

FIG LEAVES

Volume 18 Issue 12

December 2009

December FIG Meeting: **Note Time Changes!**

Tuesday 15 December 2009 at 7:00 PM

When: Tuesday 15 December 2009 at 7:00 pm

Where: The Hannaford Suites Hotel, 5900 E. Galbraith Rd. This is immediately west of I-71. Take Exit 12 onto Montgomery Rd.

What's So "New" About "The New Atheism"?

Speaker: Tim Madigan

In the past few years several books on atheism, by such authors as Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, Victor Stenger, John Allen Paulos and Daniel C. Dennett, have become best-sellers, and have sparked what has been called 'The New Atheism' movement. In this talk, Tim Madigan will discuss some of the reasons for this unexpected surge of disbelief, and what, if anything, is *new* about the new atheism, as well as the relevance this might have for organized humanism. Tim would be well primed for this topic since he is editing a series of articles on this subject for *Philosophy Now* magazine.

Timothy J. Madigan (Rochester, NY) is an assistant professor of philosophy at St. John Fisher College and a member of the editorial board of *Philosophy Now* magazine. For many years he was editor of *Free Inquiry* magazine.



January 2010 FIG Meeting: Tuesday, 26 January *Location to be determined*

What's New in the Right to Die Movement?

Speaker: Judith Snyderman

Judith Snyderman from the Final Exit Network will speak on "What's New in the Right to Die Movement." She will discuss recent events about what is happening abroad and in the US. She will also cover the two cases pending against volunteers from Final Exit Network in Arizona and Georgia and the raid on her house by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation last February.

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Events

December Potluck

*No potluck is scheduled.
Enjoy time with friends & family.*

December Meeting

7:00 PM, Tuesday Dec. 15, 2009
Hannaford Suites Hotel,
5900 E. Galbraith Rd.

January Potluck

No potluck is scheduled.

January Meeting

7:00 PM, Tuesday Jan. 26, 2009
Location to be determined.

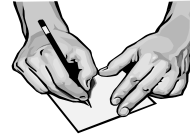
February Potluck

No potluck is scheduled.

HELP! We are still searching for a permanent location and don't have dates or times to report until we make more headway on that front. If you have any ideas/suggestions, please contact John Welte or Shawn Jeffers.



Letters



Secular Nation, Secular Military

Q: What is the proper role of religion -- and personal religious belief -- in the U.S. armed forces? Should a particular religious affiliation disqualify someone from active military service? How far should the military go to accommodate personal religious beliefs and practices?

The United States is a secular nation with a secular military. Its personnel take an oath of allegiance to the United States Constitution, which prohibits religious tests for any public office. The military cannot favor any particular religion over another, or religion in general over non-religion. Individuals are free to practice the religion of their choice, if they have one, as long as such practice doesn't interfere with their missions.

On the other hand, military officers are representatives of the U.S. government, and should not tell subordinates that the only way to salvation is through Jesus Christ. Nor should I, as a math professor at a state institution, tell my students that all gods are made believe. I've not done the make-believe thing, but there have been numerous instances of military proselytizing. A book by Mikey Weinstein, President of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, documents such incidents in, *With God on Our Side: One Man's War Against an Evangelical Coup in America's Military*.

Just as we should be color blind in treating military personnel, so should we be religion blind. I hope we will also soon have a blind sexual orientation policy. But don't ask, don't tell should not apply to religious beliefs or to orientation. So when in the military does the religious freedom rubber meet the religious restriction road? There generally are no problems with faith traditions that don't proselytize. The difficulty arises with those who believe their faith to be the one and only path to eternal salvation, and that it is their duty to "save" others. Such military personnel who deem their comrades to be religiously inferior should probably seek employment elsewhere--preferably in an occupation where the cohesion of a diverse community is not essential.

Stressful situations can bring out the best in people, as well as the worst. We've seen an abundance of both in the military. A notable example of the latter is the recent Fort Hood incident. We can't and shouldn't exclude people from military service because of their personal religious beliefs. However, we should give special attention to those whose stress levels seem particularly high for any reason, and disqualify anyone from active duty who believes our country is engaged in a holy war.

Herb Silverman is Distinguished Professor of Mathematics at the College of Charleston and Founder and President of the Secular Coalition for America (9 November 2009)



Holidays for Everyone

by Herb Silverman

Distinguished Professor of Mathematics at the College of Charleston and Founder and President of the Secular Coalition for America. (23 November 2009)

Q: What do you think of the American Humanist Association's new "Godless Holiday" campaign? The ads will say: "No God? . . . No Problem! Be good for goodness' sake. Humanism is the idea that you can be good without a belief in God."

