



CENTER FOR INQUIRY *Long Island* INQUIRER

Reason, Science, and Freedom of Inquiry

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CFI-LI/LISH MEETING INFO

THE GREAT DEBATE: DOES GOD EXIST?
Featuring Ed Tabash, in the negative and
Frank Gambino in the affirmative
Thursday, April 7, 7PM @ Stony Brook
University

In April, CFI-LI will be sponsoring the debate that never ends: Does God Exist? at Room 401 of the Charles B. Wang Center at Stony Brook University beginning at 7PM on Thursday, April 7. Enter via the Main Entrance on Nicolls Road, (north of the "South" entrance.) A parking garage is nearby.

EDDIE TABASH is a constitutional lawyer in Beverly Hills, California. He graduated magna cum laude from UCLA in 1973 and obtained his law degree from Loyola Law School of Los Angeles in 1976. He is a life member of American Atheists. He serves on the Board of Directors of the Council for Secular Humanism. From 1995 -- 2002, he chaired the national legal committee of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. He has represented the Atheistic viewpoint in formal debates against some of the world's foremost Christian philosophers, including Peter Van Inwagen, William Lane Craig, and Richard Swinburne. His topics for public speeches and debates include the separation of church and state and the question of the existence of God.

FRANK GAMBINO is a teacher and department chairman of religion at Archbishop Molloy High School, has a BA and MA in Theology from Fordham University, and has studied the works of Plato in his spare time. He is also the track coach at his school and an accom-

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The Center for Inquiry is a transnational nonprofit 501 (c) (3) organization that encourages evidence-based inquiry into science, pseudoscience, medicine and health, religion, ethics, secularism and society.

Spongebob Must Be Stopped – Amend the Constitution!

Remarks by the Rev. James Dale Jeff Topman (as reported by Gerry Dantone)

Enough is enough! First it's Batman & Robin; then it's Bert & Ernie; then it's Tinky Winky; now it's Spongebob Squarepants!!!

Honestly, thanks to Dr. James C. Dobson the founder of Focus on the Family, the whole *Great Gay Toon Conspiracy* has been exposed for what it is: A plot to subvert and corrupt the youth of America!!!

The courageous Dr. Dobson pointed out at a dinner in Washington to Congresspersons and political allies in January 2005 that Spongebob Squarepants had appeared in a "pro-gay" video. An uproar over Dr. Dobson's remarks soon erupted but just to prove that Dr. Dobson meant what he said, a Focus on the Family spokesperson, Paul Batura, added the next day, "We see the video as an insidious means by which the organization is manipulating and potentially brainwashing kids... It is a classic bait and switch."

Exactly! The video that Spongebob appears in for the "We Are Family Foundation" (which amazingly is the same name as an "unrelated" pro-gay organization), features a (gay-loving) disco soundtrack and is funded by FedEx (as in XXX)! This video advocates tolerance towards others yet amazingly does not single out gays as an exception to this rule!! How dare they!!!!

This obviously is not an isolated incident in the *Great Gay Toon Conspiracy*. We all know about Batman and his "ward," Robin, the infamous Bert and Ernie who co-habit a bedroom on Sesame Street and of course the effeminate Tinky Winky, the Teletubbie who carries a purse.

But what about Marcie and Peppermint Patty of the Peanuts comic strip; Jughead from the Archie comics; and even Bugs Bunny himself? This conspiracy's tentacles are staggering in their reach!

Even TV's longest running show, "The Simpsons" are in on the plot: Patty Bouvier, Marge Simpson's sister, is a self-avowed lesbian. You could see it coming!

Do we want our children to absorb the values that made our country great? Of course! Then we cannot allow them to be seduced by the kindness and good feelings created by tolerating those persons with whom we disagree!

Cartoons are just the tip of the gay/secular humanist conspiracy iceberg. Not only do gays want not to be considered deviant perverts but they want to be treated equally under the law. Don't they know this is America? Their quest for equality and justice threatens our American paradise!

But of course there is an obstacle to building this American paradise of a tolerance-free society: Activist judges.

