



INGERSOLL'S CHILDREN

Center for Inquiry

Community of Pittsburgh Newsletter

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Defending Reason in an Irrational World

FIRST CFI WEDDING



Andrew and Stacey Beard, here seated for a celebratory dinner beside Officiant David Campbell (L), were married in a legal Pennsylvania self-uniting marriage ceremony on October 27. This was the first such marriage conducted under our community's Secular Services initiative. Other witnesses include Karen Campbell, Dana Morreale, Bill Kaszycki, Victor Bernard, and Ken and Lee Jones.

A VERY SPECIAL SHOW

CFIC-Pgh and the Carnegie Science Center share intersecting aims and a cross-pollination among personnel, so it was only natural that our group occasionally meet at CSC. John Radzilowicz, Director of Visitor Experience at CSC, invited us for a special demonstration of the new "Digital Dome," a very high definition projector attached to a database that encompasses all surveyed objects in the universe.

The resulting display is visually astounding. John and his assistant began the show with a night sky so realistic as to include atmospheric scintillation. The scene was then shifted as the vantage point was moved to a spot a few thousand miles above a real-time North America, showing the lights from numerous cities with the crescent earth still shining along the West Coast. Thus began our trip to the edge of the universe.

The tour continued to the earth-moon system, then to the inner planets, all in positions adjusted for the present time. At sufficiently close vantage points, the surfaces of planets were represented by accurate spacecraft images. "Warp" speed took us to the nearby stars, and the superimposed lines delineating the constellations began to distort. In a short time all the bright stars in the familiar

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constellations were contained in a sphere before us, as they receded with our progress. The entire view would be periodically rotated to accentuate the illusion of distance and depth.

By steps the scene showed our region of the Milky Way, followed by the entire galaxy as



Pat Joseph and Mary Balint examine a meteor fragment from the planet Mars at the Carnegie Science Center.

currently understood, followed by all the galaxies in our Local Group. Several “deep sky” surveys then came into play, giving locations of galaxies on a scale to reveal the foamy structure due to galactic voids. Farther out the galaxies fade, but inserting the locations of all known quasars fills in the voids almost to the “edge” which was our destination. The edge was represented by a display of the data from the COBE and WMAP satellites which mapped the microdegree temperature fluctuations in the cosmic background radiation. These fluctuations gave rise to the galactic voids and the galaxies themselves.

The 40 or so attendees had a mind-stimulating, visual treat. John aptly handled some excellent Q&A queries, and afterwards provided some free snacks. Thanks, John, for a great show!□

Only the atheist realizes how morally objectionable it is for survivors of a catastrophe to believe themselves spared by a loving God while this same God drowned infants in their cribs.

-Sam Harris

Once miracles are admitted, every scientific explanation is out of the question.

- Johannes Kepler

New Enlightenment

by Linn Frank Hamilton

What we need is less nonsense,
More of Paine's common sense.
A little less commercial huff and puff,
And more scientific factual stuff.

Instead of money and the pursuit of gain,
Let's see what wisdom and truth can obtain.
In the place of lies and deception,
Let's try a factual explanation.

Instead of religion and illusion,
Let wisdom dictate the conclusion.
Tell the priest and preachers to go away,
Study nature and her way.

Have a second enlightenment,
Free from fear and sacrament,
Go by what the scientists say,
Take the best answer of the day.

Banish all religious fable,
Sit at Newton's table.
Cut loose from fantasy,
Be as brave and wise as you can be.

Counsel not with fear and hate,
But walk with Einstein as your mate.
Don't rely on myth and fable,
To chart a course true and stable.

But take a page from Sagan's view,
Or from a Hawkins interview.
See how the world is made,
Don't be ignorant or afraid.

Take the road that reason found,
Your happiness will abound.

Hooliganism

Bill Kaszycki

A couple of months ago, in his Washington Post column “On Faith”, Jacques Berlinerbrau of Georgetown University characterized best-selling authors Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens as “the soccer hooligans of rational discourse”. He laments the stridency of their tone and the anger and disdain in their voices and the obvious contempt that they have for those with the irrational assertions.