Full disclosure: I'm a member of the American Humanist Association Board of Directors. But even if I weren't, I would strongly favor campaigns that show what everybody should know, that we can certainly be good without God. My main regret is that these kinds of messages haven't been promoted decades ago. For too long, humanists and atheists have been



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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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.



marginalized, ignored, or demonized in what many refer to as a “Christian country” or a “Judeo-Christian country.”

The goals of such ads are to show that there is a humanist community for like-minded people, that we represent about 16 percent of the population, that our perspectives should become part of the fabric of public opinion, and that we are open to dialog with those whose views are different.

There undoubtedly will be some Christians who perceive this humanist holiday celebration as part of the “war on Christmas,” perhaps even more sacrilegious than wishing someone “Happy Holidays.” Paranoids will be paranoids. Should we desist from promoting our viewpoint to spare their feelings? Of course not. They’ll likely hate us and our philosophy no matter what we do, so we should just be ourselves. Saying you don’t believe in God is no more anti-Christian or anti-religious than saying you are black is anti-white, saying you are female is anti-male, or saying you are gay is anti-straight. In the words of that great philosopher, Popeye the Sailor Man: “I yam what I yam.”

I was a member of the first media outreach committee of the American Humanist Association, and we struggled over the best kinds of ads that would both promote our worldview and would not be perceived as anti-religious. I tended to be edgier than most, which is why the committee rejected my suggested billboard: “Have You Found Jesus? Neither Have We.”

Many Americans will give thanks as they sit down to their Thanksgiving meals. Religious people are free to thank God for the food they are about to eat. Humanists are free to thank those who grew and prepared the food. And we are even free to recite Bart Simpson’s Thanksgiving prayer, “Dear God, we paid for all this stuff ourselves, so thanks for nothing.” And perhaps that’s the real point of what we can be thankful for in this and every season. We live in a free country with freedom of speech, with freedom to practice any religion or no religion, and the freedom to promote and advertise our beliefs. ☘



Contrary to common belief, witches actually stopped dancing naked around the fire on winter solstice with the advent of woolly turtleneck pullovers.

Cartoon from the Secular Humanists of the Low Country “The Separationist” December 2009. p.1.

Yuletide Greetings

by B. B. Saner in *Liberal* (December 1949)

The sun has completed its journey
And now will return once again;
To gladden the crops and the vineyards,
And comfort the spirits of men.

Ere Jesus and all of his cohorts
Had made their appearance in time;
Or even ere glorious Homer
Had written one immortal line –

When Athens was still in the future
And Memphis was still in the mold;
By bards of the barbarous peoples
The story was told and retold.

Yes, even before the God Krishna,
Whose legend the Christian Church thieved
And tagged on their mystical Jesus
A story by millions believed –

The Sun God was worshiped at Yuletide
By people all over the earth.
Who knelt and gave thanks and oblations
To honor their patrons rebirth.

Far saner to worship this day star,
Which brings us the heat and the rain,
Than kneel to the God of the Christians
With horrors and wars in its train.

So in line with this old pagan custom,
From which our holidays grew;
But freed from the latter’s delusions,
I send my best greetings to you!



THINGS TO DO...

THINGS TO SEE...



Hear! Hear! *Answers in Atheism* at

<www.answersinatheism.net>

JOIN US! - We are live on the internet

Thursday evenings from 7 pm to 8 pm EST. Our shows are also available as archived audio files, so you can listen later at any time. Please tune in at www.answersinatheism.net.

The Answers in Atheism crew

Wanted - A Volunteer

FIG has been asked for help by a young man, Tyler Chitwood, from Connor High School in Hebron, Kentucky. He is the son of a former FIG member. He needs an adult sponsor for the secular student group he is starting at his school. This sponsor would be responsible for monitoring the group twice a month for less than an hour each meeting. This is a minimum requirement of his school.

The group will be known as THINK - Tomorrow's Humanists In Northern Kentucky. These goals have been suggested:

1. To provide a functional system (because there is an absence of such) for non believers to participate within the school
2. To relieve the stigma of the atheist through heightened morale and community service, proving a person can be "good without god"
3. To increase the number of secular humanists in the community by means of reason and demonstration

If you would like to help young secularists to organize please contact Tyler by email at tyler.chitwood@insightbb.com or phone at 859 394-7648

Hebron is located just west of the Airport in Boone County

Announcing a new Meetup

The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup Group!

What: The Friends of the Observatory's Dark Sky Viewing Site

When: December 12, 2009 7:30 PM

Where: Stonelick State Park 2895 Lake Drive Pleasant Plain, OH 45162

Ohio's Stonelick Lake State Park hosts The Friends of the Observatory's Dark Sky Viewing Site. The park is situated far enough from light polluted suburbs to allow dark skies, yet close enough to the Cincinnati Metro area to attract hundreds of interested star gazers throughout the year. On Saturday's, near the New Moon, amateur astronomers set up a variety of telescopes inviting the public to view the wonders of the night sky. The event is free and open to the public.

