



CENTER FOR INQUIRY

Portland

November
2011

The mission of the Center for Inquiry is to foster a secular society based on science, reason, freedom of inquiry, and humanist values.

CFI has established centers throughout the world which provide a means of delivering educational programs and services on a local level and provide a venue for like-minded individuals to meet and share experiences.

In aiming to foster a secular society, we do not seek to abridge the rights of believers. We vigorously object to government support of religion and the use of religious dogma to justify public policy; we do not oppose the free exercise of religion. The secular society we are building is a community of reason and compassion in which the dignity and fundamental rights of all individuals are respected.

Three goals represent the focus of our activities: an end to the influence that religion and pseudoscience have on public policy, an end to the privileged position that religion and pseudoscience continue to enjoy in many societies, and an end to the stigma attached to being a nonbeliever.



Three days of film, talk, & community: **The Portland Humanist Film Festival**

11/11/11 is the kickoff for our biggest CFI-Portland event in 2011, at Cinema 21, 616 NW 21st Ave, Portland.

Starts 5pm Friday and 2pm Saturday and Sunday

Friday \$5.00 • Saturday/Sunday \$10.00 • Weekend pass \$20.00

Purchase passes at www.HumanistFest.com

Popular Hollywood films, juried independent films, and presentations by film directors and noted speakers will co-create our theme: Advancing a Culture of Freethought.

See 17 films that shed light on the freethought and humanist values you really care about. Themes include: the impact

of powerful extremist religious organizations in politics, the separation of church and state, the human quest for meaning, the cultivation of critical thinking, historical drama, same-sex marriage, comedy, and **independent films that you will never see on Netflix!**

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FRIDAY 11/11/11 - "Triple Feature Friday!" See *The Nature of Existence*, *The Invention of Lying*, and *Monty Python's Life of Brian* with a character costume contest and prizes. ALL three films for \$5.00 on Veterans Day (Free if you are a veteran or active duty military with ID/proof). Master of Ceremonies: Professor Will Knott from the lower highlands of Halfthefax.

SATURDAY 11/12/11 - Don't miss featured speaker Tom Flynn's talk: "Who Are These Doubters Anyway?" an exploration of the growing demographic that doesn't believe in a god. Tom Flynn, editor for *Free Inquiry Magazine* and Executive Director for The Council for Secular Humanism has come to the west coast just for this event!

SUNDAY 11/13/11 - See Jay Rosenstein's Peabody Award winning film, *The Lord is Not on Trial Here Today*. Then discuss the separation of church and state with Bruce Adams, president of the Columbia

chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

Celebrate the CFI-Portland Independent Film Awards: Four winning films will be screened with producers present to answer your questions.

FINALE - per your many requests: *The Ledge*.

Don't miss the west coast's largest secular humanist film festival. Your participation is what makes this event possible and keeps Portland oh - so - secular!

Sponsored by Center for Inquiry - Portland
Contributions by Humanists of Greater Portland

P.S. There are rumours that The Gypsy Restaurant and Lounge, across the street from Cinema 21, will be the hangout when you want to socialize over a drink and have a bite to eat. (No one will judge you if you only see 16 films!)

"The Ledge is a gripping and deeply moving story. It presents one of the most intimate contrasts between religious fundamentalism and desultory existentialism ever portrayed. Rarely are films able to transcend their medium and become something larger than life." - ScreenSpotlight.com

2011 Portland Humanist Film Festival full schedule

TRIPLE FEATURE FRIDAY 11/11/11 (Veterans free Friday with ID)

5:00 **The Nature of Existence***
(Documentary - Unrated)

This is Roger Nygard's global quest for answers to those pesky meaning-of-life questions, and everyone gets to weigh in: scientists, artists, religious leaders, philosophers, even the neighbor's kids! A planetary kaleidoscope of what we humans really believe!

7:00 **The Invention of Lying**
(Comedy - Rated PG 13)

Ricky Gervais' 2009 romantic comedy: In a world where people speak the truth and have no concept of deception, a young man about to lose everything invents "the lie" and creates the basis for religion.