Is there any doubt that there exists somewhere, probably in Massachusetts, an activist judge who would erroneously interpret the Constitution of the United States in such a way that would protect the promotion of tolerance to impressionable young children? Somehow this judge would conclude that the First Amendment allows for the



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A Thumbs Up Publication
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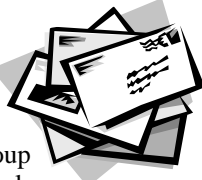
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Letters to the Editor



2/11/05 I so enjoy receiving your online copies of the CFI-LI Inquirer. I print them out for bedtime reading or public transit trips around Manhattan. Although a car in an enormous expense and nuisance in New York, I do wish I could have attended some of the fascinating (Darwin Day) events you have planned in Stony Brook.

I forward much of what you send me to fellow atheists in Europe, where I lived for twenty-five years (Amsterdam, Holland), so you have a bunch of Dutch fans. Although Holland lists itself as a Catholic country, this is baloney. When the Pope came to visit one of the huge cathedrals in the south of Holland, only about 15 people showed up and they were all over 65. The truth is that Holland is a liberal democracy; all of the people I knew, or knew about, were either agnostics or atheists.

I also appreciate your mention of our

SOS meeting on your calendar. The Manhattan SOS group is moving along nicely; last night we had our third meeting, and we are always gratified to hear how delighted newcomers are to have finally found a secular meeting. Keep the good stuff coming! Yours, via Internet, NYC, NY.

Response: Many thanks. G.D.

2/27/05: I find it ironic that some people editorialize on the so-called state of human "dignity."

What possesses them to assume humans have or deserve dignity? Read any holy book and you will find them possessed with killing off their neighbors [all enemies, heretics and infidels of course], leaving all the arrogance, complete with plunder and virgins, to themselves, chosen of their god.

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plished musician, his latest CD being "If Ignorance is Bliss, How Come you're Not Happy?" Get there early to get a good seat! The Darwin Day events at StonyBrook were literally standing room only!

Ed Tabash will also speak at a forum to be held 7PM, Friday, April 8 @ Queensborough Community College, 56th Avenue & Cloverdale Blvd., Bayside/Douglaston, Queens, Room M136. Ed's topic will be "The True Meaning of Separation of Church and State." **It's free; get there early!!**

Driving/locating building directions: LIE to exit 29 (Springfield Blvd.) Go north a few blocks to 56th Avenue. Go right on 56th Avenue. Just after traffic light is main entrance to campus on left. Park in the main lot. Walk across quad, Science building will be in front of you. Walk into courtyard of Science building and bear left. Pass through glass doors, across lobby and into Medical Arts building. M-136 is immediately on your right.

By LIRR: Take train to Bayside or Douglaston station, take cab to QCC.

CFI/LISH Patchogue Discussion Group
Meetings on the first Tuesday of the month; next meeting, will be on Tuesday, April 5, @ 7:30PM.

The group meets in Patchogue, with limited seating, call Warren Rothstein @ **631-869-5140** or email warremmy@optonline.net to reserve a place and for directions.

Welcome to Plato's Footnote, a Philosophy for All Café!

Tuesday, April 19, 7:30PM, at "The Lodge" (Patchogue via RSVP) chatting about everything from ethics to politics, from the nature of science to the question of free will. **Dr. Massimo Pigliucci** will facilitate the meetings, sending out in advance copies of the articles (usually as .pdf versions via email). Topic: "Love's complications," an article from The Philosopher's Magazine about the concept of love and some alternative views of it. For further info about the topic, contact: **Massimo at 631-476-6736 or: skeptic@rationallyspeaking.org.** Call **Warren Rothstein @ 631-869-5140 or email warremmy@optonline.net to reserve a place and for directions.**

Women Are Innately Inferior At Wellness!

By Don Ardell

(Note: The president of Harvard University, Lawrence H. Summers, sparked an uproar at an academic conference a few weeks ago when he said that innate differences between men and women might be one reason fewer women succeed in science and math careers.)

While I have no empirical data to back this ridiculous declaration, know of no evidence to support it and don't believe it for one second (not to mention that it's a meaningless statement absent an operational, measurable definition of wellness), I advance the claim, nonetheless. Why? For three reasons: First, I seek attention. Second, I seek to have my essay banned in Boston by the Catholic Archdiocese, though the all-male Catholic hierarchy would probably agree heartily with my position. But, a ban would be helpful since such attempts at censorship have been a certain path to best-seller status and hit movies. There is no better endorsement than the censorship of the Catholic Church, unless it's a Muslim fatwah or a condemnation by Jerry Falwell or the Christian Right, better known as the Republican Party. My third, and main, reason is that it sets me up to discuss this week's topic, innate abilities-at both ends of the spectrum. Are there innate talents? Almost certainly, but it may not be helpful to take them too seriously. A learned colleague recently observed, "Oriental cultures don't put much stock in ideas like innate talent, or natural ability. They just exhort their kids to work harder." One has to wonder if this is a healthy cultural bias that is related their higher scholastic achievement?