This is a great opportunity to view planets, galaxies, nebulae, star clusters and stars. It is also a good opportunity to see many different types of telescopes in action, ask questions and become involved in the fascinating world of astronomy. Amateur astronomers are more than willing to have you look through their telescopes as well as explain astronomical concepts, from basic to complex.

More info here: <http://www.cincinnatiobservatory.org/darkskysite.html>. Learn more here: <http://www.meetup.com/cincinnatiatheists/calendar/11894381/>

2009/ 2010 partial SCIENCE BOOK CLUB Schedule - All

meetings will be held on the 3rd Sunday every month at 2:30 at the downtown Cincinnati Public Library in Room 3A. We have not yet established a final schedule beyond February 2010.

Dec 20, 2009 - *Origins of Creativity* by Karl Pfenninger & Valerie Shubik

Jan. 17, 2010 - *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* by John Cacioppo

Feb. 21, 2010 - *In Search of Memory: Emergence of a New Science of Mind* by Eric R. Kandel



Council Lauches Free Expression Cartoon Contest!

As part of its contribution to the Center for Inquiry's **Campaign for Free Expression**, the Council for Secular Humanism is sponsoring a Free Expression Cartoon Contest. The Council—publisher of *Free Inquiry*, the first major U. S. publication to republish a selection of the Danish cartoons—invites professional and amateur artists to submit their sharpest, cleverest, and most ingenious creations touching on that most sensitive subject: religion. (Though secular humanism

is not a religion, cartoons about secular humanists and other activists who live without religion are welcome, too.)

The Campaign for Free Expression is a CFI initiative to focus efforts and attention on one of the most crucial components of freethought: the right of individuals to express their viewpoints, opinions, and beliefs about all subjects—especially religion. As the great Danish cartoon controversy of 2005 and 2006 showed, few media can speak so eloquently—or so pointedly—on sensitive topics as a cartoon.

Learn more about how to enter at >www.secularhumanism.org<



UN Report Links Contraception And Climate.

Why, one wonders, has it taken this long? If, as most scientists accept, human activity is driving climate change; the place to start is fertility rates. Even now, on the eve of the Copenhagen climate conference, this crucial report from the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), *The State*

of the World Population 2009, has been almost ignored by the US media. The tactic of those who prefer to do nothing is to warn that the link between population and environment is complex. That's all it takes to scare the media away. Of course it's complex; everything is complex. It is doubtless true that the starving masses are responsible for less greenhouse emission than the wealthy. Does this mean we have a stake in keeping them poor? I hope not. But the poor do have high fertility rates. Their offspring may grow up to join the Taliban or something, drawing wealthy nations into costly and wasteful wars with huge environmental consequences.

In contrast, the UN food summit in Rome was a failure.

The goal was to find a new strategy to help farmers in poor countries produce enough to feed their people. Instead they wound up with a call for more international food aid. Meanwhile an estimated 1 billion people are seriously hungry. This was foretold by Norman Borlaug in his 1970 acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize. The green revolution, Borlaug warned, would be for naught if human reproduction was not controlled. We must face it some time

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 20 November 2009

The Result Of Too Many Innumerates?

Last week, Brendan O'Neill, innumerate editor of the online publication, *Spiked*, thought his side of a debate on population to be so brilliant he published it with the title: *Too many people? No, too many Malthusians*. Could Brendan O'Neill be related to Gerard K. O'Neill, the Princeton physicist who in 1977 published "The High Frontier: Human Colonies in Space?" O'Neill proposed erecting "islands" in space at the L5 point between the Earth and the Moon to serve as colonies on which to offload Earth's excess population. He envisioned giant cylinders, closed at the ends, rotating about the axis to simulate gravity for people living on the inner surface. He thought each island could support one million people. In the 33 years since, Earth's population has grown by three billion. We would need three thousand of these gigantic space colonies to offload the excess population. Today, the hugely expensive ISS has trouble keeping six alive.

Malthus was a hero before his time. Born in 1776 in Surrey, Thomas Malthus was well-educated in mathematics,

but served as a gentle country parson, keeping the census in his parish. He observed that most animals bore offspring far beyond mere replacement. This would result in exponential growth of the population, eventually overflowing the boundaries of productive agriculture. His simple reasoning was dismissed by the mathematically challenged, and still is.

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 27 November 2009

Hip, Hip, Hooray!

Did you read the article "Books Written By Our Members!" which appeared in the April 2009 FIG Leaves? This article included a great review of an historical novel by Vivian Kline: *Let Freedom Sing: Of 19th Century Americans. An Historical Novel Or Could It Be A Musical?*

Did you know that since publication, Vivian was honored at the Gala of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People? This gala, which took place on October 16, 2009 had a dual purpose. It is "the" fundraiser for the Cincinnati NAACP. It is also an awards ceremony.