9:00 **Monty Python's Life of Brian** (Comedy - Rated R)

Starts with our Life of Brian fashion contest and prize awards with Professor Will

Knott, master of ceremonies. This is the 1979 comedy that was banned in Norway for one year. You know the story: Brian, born in the other manger on Christmas day, who as a newborn confounds the three wise men, then grows up to be a bit testy with the Roman occupiers, and eventually is mistaken for the messiah. Oh, and with a little satire and blasphemy thrown in.

SATURDAY 11/12/11

2:00 **8: The Mormon Proposition**
(Documentary - Rated R)

See what a religious organization can do when it decides to get involved with politics. In 2008 the Mormon Church crushed the marriage laws that were inclusive of everyone in California by helping pass Measure 8. (BTW, we don't know why this was rated R). *This film is available to purchase on DVD and/or digitally from www.8themormonproposition.com.*

3:30 **Here Be Dragons***
(Documentary - Unrated)

Homeopathy, energy fields, precognition, full moons, the "unexplained," and other commonly held beliefs as seen through the eyes of Brian Dunning, the exuberant host of the Skeptoid podcast. Buoyant and chock-full of handy red flags and tips. Critical thinking has never been more fun!

5:00 **D.M. Bennett: The Truth Seeker*** (Documentary - Unrated)

Fascinating and important. What happens when 19th century America's most controversial publisher and free speech enthusiast collides with anti-obscenity crusader John Comstock?

6:00 **Waiting for Armageddon**
(Documentary - Unrated)

America's 50-million strong evangelical community is convinced that the world's future is foretold in Biblical prophecy, from the Rapture to the Battle of Armageddon. This astonishing documentary explores their views and ties to Israel.

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7:30 “Who are the doubters anyway?” - The Demographics of Unbelief

Feature Speaker Tom Flynn, Exec. Dir. Council for Secular Humanism, Editor of Free Inquiry Magazine, author of The Encyclopedia of Unbelief, The Trouble With Christmas, and other works, visits Portland on his Northwest speaking tour.

8:55 Agora (Historical Drama – Rated R) with **The Hubble Ultra Deep Field in 3D** (4 min. Documentary – Unrated)

Hubble Ultra Deep Field in 3D: This short video gives an awe-inspiring scientific glimpse into the farthest we’ve ever been able to see into the universe.

Agora: Set in the 4th century A.D. during the final days of the Roman empire, Hypatia of Alexandria (Rachel Weisz), a teacher and philosopher far ahead of her time, is faced with the challenges of a world corrupted by religious dogmatism, civil unrest, and unending struggles for power. Filmed in Malta, the scenes are spectacular.

SUNDAY 11/13/11

2:00 Waking Life (Animation, Drama, Fantasy – Rated R)

Follow an ingenious take on the search for answers to life’s most important questions with this quirky and imaginative animated feature. “Are we sleep-walking through our waking state or wake-walking through our dreams?”

4:00 Humanism: Making Bigger Circles (Documentary – Unrated)

Dr. Isaac Asimov, popular science fiction author and past AHA president, narrates this film which attempts to dispel common myths and misconceptions about the philosophy of Humanism.

5:00 The Lord Is Not On Trial Here Today (Documentary – Unrated)

Fed up with blatant religious proselytizing in her children’s public schools, a young Illinois mother of three spoke up and demanded that the established law of separation of church and state be enforced. This documentary by Jay Rostenstein won a Peabody Award.

6:00 Separation Of Church And State

Feature Speaker Bruce Adams, Pres. Columbia Chapter Americans United

7:00 CFI-Portland Independent Film Awards

The Species Problem* Produced by Christina Choate

So when is a species a species? And can this be interesting to the non-scientist? YES! Beginning with two snakes slithering hypnotically and then through interviews with some down-home scientists, this high-quality science film is attention grabbing. Choate tackles this cornerstone concept of evolutionary biology brilliantly.

Patrick’s Story* Produced & Directed by Martin Vavra, who will be present.