He is not far wrong since these authors make no attempt to acquiesce to the sensitivities of the believers or to accommodate their arrogant sense of a divine right to shove their delusional nonsense down everybody else’s throats. And they don’t give a “pass” to beliefs merely because they are beliefs. They take the position that nonsense is nonsense. But rather than likening them to hooligans, I prefer to think of them as freedom fighters, as civil rights activists, because that is how I see our struggle against these forces of ignorance and darkness.

This feeling was driven home to me a few weeks ago when I was at the grocery store. As I was walking along, I sneezed, and a nearby couple said to me “Bless you”. I didn’t reply with “No, thank you” like I really wanted to, but it was only because I knew that they were merely trying to be polite and I didn’t want to offend them. But *I* was offended by their automatic assumption that I would find their comment comforting, and by it never even occurring to them that I might find their remark offensive.

And so it is for all nonbelievers in our daily lives. We are insulted and put down in hundreds of little ways, many seemingly insignificant ways, each and every day. But the cumulative effect of this has been to create a deep sense of anger and resentment, because every day, we are being told in not so many words that we are second-class citizens; that we are inferior to those that believe this delusional nonsense; that our sensibilities don’t matter.

I have thoroughly enjoyed reading Dawkins, et al, and I say that it’s about time for nonbelievers to quit being so accommodating and to call the deluded ones on their hypocrisy and irrational beliefs. All of the years of being constantly slighted in ways large and small have taken their toll. Things have festered to a point where I, and many others like me, have developed a deep-seated anger simmering just below the surface. And we don’t want to take it any more, nor should we have to. After all, we’re not the ones fostering delusional and irrational mythologies and making unproven claims. So bring on the hooliganism, if that’s what they want to call it. I just know that I am proud to be a part of it. □

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Help Wanted</i></p> <p>Intelligent person with moderately good people skills wanted for Advisory Board Member-at-large position. Compensation will consist of the satisfaction of helping CFIC-Pgh to grow and be successful. Time requirements are not great. Having been committed in the past may be a plus. Contact BillK or any other board member.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Help Wanted</i></p> <p>University Coordinator and Advisory Board member. This position is to act as liaison between the CFIC Advisory Board and the various CFI On-campus groups in the Greater Pittsburgh area. The successful candidate will be willing to work with the board to help make CFIC-Pgh a dynamic and thriving force on the region’s college campuses. Compensation will be non-existent. Academic experience helpful but not necessary. Contact BillK.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Program Participants</i></p> <p>Program Director Ken Jones would like to hear from people who would like to talk for 5-8 minutes about an article that they’ve either written or read. These presenters would be featured during a program for early next year.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Crew Needed</i></p> <p>Know someone who wants to learn TV production? Volunteers are needed to produce monthly episodes of <i>Darwin Presents</i> at the Comcast Studio in Monroeville. Reply to David Campbell at dncamp105@aol.com.</p>



Joe Kostka aims a telescope.

A Delayed Star Party

Tom Ridge

There is nothing like a view of the stars on a clear cold night. Perhaps an examination of the heavens can do more to anchor a person's naturalistic view of the human situation and the vastness and wonder of our place in space and time than any words we might hear or read.

The CFI fall "Star Party" took place this year on Saturday, October 13th. Friday the 12th was completely overcast and Saturday didn't start out much better. Chuck displayed his skill as a prognosticator by reporting that

the sky would clear by late evening. While waiting for the sky we were treated to a raft of information on the sky and universe from our resident astronomer and by 10 PM the night was indeed clear. The rest of the evening was spent manning the array of telescopes and high powered binoculars that were provided. Chuck unveiled a powerful new laser pointer that enhanced his ability to point out features in the sky and increase the ability of the novice to locate and zero in on those features.

A lot of interest was shown in the parallelogram mount that Chuck has built for his 25x100mm binoculars that really made it easy for viewers of different heights to share views without losing sight of the sky target. As in the past our guided tour of the visible universe was enlightening and very interesting.