It is little wonder that Vivian Kline received the Innovative Educator/Writer Award for *Let Freedom Sing*. The extensive bibliography alone, organized by subject matter, is a fountain for any class, book club, or researcher.

Those of you who have yet to read the book may wonder what the story has to do with the NAACP. Read the book! It is a fascinating story. You can get it from Joseph Beth Booksellers in the Rookwood Pavilion, at Amazon.com, Barnes and Noble.com, or as an e-book. Links to online purchasing, with possible discount, are available on Vivian's website (<http://www.viviankline.com>).

For more information about the NAACP and their history go to

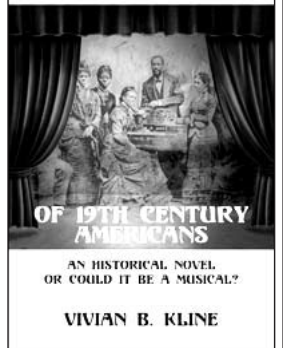
<http://www.naacp.org/about/history/index.htm>.

You can find additional media coverage in *The Cincinnati Herald*. Vivian's story makes the front page in each issue. The issue dated April 18-24, 2009 has an in depth report introducing the story's characters and Cincinnati roots. You will also find an image of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. The October 10-16, 2009 issue features the gala event. Vivian's photo is one of twelve that frame the story.

Vivian, a Cincinnati since 1960, has been a long time member of FIG. Congratulations on your novel and award, Vivian.

- Report by Fran Welte

LET FREEDOM SING:





Another Talk About "Faith."

On Wednesday in the *NY Times* an op-ed by Nicholas Kristof remarked on a new crop of books dealing with the war between science and religion. He describes this latest crop as "less combative and more thoughtful" than those by Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris and the like. He hopes this "marks an armistice in the religious wars." I hope not. Kristof is particularly taken by Robert Wright's *The Evolution of God*. I like it too. Wright is smart, and a really good writer, but he needs to be more like Dawkins, Hitchens and Harris. In his latest book he explores how religion has gotten "better" over time. People are no longer burned at the stake in the name of religion. No, now they are now blown to pieces with improvised explosive devices or flown into the side of public buildings. Different religion -- same God.

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 27 November 2009

Creationism Needs A Little Help In Spreading The Word.

An evangelical Christian, Ray Comfort, is busy distributing more than 100,000 free copies of his personal edition of Charles Darwin's seminal work, *On the Origin of Species*, on college campuses. That's nice of him; I asked my students to pick me up a copy if they get a chance. Eugenie Scott, of NCSE, the National Center of Science Education, dealt with Comfort in *US News*. Nevertheless, I thought Comfort's argument that all species are fully evolved was truly original: "Nothing we have in creation is half evolved," he wrote. "We don't find a half-evolved cow." You don't get that kind of thinking every day.

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 20 November 2009



Back by Popular - Demand Register Today!

**Join CFI Indiana for three new full-day
Intensive Sessions of the CFI Institute!
January 16 • February 20 • April 17
Center for Inquiry Indiana, 350 Canal Walk,
Suite A, Indianapolis, IN 46202**

After the resounding success of CFI-Indiana's September conference on comparing and critiquing the traditional views of both religious and nonreligious people, many attendees expressed an interest in learning more from each of the three experts who spoke. In response, we have scheduled three intensive full-day sessions to give those who want more in-depth knowledge on the subjects a chance to spend generous time with each of these learned scholars. Join us as we begin a fresh exploration of religion with Ibn Warraq, a scholar of the Koran and Islam; Robert Price, a biblical scholar; and John Shook, a philosopher of religion and naturalism.

Speakers

Ibn Warraq, Ph.D., Islamic scholar and a leading figure in Koranic criticism, is a senior fellow at the Center for Inquiry-Transnational. He is the author of five important and distinguished books on Islam and Koranic criticism, including the classic *Why I am Not a Muslim*, *The Origins of the Koran*, *What the Koran Really Says*, and the forthcoming *Which Koran?*

Full-Day Session: Jan. 16, 2010

Robert Price, Ph.D., Professor of Theology and Scriptural Studies, Johnnie Coleman Theological Seminary; founder, editor, and fellow, The Jesus Seminar; executive board member, The Jesus Project; The Bible Geek. His books include *Beyond Born Again*, *The Reason-Driven Life*, *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man*, and *Inerrant the Wind*.