Intimate and honest, Patrick’s telling of how anti-marriage laws that may seem benign to the majority of us really do hurt. Filmed locally in Portland.

The Fairy Scientist* Produced by Robert Neary, who will be present.

“Thousands of people say that fairies aren’t real, thousands, hundreds...,” says an incredulous Lydia Ghozeil at the start of *The Fairy Scientist*. Corvallis filmmaker Robert Neary and his granddaughter, Lydia - 7, created the short film for The Project Reason Video Contest.

Science is a Vaccine* Produced by Josh Fost, who will be present.

Portland’s favorite neuroscientist, philosopher and author, Josh Fost, created this delightful little video clip with a big message for the Sam Harris 2011 Project Reason Video Contest.

8:30 The Ledge (Drama - Rated R) Hailed as ‘the atheist’s Brokeback Mountain’, Matthew Chapman’s *The Ledge* is a story of love and loss, fate, choices and truth. Featuring the talents of Liv Tyler, Charlie Hunnam, Terrence Howard and Patrick Wilson, *The Ledge* is a gripping tale that is sure to leave you at the edge of your seat. Nominated for the Grand Jury Prize at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival.

* these films are independent film winners



There was a great turnout for the Secular Family Network's annual Pumpkin Patch & Potluck. Pictured is the Wagner family.

EVERYTHING IN MODERATION by Luke Mahan



BILLY TRIES TO DEAL WITH REPORTS OF NEUTRINOS HAVING BEEN MEASURED TRAVELLING FASTER THAN THE SPEED OF LIGHT

"Black people are not nice . . ."

... was the confident pronouncement by my then 6-year-old son some time around 2002. I opened my mouth to respond – and then shut it. What I had been about to do was to indoctrinate.

You see, theists are not the only ones who have sacred cows, and no matter how good our reasons for holding certain beliefs or values, none of those should ever be immune from challenge. That's the gold standard of skeptical parenting, right? Even beliefs and values about race, equality, and prejudice, right?

It's a laudable standard, and I wish I could say that the first concern that leapt into my mind was a concern about the facts: What do you mean by "nice"? How do you operationalize "niceness"? How do you reliably measure the respective niceness of different racial and ethnic groups? If you do find differences, what hypotheses can you develop to explain them? How do you test them? And how in the heck do you

**This was first published by
[Parents Beyond Belief Blog](#).
Sylvia Benner is an organizer
of CFI – Portland, and mother
of a now 15-year-old son.**

have a conversation about all this with a 6-year-old?

Unfortunately, my first reaction did not embody the highest ideals of rationality. Rather, I had a brief moment of panic. "Gah! If he ever says this in public, it will be so embarrassing! How did I manage to produce a little racist?" I am proud to say that I wrestled down my reaction that day. (For the record, I make no claim that I always, usually, or even often, succeed at doing so.)

After struggling for a moment, I made contact with my inner Tuvok and found

more solid footing. My first objective, I decided, was to teach critical thinking, not to defend my beliefs or instill them in my child. Telling him that he should give more weight to my positions, or to social consensus, than to his own experience struck me as failure to model skepticism.

First, I had to admit that his conclusion was most definitely based on observation. His comment had been triggered by an incident moments earlier: On one of our walks my son had spotted a group of black teenagers on a porch and greeted them brightly. Their response was to glare back at him in silence. It was only the last of many similar experiences he had had with black neighbors in our predominantly black and low-income neighborhood, which had a strong gang presence and was undergoing gentrification at the time.

Not only was there a vast cultural differ-

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[Oregon Humanities Magazine](#) called for reader submissions for their Summer 2011 issue on the theme of "Belonging". They published the following submission of CFI member Wes Mahan:

BORN AGAIN (AGAIN)

For forty-six years, a sense of belonging was naturally a part of my life. As an evangelical Christian, a theology graduate, and a missionary, wherever I went in the world, I could find a gathering of like-minded religious people. We pretty much accepted each other, imperfections and all. Like a family, my local church here in Oregon gathered round and helped my family make mortgage payments when I lost my job of 15 years, or when I had open-heart surgery and had to take time off work without pay.