In any case, it seems clear that some folks DO have innate talents. Some are gifted artists, some are math geniuses, some display extraordinary physical skills and so on. On the other side of the talent continuum, some can't seem to do anything well. How can we help the latter? How can we motivate people of average or even somewhat less than average ability to master the basics of whatever it is they need to master?

I have no idea.

Who am I, "Mister Know Everything?" Isn't this issue one that the greatest minds in the universe have sought to discover?

Well, let me wing it here. Don't bet the

farm on this, but I'll put forth a few ideas right off the top. Not off my top, but that of my erudite advisor, the good Bob Ludlow. Bob believes that innate factors play a significant role in achievement, but he also notes that lots of people tend to lose interest and give up when the going gets tough. Why? Possibly because such people did not get needed familial or cultural support in their formative years. Maybe a share of the blame goes to our mass education system. In a more effective educational system, resilience might be one of the first lessons to be taught, modeled and reinforced in school. "Life ain't easy but don't give up. Keep trying and you'll eventually get it, maybe sooner than you think. That's it. Lots of kids never get this foundation insight. Result? They quit too soon. That's Bob's take on the matter.

Can't figure out a math problem? "I just have no aptitude for math." Sound familiar? Bob told me that if he were back in graduate school, looking for a good research topic for his psychology degree, he would focus his energy on early training in persistence. He explained it would be easy enough to devise a fairly large set of tasks and problems that would initially be too difficult for most students but that could be completed or solved with persistent effort (and some help, which they could be taught to seek out). "The tasks could be graded in difficulty, so that initially only a little persistence would be needed. Gradually, more and more effort would be required. Kids would also be taught how seek out and utilize available resources."

I think Bob's on to something. He claims he is no paragon of anything but has had the experience of becoming reasonably proficient in a few areas. "Not much came easy, but once I had an interest in something, I could be extremely persistent and put in extraordinary amounts of time and effort to overcome obstacles and meet goals. That seems to be a quality that is lacking in too many students, who tend to lose interest as soon as they encounter some difficulty. If they had more confidence that success would result from sustained effort, they would experience one of life's most powerful rewards--succeeding at something difficult."

Bob thinks the key might be to provide kids with early training designed to instill

the insight that "working harder really does pay off, that difficulty is not insurmountable and often can be overcome with a little persistence. The idea is to counteract the generalized tendency to quit."

He asked me, "What do I think?" I think he's on to something. What do YOU think?

Meanwhile, let me emphasize, I was just kidding. Women are NOT innately or otherwise inferior at wellness. Au contraire, men are probably innately inferior--at everything. But, the topic probably deserves further research, like everything else. I suppose the best advice is to be persistent and always look on the bright side of life.

Church – State Separation

By Edd Doerr

On Monday, February, 21, I debated Miss (sic!) Nellie Gray before an audience of Jewish high school students sponsored by Panim el Panim, the Institute for Jewish Leadership and Values. Gray is the organizer of the annual "March for Life" that brings tens of thousands of anti-choice demonstrators to Washington on the anniversary of Roe v. Wade. The subject, naturally, was abortion rights. For 15 minutes I extemporaneously summarized the case for freedom of choice, anticipating and refuting all of the arguments my opponent would make. Gray, though with over 30 years of anti-choice activism, actually read her semi-literate spiel verbatim. As expected, I won the debate hands down. But what is frightening is that Gray's movement is gaining ground, with friends in the White House and Congress, the possibility of anti-Roe appointments to the Supreme Court, and far too much public apathy.

On the following day, the Women's National Democratic Club sponsored a luncheon address by C. Welton Gaddy, president of The Interfaith Alliance. The luncheon was cosponsored by Americans for Religious Liberty, which I have headed since 1982, and the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, of which I was a founding board member in 1973. Gaddy's subject was "Religion, Which Politics and What Values?" which should be available on TIA's web site. Gaddy brilliantly analyzed the religious factors in the 2004 elec-

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promotion of the gay lifestyle, but the last time I checked, the word "gay" was not in the Constitution.