Full-Day Session: Feb. 20, 2010

John Shook, Ph.D., is vice president and senior research fellow at the Center for Inquiry Transnational in Amherst, N.Y., and research associate in philosophy at the University at Buffalo since 2006. He has authored and edited more than a dozen books, is a co-editor of three philosophy journals, and travels for lectures and debates across the United States and around the world. **Full-Day Session: April 17, 2010**

Conference Fees

General: \$60 per session, \$150 for all three sessions

Friends of the Center: \$50 per session, \$125 for all three sessions

Students: \$25 per session, \$60 for all three sessions

To Register:

Register Online & pay with a credit card **or**
Download a mail-in Registration Form.

For more information, please visit the CFI-Indiana Institute Web page, e-mail indy@centerforinquiry.net, or call 317-423-0710.

The Center for Inquiry-Indiana, promoting science, reason and freedom of inquiry in all areas of human endeavor, is located at 350 Canal Walk, Suite A, Indianapolis, IN 46202.



The Serious And Silly Season For Religion

By Sheldon F. Gottlieb

Each autumn represents, inter alia, what I consider the beginning of the serious and silly religious season in which almost anything in the name of religion can happen. This year, I was not disappointed. Two separate independent reports emerged: one dealing with the Shroud of Turin and the other with rewriting the Bible by removing all “liberal bias.”

On the serious side: Italian organic chemist Luigi Garlaschelli claimed to have artificially reproduced the Shroud of Turin. Presumably, he reproduced the full-sized shroud using materials and techniques that were available in the Middle Ages. Along with a large body of other evidence, this accomplishment helps prove definitively that the piece of cloth some Christians revere as Jesus Christ’s burial shroud is a medieval fake. This achievement is still too new for the nay sayers to come to the fore.

Sadly, to counteract the religiously based silliness surrounding the shroud, valuable resources have to be expended to prove a known forgery is truly a forgery because there are people who fervently “believe” (accepting as true even when a variety of scientific evidence shows otherwise) that the cloth is what they claim, i.e., Jesus’ shroud. They still believe despite Bishop Pierre D’Arcis’s denouncement of the shroud as a fraud in the 14th century (about the time of the shroud’s reported existence). In a letter written in 1389 to the Avignon Antipope Clement VII, Bishop D’Arcis mentioned that the image had been denounced by his predecessor Henri de Poitiers. D’Arcis stated: “Eventually, after diligent inquiry and examination, [Henri de Poitiers] discovered how the said cloth had been cunningly painted, the truth being attested by the artist who had painted it, to wit, that it was a work of human skill and not miraculously wrought or bestowed.” Bishop D’Arcis also mentioned Bishop de Poitiers’s attempt to suppress the shroud’s veneration. Predictably, he was unsuccessful and its silly veneration continues to this today.

One can only hope - knowing full well that it will not occur - that reason based on science and historical evidence will eventually win out over the silly adage based on unreason and religious belief.

On the silly side, the people at the conservative version of Wikipedia, *Conservapedia*, decided to initiate the

“Conservative Bible Project,” a rewriting of the Bible to rid it of “liberal bias.” I am quite certain that they are referring to the Christian and not the Hebrew scriptures, yet I am not sure which version of Christian scripture will be used.

When Thomas Jefferson rewrote the Bible he concentrated solely on the King James Version of Christian Scripture. Jefferson attempted to extract the essence of Jesus’ moral and ethical teachings by removing from the New Testament references to the supernatural as well as what he perceived to be its misinterpretations.

In contrast, the Conservative Bible Project, unlike Jefferson’s brilliant approach, is designed to rewrite the bible to conform to what the Conservapedians conceive as modern conservative ideology.

Irrespective of the humor of the situation, we have to applaud their honesty. Throughout history, the Bible always had been interpreted to conform to the prevailing ideology of the times without any need to rewrite it. Religion and the supposed word of God are subservient to political ideology.

The biblical liberal biases the Conservapedians refer to have been removed or rewritten in their version. Some examples: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing,” “Turn the other cheek,” Jesu’ disdain for profiteering, and any other teachings that could be interpreted as favoring socialist philosophy. According to the Conservapedians, “Socialistic terminology permeates English translations of the Bible, without justification.” I wonder how the Sermon on the Mount will be transformed by these “Wackopedians.”

Let religious-based silliness proceed.

Sheldon F. Gottlieb, PhD is the author of THE NAKED MIND. He can be e-mailed at shellyeda@gmail.com.



The Philosophy Of Ambiguity...

- Atheism is a non-prophet organization.
- One tequila, two tequila, three tequila, floor.
- If you try to fail, and succeed, which have you done?
- I went to a bookstore and asked the sales-woman, “where’s the self-help section?” she said if she told me, it would defeat the purpose.



Sarah Palin's 'Rogue' Christianity

By Sally Quinn

Washington Post journalist and author, Quinn founded and moderates "On Faith," a *Washington Post* and *Newsweek* blog about religion and its impact on global life (17 November 2009).