From age 14 to age 60, I felt I belonged. As a dorky, skinny and awkward high school student, I could always turn to my church family when I felt rejected by that sports and popularity-obsessed culture. Studying theology at Multnomah University, we fellow students felt a common aspiration to follow God. As a young father, I could compare parenting notes with other "born-again" fathers. It seemed that whatever stage of life I was experiencing, I could always turn to my church family, even when my own biological family was on the other side of the globe.

Then, about three years ago, my religious faith and my steadfast belief in a loving heavenly Father, dissipated into thin air, as I began to seriously re-examine everything that I once held dear. How could a loving Father God invent and maintain a place called Hell, which would be the eternal tormenting abode for most of humanity after they died? My

studies showed that the Bible was not inerrant or infallible. Its stories about creation and worldwide floods and talking donkeys suddenly seemed, well, made-up. I reluctantly became an agnostic, and with it, lost the religious family where I once belonged.

While the sense of freedom and release was very liberating in one sense, the loss of that spiritual family is taking longer to heal than I thought it would. Rebuilding that sense of belonging is slow and tenuous, as I gradually find other non-theists and humanists to whom I can relate. It may never quite match what I had in the church, but I will persist.

(Author's note: *I am realizing, several months after I wrote the above, that one of the difficulties of re-creating communities as exist in religious culture, lies in the nature of its participants. Freethinkers and secular humanists, by definition, are independent thinkers and resist the temptation of "group-think" that religious faith requires. ("Herding cats" is a phrase that I've heard more than once!) The time and emotional commitment demanded by churches are also difficult to accept in our secular culture. Regardless, the community that we seek to create in CFI and similar groups around Portland will succeed as we care enough about one another to give of our time and resources.*)



CFI November Events

For more information about any of these events, late additions, or to RSVP, go to the CFI calendar at www.meetup.com/cfi-portland/#calendar and click on that event

Wednesday, Nov. 2 & 16, 11am

Skeptics of Eugene Coffee Klatch

Midtown Coffee
1591 Willamette St, Eugene, OR
Organizer: Mary Hubbard

Casual conversation about whatever we feel like. Drop in or out as your schedule allows.

Wednesday, Nov. 2, 9, 16, 23 & 30, 10am

Preschool Playdate

13755 SW 6th #1, Beaverton, OR

For preschool children aged 3 & 4 (and other ages). Please RSVP at CFI-SFN website.

Thursday, Nov. 3 & 17, 11:45am

South Coast Skeptics Meetup

Denny's, 98 E. 1st St,
Coquille, OR

Organizer: Greg Collver

Pizza and skeptical discussion at Denny's!

Thursday, Nov. 3, 10, 17, & 24 6:30pm

Save Our Selves (SOS) Secular Support Group in Rogue Valley

1505 NW Washington Blvd,
Grants Pass, OR

Our SOS Group offers secular alternative support to individuals strugglin to overcome a personal addiction, such as alcoholism. This approach differs from typical 12-step programs.

Saturday, November 5, 2pm

Skeptics in the Pub

Round Table
5016 NE Thurston Way
Vancouver, WA

Meet local skeptics, atheists, secular humanists, scientific naturalists and other friends of reason for conversation and friendship! We meet in Vancouver but welcome people from anywhere.

We meet at the Round Table by Westfield mall in Vancouver, in their banquet room, between 2 and 5 pm.

Sunday, November 6 & 20, 11am

Eastside Sunday Brunch

Old Wives Tales, 1300 E Burnside St, Portland, OR 97214

Organizer: Sylvia Benner

Please RSVP so we can reserve the correct number of seats.

A chance to meet and get to know others in the community over good food in a relaxed atmosphere! The restaurant has a children's menu and a separate play room for the little ones. Vegetarian dishes available.

Sunday, Nov. 6 & 20, 12:30pm

Rogue Valley Freethinkers (Grants Pass)

Union Drop-In Center,
225 NW Hillcrest Dr, Grants Pass, OR

We will meet at 12:30 to discuss a topic of interest to freethinkers and humanists, presented by one of our members. There will also be ample time for sharing related to these worldview perspectives.