You can just see these judges interfering with many other accepted norms of American life, such as the teaching of Creationism in science class, prayer in public schools, and the absolute right of churches to never pay taxes, even if they have plotted to cover up the serial rape of young children.

Yes, my solution would be complete: A new Constitutional Amendment that would be based on a very successful (with one

major problem that we'll fix) implementation in another country.

The Constitutional Amendment would be as follows: *All laws of the United States of America, including all laws on the State level, shall conform to the tenets of Islam Christianity, as interpreted by the Ayatollah James C. Dobson. All elected officials and government appointees and employees shall adhere to these tenets as well.*

This would take care of everything and be efficient as well. Enact this one Amendment and, literally, our work would be done. If only everyone believed what we believe.

**Be Sure to Watch—Channel 20:
STARTING IN APRIL**

"Humanist Perspective" hosted by Joe Beck, DJ Grothe and others, on Cablevision Public Access can be seen:
Woodbury: Wednesdays @ 7:30PM.
Hauppauge/Brookhaven: Wednesdays, 9:30PM

CFI-LI/LISH ON CABLE!

"What is Secular Humanism?" This is a CFI-LIone-hour show and will be shown:
Woodbury: Saturdays, 7PM.

Hauppauge/Brookhaven: Tuesdays, 8:30PM

From American Atheists!

"Atheist Viewpoint" featuring Ellen Johnson, it will be seen:

Woodbury: Tuesdays, 7PM

Hauppauge/Brookhaven: Thursdays, 10PM

(Letters from page 2)

Who engaged in thousands of brutal wars in history, even unto today, with millions if not billions killed, maimed and tortured?

Who invented weapons of mass destruction?

Who is poisoning and raping the planet?

Who invented slavery, the denigration of women, stoning children (yes, it's in the Torah), insider trading, cooking the books, embezzlement, car-jacking, 9-11, lying, cheating and stealing, child molestation, Nazis, Zionists, Pol Pot, the Christian Coalition, the Moral Majority and crazy Arab fundies with their Jihads and Fatwahs?

There's genocide in Africa right now. Ever since the wonderful holocaust the Jews have been claiming "never again." Where are they now, or does "never again" apply only to Jews?

Where's the "dignity" in all of this? I utterly fail to see any. John Nernoff, PA, via Internet.

Response: There is no question that the actual behavior of many individual persons makes it difficult to accord the status of dignity and value to each of those individuals. However, I do not think it is a stretch to consider each person's dignity and value before applying the standards of justice based on their actual subsequent behavior. Those villains that you have mentioned above may be the type that failed to assume that other persons have intrinsic value – at least until proven otherwise. G.D

Re: Al Qaeda's Motives

3/7/05 Although I often agree with Gerry Dantone's assessments of our post 9/11 world - certainly when it comes to

religious fundamentalism, I think he is abusing Occam's Razor a bit when he points to what seems to be the simple answer ... that bin Laden's motives are purely "faith-based." Yes, all we humanists agree that Laden is a "religious bigot," and his fundamentalism is so tightly knit together that it is possible that he sees moderate (or fundamentalist?) Shiites as infidels; but to believe that this man, and similar terrorists connected to Al Qaeda (for Laden does not act in a vacuum), is/are so fundamentally blinded by such a narrow doctrine, would require them to adopt a close - mindedness so cancerous, so mind-numbing, as to leave little room for the obvious intelligence and strategy required to pull off the attacks of 9/11.

Is it not possible that Laden sees a political advantage to attack Shiites - the majority religious sect in Iraq - thus further incising the violence in that *Bush-torn* country, and therefore assuring Iraq's future as a terrorist magnate (both for reasons of cover and motivation)? Isn't it also possible that Laden wants more control over the oil reserves in Iraq before the Exxon/Mobile axis steal it all? Back in 1991, when the U.S. led the imperialist coalition against Iraq - and had troops stationed in the Muslim "holy land" of Saudi Arabia - the fundamentalists united against the new "evil empire." Laden joined forces with other fundamentalist forces like the Islamic Jihad of Egypt who had murdered Anwar Sadat who was considered a lackey of the U.S. and Israel.

These forces represent a section of the Middle Eastern ruling classes which use religion to cover their desire not to share the oil wealth with U.S. imperialism/Exxon-Mobil. So, when talking about

terrorism, we must not lose sight of what is behind the "holy war" between bin Laden and the U.S.: control of oil profits. Yours, Barry F. Seidman, NJ via Internet.