In her new book Sarah Palin writes that one summer at Bible Camp she "put my life in my creator's hands and trust Him as I sought my life's path." For Palin, this grand divine plan was "a natural progression." She writes. And later, "I don't believe in coincidences." Which leads me to ask:

What does she believe is God's plan for her? Does she have any free will or is everything preordained. Can she see something coming and change her mind despite God's plans for her? Did God plan for her to become Governor of Alaska. If so, did God plan for her to step down. Did God plan for her to run for Vice President? If so why did she and McCain lose? Did God plan for her to have a child with Down's Syndrome? If so why did she consider an abortion? Did God plan for her to have a huge wardrobe? Then why did she apologize for it? Did God plan for her to do the Katie Couric and Charlie Gibson interviews and be humiliated by them. Did God plan for her to allow herself to be forced, against her will to do those interviews? If so then why complain?

Did God plan for her daughter Bristol to get pregnant while she was a teenager? Why was she then not thrilled. Did God plan for Bristol to get engaged and then break up, only to be left a single mother, dropping out of school? Did God plan for Levi Johnson to be the father of her grandchild? Did God plan for Levi Johnson, whom she now calls Ricky Hollywood, to pose nude for *Playgirl* and go into "porn" as she told Oprah. If so, why does she find it heartbreaking?

I find it all very confusing.

Certainly Palin could say that God planned for her to publish a book that would be a huge, bestseller, go on Oprah, and make an enormous amount of money. Why would God choose her? Why would God look at the suffering around the world of so many millions and say, Sarah, I'm going to give you all of this.

Perhaps God wants more out of Sarah Palin. You would think that God would ask of her to live her life as an example to others of a compassionate loving, caring person. One of the most powerful examples of God's love in the Bible is that of forgiveness. Turning the other

cheek. But Palin's book is a screed against everyone who ever done her wrong.

She is angry at the campaign staffer for "forcing her to do things she didn't want to do," she is angry at the media for asking her questions she couldn't answer. She is angry at the father of her grandson for being a foolish teenager. She has used this book and all of her Christian charity to do nothing but settle scores. She names names and calls 'em like she see 'em. And she doesn't see 'em the way God might. They are all his children.

Why would she not simply write a book describing her life as full of blessings as they are, forgiving those who caused her pain or discomfort and show God the gratitude she owes him for everything he has bestowed upon her.

But maybe that wasn't God's plan for her. Maybe he decided that he would have her stray from the basic tenets of her religions beliefs. The dictionary defines "rogue" as "an individual varying markedly from the standard."

The standard for Palin's God and faith is love, generosity, mercy and forgiveness. Perhaps that's what she means when she says she is "Going Rogue."



What The Space Program Has Shown Us!



There is no place else to go. If global warming is real and we're the cause, we need to mend our ways. We are not going to clean up the Earth's atmosphere by burying carbon. There are just two things we can do: make fewer people, and use energy more efficiently. The first seems to be mostly a human rights problem; the second falls squarely on our shoulders, but it won't help if the fertility rate remains high. But what if carbon in the atmosphere is not a problem as the deniers insist? We ought to promote efficiency anyway, if only for the sake of future generations.

- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 13 November 2009



Quote
No man ever believes that the Bible means what it says: He is always convinced that it says what he means.
George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) Unquote.



Does This Sound Familiar?

David Nicholls, *The Sydney Morning Herald*
(Australia), 27 November 2009

You would think that in a country widely acknowledged as one of the world's most non-religious nations, politicians would be keen to parade their secular credentials. Curiously, this is not the case in Australia.

Having survived a decade of the Howard government's blatant exploitation of religion for votes, it is disappointing to find the Labor Government following suit. This seems rather counter-productive considering that 92 per cent of Australians are so disinterested in religion they can't be bothered going to church.

In fact, the Government is so busy knock-knock-knocking on heaven's door, they've missed the bleeding obvious. Most of Australia's churches are empty, the non-religious sector is growing twice as fast as Pentecostalism, Australia's religiously unaffiliated outnumber Pentecostals by 17 to one, and more than half of Australia's "Gen Y" don't believe in God. Even the Pope has acknowledged that religion is moribund in Australia.

Meanwhile, the Government continues to alienate the majority of Australian voters by kowtowing to a noisy religious minority. In August, the Rudd Government *substantially increased funding to non-government schools*, ignoring an internal review, which warned of entrenched inequities in the system.

Last week, the Australian Labor Party announced it will extend Howard's *school chaplaincy program*, adding \$42.8 million to the \$165 million already committed by taxpayers. If children in state schools need counselling, surely funding should go towards providing qualified counsellors, not those who bring only their blue card and religious bias to the table. What will be next? Will Medicare favour faith-healers, over doctors on the basis that they're "more economical" and "just as effective"? If not, why are our children any less deserving of unbiased, professionally accredited counsellors?