Anyone who has not been able to attend either the spring or fall gathering at Chuck and Carol's Westmoreland County home should try to make the next trip. The absence of the night time light pollution experienced nearer the city makes the sky features jump out at the viewers. Chuck's enthusiasm and natural teaching abilities make these visits nights to remember. In addition, Carol's coffee and cookies, cheese and crackers gird the viewers for the chill of the night air and everyone leaves invigorated as well as informed.

□



Last month we welcomed Murray and his wife, Catherine, to our group.

Poisoning Everything

By Fsegda Gotov

Christopher Hitchens' bestselling book, *God is not Great* is subtitled *How Religion Poisons Everything*. Many of us in CFIC-Pgh have read this book, either for personal edification or in conjunction with a book discussion group, or both.

When he cited the poisonous nature of religion, Hitchens mainly concerned himself with documented instances where religion corroded the relationships between and within societies. I wish to add that the pain of religion's poison is also bitterly experienced within families.

On November 13, the PBS *Nova* program presented a 2-hour special episode, *Judgment Day: Intelligent Design on Trial*. In excellent fashion *Nova* outlined the *Kitzmiller v Dover* suit

to prevent the promotion of Intelligent Design Theory as an alternative to evolutionary theory in Dover, PA, science classes. The program made a point to illustrate how the issue divided the community. In particular, a father and daughter who managed a radio station were estranged in poignant fashion by the issue, a situation not resolved up to the time of the father's death.

While religion may be the basis for many of history's wars, its venom in daily doses causes innumerable cases of family friction. Without going to war, scientists can decide whether or not Pluto is a planet. The same can never be said for issues covered under religion's umbrella, from made-up issues like "divine will" to testable matters, like the origins of species and the age of the universe. How many fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, siblings and in-laws have sparred

PRACTICE YOUR HUMANISM

"Early Music" is the theme for the December 13th dinner meeting at Harvard's, in which the program will feature Lee Jones and Pastime Early Music Consort. **Everyone is invited to bring non-perishable food items, which will be donated to a local food bank.** (No glass jars, please.) Remember, we are not only *secular* but also *humanists*.

with each other to the point of pain because of religious differences? How many among you have shared this experience? The family tiffs shown in Dover are depressingly common.

Religion really poisons everything, including families. We would all do better if it were taken in smaller doses, preferably not at all. □

Advisory Board Seeks Your Support

Hello, and a very Happy Holiday Season and New Year to one and all!

As your Advisory Board, we would like to update you as to what our hopes are for the future of our community. In April, our community will have been together for four years. We feel that it is time to advance beyond monthly dinner meetings and book discussion groups. We need to create a true CFI "community" for our members and for Pittsburgh at large.

Churches do a very good job of this. While they do work to fulfill the spiritual and religious needs of their congregations, they also attend to the social needs of their members. Perhaps, these social aspects of their ministry may be the most important reason for their success.

We would like to expand our activities and services for our members. We also want to expand our Community's presence in the area to make it a positive force for reason and rationally thinking people throughout the tri-state region. We want a vibrant Community that is a benefit to its members. But at the present time, while we have a contact list of about 300 people, we only have an active membership of 35 – 40 people and a truly committed core of only about 10 members. That is not enough to make this new vision of CFIC – Pittsburgh happen.

We know that there are more potential CFIC – Pittsburgh members in the Pittsburgh area. We need to attract them to our Community and get them involved. CFI Transnational has told us that they have a "road map", a proven method for accomplishing this. They also tell us this plan has been successful in Indianapolis, Austin, TX, Grand Rapids, MI, and Washington DC. The centerpiece of this plan is to host "big events", using CFI – Transnational's resources to stage and publicize these events. According to our friends in Amherst, our sister communities have had great success with these programs. We would like to put on at least six such events in the coming year.

But to do this, we will need your help. There are only eleven Advisory Board members, nine of whom have been on the board for four years. Our group needs new blood to bring new ideas and energy. A new committee is being created, Special Events. One person cannot plan, and put on, such large events. So, we are looking for at least three volunteers to serve on the Special Events committee. If you have event planning experience, and are willing to help, you

would be welcomed with open arms and minds. If you would like to volunteer, but have no experience...no worries, CFI has committed to providing a high level of support!

