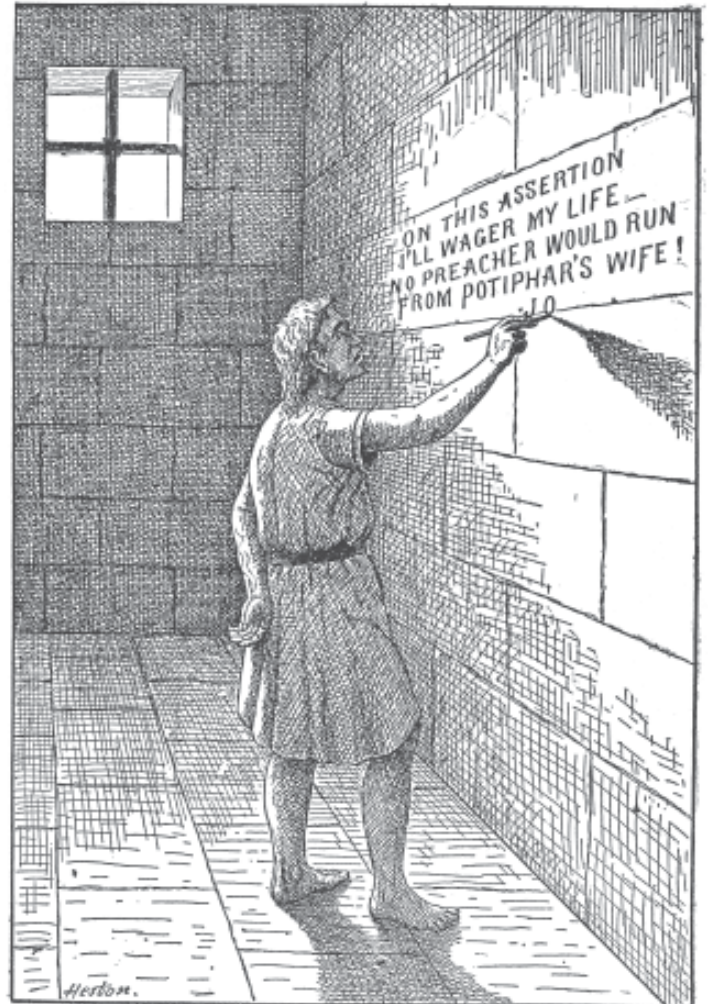
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Quote

Even though progress is only made through disobedience and rebellion, it doesn’t mean you’re progressing merely because you’re disobedient and rebellious.

– Wolf Roder

Unquote



“And Joseph’s master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king’s prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison.” -- Gen. xxxix, 20.

Watson Heston, *Old Testament Stories Comically Illustrated*. (New York: The Truth Seeker Company, 1892)

Quote

- **Headlines from the Year 2026**
- Couple petitions court to reinstate heterosexual marriage
- Baby conceived “naturally” ... scientists stumped
- Ozone created by electric cars now killing many in California, the world’s seventh largest country
- White minority petitioning to recognize English as California’s third official language
- Spotted owl plague threatens northwestern United States crops and livestock
- Refugees fleeing rising oceans in Louisiana and desert conditions in Texas

Unquote



BOOK REVIEW II

Myths, Lies, and Downright Stupidity: Get Out the Shovel—

Why Everything You Know is Wrong

by John Stossel

(New York: Hyperion, 2006)

Another book by John Stossel aimed at debunking what everyone knows is true. It is based on his investigations on the popular 20/20 television program. Myth busting, showing that many popular beliefs and traditions are nonsense, he informs us is fun. At the same time many of the lies and claims supporting the nonsense are designed to profit or give other advantage to those perpetuating them. Stossel clearly sees himself and his helpers as providing education, truth, and support for democratic freedoms. Can all the many issues he takes up be outright wrong?

Stossel examines a large number of topics, his descriptions and solutions are short, about one per page, so the book has some 280 myths for which it provides “truth.” In fact, I would consider this volume a usable reference book if it had a good index or detailed contents page. As it stands, you may have to search for the answer to a topic of interest.

The first chapter is devoted to showing the media, TV, radio, and newspapers, are clueless about science. Pesticide residues are in such small amounts they are largely harmless, food irradiation kills germs and is an excellent preservative, there is no cancer epidemic from chemical pollution or any other cause. Since Stossel is a media person himself, we are justified in accepting that he is equally clueless about much science. And sure enough in a later chapter he doubts a human effect on global warming and does not see much reason to do anything about climate change.

The media are of course ignorant about much else, including economics. Stossel is inclined to buy into the free market religion, competition in the free market will protect us. He informs us we don't need government regulations, or lawyers, or lawsuits, of the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission. The EEOC will not make America less sexist and racist, it will merely torment people and enrich lawyers. So Stossel buys into the pharmaceutical company claims that they need to charge high prices in order to pay for research on new medicines. He is unaware really new healing medical

ideas come from Government and the Universities. Big Pharma mostly researches for small changes on existing products to get new patents and new hype.

Some of Stossel's assessments are true, but simply not to the point. Yes, there is plenty of space on earth for all the garbage we generate, and yes you could cram the total world population into Texas. But do we want to live that way? Much of what he has to say on the chapters on *Stupid Schools* and *Monster Government* is not very relevant. We do need public schools for most children, and we do have to have a government because the people as a whole can not run America from day to day. Apparently John Stossel, who calls himself a libertarian, thinks we can do without most government.

Besides assessments that are not to the point or definitely wrong, Stossel informs us of a lot of things you probably know already. Women are better drivers than men; most businesses don't trip us off; politicians need to lie and are hypocrites; brand names merely cost more; bottled water is no different from tap water; most cars don't need premium gas; not fast food but eating too much makes us fat; experts can't “cure” homosexuality; experts don't know what the stock market will do; chiropractors can't cure asthma; there is no truth in astrology; police don't use psychics to solve crimes; homeopathy is absurd. And many more.

Let me say that much of what Stossel has to say is OK and some of it is very good. I like particularly his chapter on *Perils of Parenting*. His explanation why beating a child is a bad idea, even though the Bible says “spare the rod spoils the child.” Beating children makes them violent themselves, and other measures of discipline work better. He also works a good explanation why children should not always be obedient. Simply, they need to discuss the why's of right and wrong with their parents and to learn to think for themselves.

— Wolf Roder

Quote.....
• **Quoting Madeleine Albright:**
• “... I think Iraq will go down in history as the worst policy
• mistake in U.S. history, even worse than Vietnam, in
• terms of lasting effects” on international relations rather
• than in the number of American deaths. President Bush,
• she said, has not used America's exceptionalism wisely.
• — University of Chicago Magazine, August 2006, p. 13
•.....**Unquote:**



August Picnic: Sunday August 27, 2:00 PM
September Potluck: Tuesday 12, 6:30 PM
No August Meeting
September Meeting: Sunday 17, 7:00 PM



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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 figinfo@gofigger.org, or leave a message at (513) 557-3836. Visit our web site at gofigger.org.