Response: When you start a sentence "Is it not possible..." it is almost a confession that one has no evidence to support what is about to follow. And it would be a bigger mistake to attribute to a bin Laden any humanistic rationale that you, but not he, would embrace. I doubt that bin Laden has any altruistic motive in protecting Iraq's oil from the US. His entire motive would be to keep it out of the hands of the "infidel" US, a religious motive. Please keep in mind that bin Laden was a huge supporter of the Taliban, the most despotic, corrupt and sickening ruling group on the face of the earth, with the possible exception of Kim Jong Ill of North Korea. He also supported getting Iraq and Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait in the first Gulf War. He only objected to the "presence" of infidels in that war – not what they were doing. Had the Americans been Muslims, all would have been acceptable.

Every strategy mentioned supports bin Laden's STATED motivation: jihad against infidels. The fight for oil profits (versus the US) fails to explain at all his war against Shiites who would obviously also not want the US to abscond with Iraq's oil profits – why would they? And yes, a mind-numbing religious belief would still allow for Al Qaeda to plan and execute precisely what they planned and executed. Why not? They may be crazy, as the old joke goes, but they're not stupid. G.D.

NEXT MONTH: Reactions to the God Squad!

And They Say Liberals Are Whiny!

By Dr. Massimo Pigliucci

It is rather amusing (when I'm in a good mood) to hear conservatives (especially religious ones) complain that they are "persecuted" in American society, that they don't get a saying, that they have constantly to battle against the liberal media bias. What persecution? What liberal media? Don't get a saying? What are these people talking about?

In the United States, conservatives now control the Presidency, the House of Representatives, the Senate, and a large number of State Governorships. If we add to the list that the Supreme Court is increasingly conservative, and may soon become extremely so, in essence these people control the country -- and set the agenda for the rest of the world. What, then, is there to complain? Why is this not enough?

Well, one thing to understand about ideological zealots (again, both of the religious and non-religious variety, though the former are by far more common) is that

they absolutely know they are right, so there really is no point in considering alternative opinions, is there? Moreover, since they tend to see things in apocalyptic terms, always painted in stark black and white, then anything less than 100% victory can be construed as a failure of cosmic proportions.

There is, of course, one little area of American life where conservatives are still by far in the minority: academia. By the latest estimates, about 70% of faculty at US universities consider themselves "on the left" within the current political spectrum. Of course, this has immediately raised the ire of conservatives, who have recently had the audacity to claim that there is a nationwide conspiracy to keep right-leaning faculty out of our campuses. It isn't clear whether the charge applies only to state universities or includes the private ones (in the latter case, one wonders how many liberal-leaning faculty are on the payroll, say, at Bob Jones "University"). But the fact remains indisputable: academia is still a bastion of liber-

alism, and that ain't gonna change overnight, no matter how widespread the "outrage."

Outside of silly conspiracy theories, why exactly is it that academia is full of liberals, and why is it that the majority of the media used to be equally favorable to moderately progressive positions (at the moment, only *The Onion* and *The Daily Show* are firmly into this category)? As in the case of any search for causal explanations, we must start with observations aimed at identifying the characteristics that separate the two groups in question (academia and "the real world"), to see if such differences may be conducive to the formulation of sensible hypotheses about the underlying causal links.

There are three things, roughly speaking, that come to mind: the high diversity (ethnic, and of opinions) on college campuses; the financial independence of faculty (after tenure); and, oh yeah, the fact that the very idea of a "liberal arts" education is to foster critical thinking, dialogue,

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tion and concluded that "Seldom has a national election cycle been so saturated with religious language, so disrespectful of religious institutions, and so manipulative of religious values." Gaddy's speech deserves wide circulation.

On Sunday, February 27, the New York Times ran a long article by David Kirkpatrick on "Putting God Back Into American History", which should be available on the Times' web site. Kirkpatrick shows that the Religious Right is engaged in a systematic campaign to spread the notion that this country's Founders intended to set up a "Christian nation." As Orwell or Santayana or someone observed, those who control the past will control the future. (We recall that this was one of the tricks that Hitler and Goebels used.)