Sunday, Nov. 6 & 20, 3-5pm

Rogue Valley Humanists (Ashland)

87 4th Street, Ashland, OR

The Humanism Group studies current topics of interest to Humanists, often from a recent book or article. We usually have an optional short reading related to the discussion topic available in the UU Center library a week before each meeting.

Friday through Sunday
November 11, 12, 13

Various times

2nd Annual Portland Humanist Film Festival

Cinema 21
616 NW 21st Ave, Portland, OR

PLEASE SEE COMPLETE DETAILS ON PAGES 1-3 OF THIS NEWSLETTER.

TICKETS AVAILABLE AT
<http://bit.ly/q8DtI7>

FILM FESTIVAL WEBSITE:
HumanistFest.com

Sunday, November 13, 1:00pm

Secular Sunday School

Location and other details available upon RSVP at the CFI website

Sunday, November 13, 6pm

Tom Flynn at AHA! in Eugene

U of O, Allen Hall, Room 221
(May change, check calendar)

The editor of Free Inquiry Magazine visits Eugene and speaks on "why secularists should not celebrate Christmas".

CFI November Events CONT'D

More details and RSVP: www.meetup.com/cfi-portland/#calendar

Monday, November 14, 7pm

Discussion: Why do smart people believe irrational things?

Java Vivace
2287 NW Pettygrove St
Portland, OR

Moderator: Glenn Peters

How do we use rational thought and reasoning to achieve irrational goals? Are we really as exclusively rational as we'd like to believe? Can we be? Join us for a discussion of these issues.

Thursday, November 17, 7pm

Skeptics of Eugene Book Discussion

Eugene City Brewery
844 Olive St, Eugene, OR

Organizer(s): Sam Lorrie

"How the Mind Works" by Steven Pinker. Pinker has synthesized theories and data from genetics, neuroscience, social science, and psychology to explore human nature. He explores consciousness, intelligence, and emotion in light of biology, chemistry, and anatomy. The book will change how you see yourself and others.

Saturday, November 19, 7pm

Skeptics of Eugene Game Night

Growers Market,
454 Willamette, Eugene, OR

Host: Bob Hubbard

We'll play board games, munch snacks and socialize. If you have a game you'd like to share, please bring it. We'll decide at the beginning of the evening which game(s) we'll play. I have 3 card tables, each can seat up to 6 people.

Tuesday, November 22, 6:30pm

Rogue Valley Freethinkers' Social (Grants Pass)

595 Northeast E St, Grants Pass

Engaging, relaxing and interesting conversation at our monthly meeting.

Friday, November 25, 3:00pm

Parent and Baby/Toddler Meetup

Location and other details available upon RSVP at the CFI-SFN website

Friday, November 25, 7pm

Skeptics of Eugene Monthly Meetup

33733 Seavey Loop Rd,
Eugene, OR

Host: Lowell Thomas

This is Open Topic so everyone is welcome to bring up a specific subject of interest, and if there are copies of news items or articles you can share, please do. We are all interested in learning about our world with open minds and healthy skepticism.

Sunday, November 27 10:30am

Monthly Westside Sunday Brunch

Goodness Coffee House
4925 SW Angel St, Beaverton, OR

Organizer(s): Sylvia Benner

Join us for a chance to meet and get to know others in the community over good food! Please RSVP so we can anticipate the correct number of people and reserve some seats.

Wednesday, November 30, 7pm

Beaverton Atheists Meetup

Location shown to members upon RSVP.

Host: Alan Litchfield

Engaging, relaxing and interesting conversation at our monthly meeting.

"An infinite God ought to be able to protect himself, without going in partnership with State legislatures. Certainly he ought not so to act that laws become necessary to keep him from being laughed at. No one thinks of protecting Shakespeare from ridicule, by the threat of fine and imprisonment."