Bowing to pressure from the religious right, Rudd's Government continues to oppose laws that would grant equality to same-sex couples and ignores the 80 per cent of Australians who favour voluntary euthanasia.

Last week, the Prime Minister graced the Australian Christian Lobby Conference with his presence. He has ignored the Atheist Foundation's invitation for him to address the Global Atheist Convention to be held in

Melbourne next March.

Given Labor's ungainly lean towards the religious right, it was not altogether surprising when the Atheist Foundation was advised last week that the Brumby Labor Government (Victoria State) has rejected the Atheist Convention's application for funding. The *Rise of Atheism Convention* will feature some of the world's most influential public intellectuals, including evolutionary biologist, Richard Dawkins and philosopher Peter Singer. It has attracted worldwide attention, has already sold about 1400 tickets and is on target to sell more than 2000, bringing a considerable amount of publicity and revenue to Victoria.

Despite this, it appears we "do not meet the criteria" for funding, (though we were recently led to believe that having reached ticket sales of 1000, funding was more or less assured). Indeed, we're rather puzzled that the State Government held on to an application that didn't meet its criteria for five months. It's also puzzling that the Parliament of the World's Religions, a similar gathering, in the same venue starting on December 3, involving a similar exchange of philosophical views qualifies for \$4.5 million of government funds – more than 16 times the amount requested for the Global Atheist Convention.

The international atheist community is large and well-connected and news that Victoria doesn't welcome non-theists is already leaking out. Richard Haynes, executive director of the American-based Atheist Nexus represents 13,000 atheists worldwide. In an e-mail to the Atheist Foundation Haynes says, "I seriously doubt the Victorian Government will uphold this injustice. We will reserve judgment for now, but if it stands, rest assured our community will inform the world of their bigotry."

So, for now, it's: Atheists, nil; theists, \$4.5 million – unless the Brumby Government sees fit to change its mind and the Federal Government deigns to acknowledge that it represents secular as well as religious Australians.

Despite all indications to the contrary, the Atheist Foundation is still hopeful that the decision is no more than a bureaucratic bungle and that sanity – and secularity – will soon prevail.

David Nicholls is president of the Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc. Source: <theage.com.au>





Evolution - Happy 150th Birthday

reviews by John Welte

November 2009 marked the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of the release of Charles Darwin's *On The Origin of Species By Means Of Natural Selection*. Two new books and one released in 2007 illustrate the progress that scientists have made in establishing that evolution is a fact. These books set out the evidence in a format that is thorough, concise and very understandable.

Your Inner Fish: A Journey Into The 3.5 Billion Year History Of The Human Body

by Neil Shubin

Neil Shubin is a paleontologist and professor of anatomy at the University of Chicago. He spends every summer in the Arctic in a small tent on Ellesmere Island that is surrounded with piles of rocks to protect it from the 50 mile per hour winds. It is cold and barren. It sleets and snows. Shubin loves it. This is where he and his colleagues found one of the most important pieces of evidence for evolution so far discovered, the *Tiktaalik*. Shubin writes a compelling and interesting adventure story that started in 1999 and culminated in 2004 with the find of a lifetime.

Tiktaalik is an Inuit word meaning "large fresh water fish." Shubin needed to look for this fossil fish in the Arctic because the area featured the rocks where he suspected, after reviewing the findings of other scientists, he would find a "missing link" between water dwellers and their land dwelling descendants. The exposed rocks were the right age and type. They were 375 million year old sedentary rocks from an ancient river delta.

The subtitle of the book could be confusing until you realize that Shubin is highlighting the similarities between this ancient fish and the human body. The fossil of *Tiktaalik* displays a rudimentary wrist bone that helped it to crawl onto the land using its front fins. The book compares the appearance and function of this bone to the modern human wrist. The neck of the fish is also distinct from its predecessors since it is the first known animal that had a head completely free of the shoulder so that it could turn its head independently from its body.

All subsequent descendants including mammals display this functional adaptation.

Shubin also shows the similarities that can be found between our DNA and that of *Tiktaalik*. The same basic DNA "recipe" that makes the fins in fish causes hands to grow in humans with just a slight modification. It is evident from studying genetics that all organisms evolved using the same basic genetic recipe as other organisms. The determining factor is which genes are "turned on" in our DNA sequences and what has been added to that basic recipe.

Shubin says, "Looking back through billions of years of change, everything innovative or apparently unique in the history of life is really just old stuff that has been recycled, recombined, repurposed, or otherwise modified for new uses. This is the story of every part of us, from our sense organs to our heads, indeed our entire body plan."