We also need to fill two vacancies on the Advisory Board; someone to serve as our University Coordinator, and a Member-at-large. Board membership is relatively painless requiring attendance at one board meeting per month and volunteering some time and effort when needed.

On another topic, we need to look to our competition to see if we can gain some insight into how we can be more successful. One of the ways churches are able to be such an integral part of their congregation's lives is by having a building, a place to come together, rally 'round, and care about, in short a focal pint for our community. This has the added benefit of providing a visible presence in the greater community at large. In the long term, we would like to have our own building, a multi-purpose facility capable of supporting a thriving and vibrant non-believer community. But we need more than 30 – 40 active members for this to be viable. And we will need the help of our parent organization, CFI – Transnational.

Before we can expect CFI – Transnational to invest their time and money in a building for us, we need to prove to them that CFIC – Pittsburgh is a vibrant, active community, worthy of their time and money. Building a membership base using CFI's programs is part of this, but CFI – Transnational also judges us on the basis of how many Friends of the Center our community generates.

Many of the people who contact us talk about how lonely and isolated their life has been. They tell us how they have felt they were the only people in America who think as they do. They tell us how happy - how relieved - they are to find that they are not alone. If you have experienced this or if you feel that our being here for unbelievers and freethinkers in Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania is important, one way to ensure that CFIC – Pittsburgh remains active is to become a Friend of the Center.

We know that we have asked you to become a Friend of the Center before, but it is important. It is a way that you can support our work, even if you can't serve on committees or make it to many of our meetings. These Friend of the Center memberships provide money that goes to support our community and to show CFI – Transnational that you are a part of our future.

In this season of giving, please give serious consideration to becoming a Friend of the Center. It doesn't cost much. Individual memberships are only \$60.00 and for students, only \$20.00. It isn't hard to do. You can make out a check, mark it "For FOC", and send it to:

CFIC-Pittsburgh
c/o Chuck Bobich, Treasurer
173 Spring Street
Yukon, PA 15698.

Even easier, you can sign up on line at <http://www.centerforinquiry.net/support>.

At this time of year, you can be sure that Christians are going out of their way to see that their churches have what they need to carry out their mission. Won't you do the same for the only organization in Pittsburgh that supports you, your right to think as you choose, and the way of life you have chosen?

We want to get started on our new programs immediately, so if you are interested in volunteering for one of our committees, please contact Bill Kaszycki by phone at 412.384.5893 or by e-mail at unkabeard@verizon.net as soon as possible.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Your Friends in Secularism,
Bill Kaszycki, Chuck Bobich, Ken Jones, Leota Jones, Victor Bernard, Tom Ridge, Bill Helwig,
Mary Balint, David Balint, and John Radzilowicz.

EVENTS to NOTE---

Dec. 10	Leota's Book Discussion Group will not meet in December
Dec. 13	General Meeting , John Harvard Restaurant, 3466 William Penn Highway, 6:00 PM social period and dinner. Program: A performance by Pastime Early Music Consort.
Dec. 16	CFIC-Pgh Board Meeting , 10:00 AM. 1100 Grant Street.
Dec. 18	Darwin Presents Taping, Episode 10, 5:00 PM, Comcast Studio, Monroeville
Jan. 5	South Hills Book Discussion Group Meeting, 5:00 PM at "The Coffee Den." Title: <i>God is not Great</i> by Christopher Hitchens. See http://cfi-shbdg.freesevers.com/
Jan. 17	General Meeting , John Harvard Restaurant, 3466 William Penn Highway, (Note that the date is one week later than normal). 6:00 PM social period and dinner. Program: The Evolution of Morality with Ken W
Jan. 14	Leota's Book Discussion Group meeting- 7:00 PM. Title: <i>The Assault on Reason</i> by Al Gore
Jan. 20	CFIC-Pgh Board Meeting , 10:00 AM. 1100 Grant Street.
Feb. 2	South Hills Book Discussion Group Meeting, 5:00 PM at "The Coffee Den." Title: T.B.D. See http://cfi-shbdg.freesevers.com/