Robert Ingersoll, in *Some Mistakes of Moses*

ence between the long established black neighbors and the white, middle-class newcomers, but there was some amount of tension between the groups. While the white neighbors displayed similar behavior as our family, we frequently witnessed black violence, vandalism and threatening behavior, which colored my son's views. Being accosted by young black males during our walks was commonplace, and to make matters worse, the kid who attempted to bully my son in his first grade class was a black kid.

We also had a black neighbor who was mentally ill, and while usually nice, she had episodes during which she angrily berated anyone within earshot. 6-year olds don't make fine distinctions between bad behavior and mental illness, I'm afraid.

So my son's conclusion that blacks were not nice was based on his experience, and experience is not a bad place to start. It's just a really bad place to end.

I asked him to explain why he thought black people weren't nice, and he cited numerous instances of bad behavior he had encountered. I declared that, based on this preliminary information, his conclusion seemed to make sense. Maybe black people weren't nice. But when trying to figure out what's real, I told him, we need to check if we haven't made a mistake in thinking. Only if our thinking passes the error check could we be reasonably certain

that we were on the right track.

A good first step to checking the quality of our thinking is to argue with ourselves: Could he come up with information that contradicted his conclusion? For example, could he think of instances in which white people had not been nice? He thought a bit, then named some. Could he think of black people who were really nice? Yes, his Kindergarten teacher, his swimming instructor, and the principal of his school, among others.

"How many black and white people have you met? How many do you think there are in the world?" He couldn't answer that, but we agreed that there were far more people in the world than either he or I knew personally. I wondered out loud how likely it was that he had simply had bad luck and met an unusual number of mean black people and nice white people. He couldn't think of a reason why that would be so (a broader view of things just begins to emerge around age 6, after all), but he conceded that it was at least possible.

I asked him to assess the quality of his conclusion now that we had played devil's advocate with ourselves. He was quite a bit less certain and we agreed that he did not have enough information to determine whether his statement was true or not. We decided to revisit the issue when we had more information.

And the battle for critical thinking was won that day.

I can't say that we actually have revisited the issue deliberately. It has just sort of gone away now that he is 15, has met a lot more people, and gotten a lot more education. But the particular question of racial prejudice was not the core problem I was faced with as a parent wanting to raise a critical thinker. What I cared about was his ability to use good methodology to arrive at conclusions in life, whether about race or any other issue.

What I discovered that day was that the critical point in good thinking is that first moment when, instead of jumping from plausible explanation straight to firm conclusion, we are willing to entertain, and even generate, some doubt. I realized that one of my key jobs as a parent was to teach my son how to create that doubt within himself. To that end, we have often played the Devil's Advocate game.

A few years ago, my son presented me with a book titled "Don't Believe Everything You Think". I think that clever title could be a motto for skeptical parenting. I don't know any secular parents who do not want to raise critical thinkers. I have come to believe (provisionally, as behooves a skeptic) that if we can manage to impart onto our children the habit of always running an error-check on their conclusions, to always argue with themselves, to be, most of all, skeptical of their own opinions, the biggest hurdle is taken. ■

Basic member benefits include:

- CFI Membership card, good at any CFI worldwide
- Free entry into all CFI-Portland regular events
- Preferred seating at major CFI-Portland events
- Two Guest Passes
- CFI Window Decal

- Discounts on conferences and other special events
 - Reduced tuition for CFI Institute online courses
 - 15% off Prometheus Books purchased through the CFI-Portland
- More benefits are available with other options. See CFI membership levels and benefits [here](#).*

ONE-TIME DONATION: Click the [blue](#) button to join or renew your membership with a single donation to CFI. Regular membership is \$60. Reduced rates for students and unemployed.

MONTHLY DONATION: Click the [green](#) button to make an automatically renewing monthly donation. Sustain your membership while sustaining CFI! We'll keep your CFI membership active as long as your regular donations continue, but if your budget changes, you may change or suspend your payment at any time. Starting at \$5 per month.

For more information, click on the above buttons, call CFI-Portland at 503-877-2347 or email portland@centerforinquiry.net