The Greatest Show On Earth:

The Evidence For Evolution

by Richard Dawkins

The latest book by Dr. Dawkins is beautiful in its prose and presentation. Not only does it exhibit the no-nonsense, straight forward style that he used to discredit religion in *The God Delusion*, it also utilizes many colorful photographs, drawings, and diagrams to illustrate the evidence cited in the text. After stating that over 40 percent of Americans, according to recent Gallup and Pew polls, believe that life was created in its present form, he issues the following statement. "Evolution is a fact. Beyond reasonable doubt, beyond serious doubt, beyond sane, informed, intelligent doubt, beyond doubt evolution is a fact." He coins the term "history deniers" when referring to creationists and intelligent design supporters and says he hopes to reach some of those people with this book. The evidence for evolution as described in the book is so overwhelming that "...no unbiased reader will close the book doubting it."

The myths about evolution that are spread by the history deniers are dealt with in a simple but deliberate manner. The concept of deep time is denounced by the history deniers, so Dawkins gives a brief description of the ways that deep time is measurable. We measure time not just by one method but many. The results of these methods concur about the age of the earth and its





inhabitants.

The myth of random chance as the mechanism for evolution is dispatched in a discussion of the logical progression of mutations that are retained by an organism simply because they benefit that organism. Thus, evolution is bound to happen through natural selection.

The myths of the “missing link” and a lack of transitional fossils similarly die when we are presented with the many examples of fossils that obviously exhibit transitional traits. Scientists predicted the discovery of many of these fossils.

To answer the myth that no one has seen evolution take place, Dawkins cites the fascinating research (too intricate to be described in detail here) of Dr. Richard Lenski, a bacteriologist at Michigan State University. Over the last twenty years, Dr. Lenski has monitored the evolution of the bacteria *e. coli* in an experiment that has generated 45,000 bacterial generations, the equivalent of one million years in human evolution. The changes evident in the strains of bacteria are positive evidence for evolution. Geologic changes and prey/predator relationships also affect natural selection in ways that Dawkins illustrates in successive chapters.

The most fascinating piece of evidence presented is the fact that we can determine how closely we are related to any organism (plant or animal) by examining our DNA. If we are more closely related to an organism, we will share more of the genetic structure with the organism. All share at least some genetic factors with the more primitive organisms, thus illustrating the fact that all came from some initial “building block” of life. From this building block in a single celled organism, all organisms are descended. We are related to every living organism that is or was. Charles Darwin in *The Origin Of Species* said, “There is grandeur in this view of life.” There is grandeur in this latest work from Professor Dawkins.

Evolution: What The Fossils Say And Why It Matters
by Donald R. Prothero

Donald Prothero is professor of Geology at Occidental College in Los Angeles. This book was released in 2007. It is included with the aforementioned works due to its direct confrontation with the ideas of creationists and intelligent design advocates. The first five chapters are devoted to directly confronting and destroying these

ideas and presenting evidence upon which to base the rest of the book. Prothero is even more emphatic than Dawkins in pointing out the illogical and deceitful attempts by the history deniers to spread their nonsense and fantasy. He displays a substantial amount of evidence to support the theory and fact of evolution.

Graphs, diagrams, charts, photos, and text illustrate the modifications that have occurred from simple single celled organisms to the most complex creatures on the planet. Prothero states that *all* fossils are transitional fossils since they were in a long line of evolutionary change and not static creations. Our relationships to all organisms are highlighted as they are in the other books mentioned here. Extensive notes, bibliography, further reading sections, and web site links make this book a valuable resource on the evolutionary studies of the past and present.

This Prothero quote is a fitting close:

When all is said and done, we have just a few choices. We can let the creationists further damage our scientific literacy and technological and scientific advantages, or we can try to bring back rigorous science education in our schools and make it a priority. We can reject evolution, astronomy, geology, paleontology and anthropology for some minority’s religious viewpoint, or we can accept what science has taught us about the world, and see ourselves in this humbling new light.”

Conclusion:

These three works are a definitive collection and summation of the past one hundred fifty years of scientific research since Darwin’s world changing book was published in November of 1859. They are not comprehensive but they represent the collective works of scientists and researchers who have embarked on a quest for the truth and have found that all the evidence leads to evolution by natural selection. Darwin would probably be impressed with the advances in evolutionary science that have taken place since his book was published but would also be surprised at the lack of acceptance of his theory by the general public. These books are invaluable references for anyone interested in the study of evolution and those who wish to debate or discuss Darwin’s theory with the history deniers.





No Jan. Potluck is scheduled
No Feb. Potluck is scheduled



December Meeting
Tuesday Dec. 15 at 7:00 PM



FIG Leaves
P.O. Box 53174
Cincinnati, OH 45253

FIG

Our Purpose

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

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



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

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

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

For more information, write the Free Inquiry Group at the address above, e-mail - figmessage at gofigger dot org, or visit our web site at gofigger.org or freeinquirygroup.org.