Of particular interest to readers of this newsletter will be Toward a New Political Humanism, edited by **Barry F. Seidman** and **Neil J. Murphy** (Prometheus Books, 2004, 418 pp.; \$32.00). Although this book is aimed mainly at a humanist readership, it can be read with profit, though not necessarily full agreement, by people across the religious spectrum. The volume's great strengths are that its tone is generally positive and that the progres-

sive values it espouses are widely shared with a great many Christians, Jews, and others. One weakness is that too few of the 25 authors acknowledge that fact.

One of the best sections is Katherine Yurica's chapter, "The Despoiling of America: How George W. Bush Became the Head of the New American Dominionist Church/State." She explores how Pat Robertson, R. J. Rushdoony, Gary North, Herb Titus, Charles Colson, Tim LaHaye, Gary Bauer, the late Francis Schaeffer, Paul Crouch, and other "dominionist" fundamentalists created a powerful, under-the-radar in its early days, political movement that is well on the way to taking over this country for purposes antithetical to the interests of the overwhelming majority of Americans. She ties in the little known but influential political scientist Leo Strauss and such intellectual progeny as Irving Kristol, William Kristol, Clarence Thomas, Robert Bork, Alan Keyes, Gary Bauer, John Ashcroft, Newt Gingrich, and others.

Equally valuable is the section by Nigerian professor Agwonorobo Eruvbetine, who makes the point that in the interest of openness and cooperation "an examination of religion and its input into public life would foreground the fact that virtu-

ally all religions, in their genuine manifestations, are guided by the quintessential humanist ethos." In other words, humanists, though not numerous organizationally, must work with people of all persuasions to promote progressive ideas, such as those summarized in the book's last chapter by Arnell Dowret as including "guaranteed minimum income; democratic education; . . . the end of capital punishment; progressive prison reform; community-based homecare for seniors and persons with disabilities; global pacifism; single-payer universal health care," etc.

One need not agree with everything in this book to appreciate its contribution to advancing democratic values and heading off fundamentalist extremism.

In the interest of full disclosure it should be noted that this reviewer is the author of one of the sections of this book, "The Importance of Church-State Separation," which will be found shortly on ARL's web site, www.arlinc.org.

Edd Doerr, immediate past president of the American Humanist Association and president of Americans for Religious Liberty, is the author, co-author, editor, or translator of 23 books, most recently of a memoir, My Life as a Humanist.

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and the endorsement of positions based on thoughtful consideration of facts and values. Hmm, could it be that this triplet makes for an environment in which ultra-conservative ideas just don't flourish? Could it be that religious bigotry simply can't take the challenge of an ongoing open discussion, where there are no sacred cows and everything is fair game for public criticism? Could this be why academic freedom tends to be extremely limited in ultraconservative, ultra-religious campuses?

But, wait! Aren't those very characteristics of dialogue and critical thinking precisely the ones everybody agrees should be encouraged among the general public, since only they can -- in the long run -- maintain a healthy democracy? Ah, but there is the rub: the religious and ultraconservative right does not really want democracy, certainly not in the sense of a citizenry that is intelligent, well-informed, and capable of making decisions based on more than a knee-jerk reaction to MTV-style simplistic slogans. That must be why the Republican party, especially under Bush, is so clearly

against fostering education (despite the risible "no child left behind" program) and systematically attempts to discourage voting among the American public.

The real question, unfortunately, is whether there is anything that even remotely looks like a "liberal" wing of the Democratic party, or more broadly a "left" in the American political spectrum. Frankly, Bill Clinton has always looked to me like a moderate Republican, and it is hard to believe that Howard Dean is considered a "radical" within Democrats. Have these people ever seen a radical in their lives? Thanks to the right-wing propaganda (and direct or indirect conservative control of most of the media), the American public has come to believe that the words "liberal" and "progressive" are akin to, God forbid, socialist or communist! There essentially is no left in this country, just a moderate center, followed by a right, an ultra-right, and a super-duper-ultra-right. Pretty sad, but one has to admit that the extensive, grass-root program of social reengineering began by the Christian Coalition and similar groups in the mid-70s has finally succeeded and, save for the unlike possibility of miracles,

the political realignment is here to stay.

What, then, are we to do about it? We need to learn from the competition, and turn their own successful tactics against them. I am not talking about attempting to rig the vote during presidential elections, I am referring to -- quite simply -- going back to the basics and pick young, energetic people to run for office. And do equip them with simple, bite-size, messages. At the moment, that's all that a large chunk of the American public seems to be able to deal with. The time for more sophisticated, dare I say European style? (see France, England, and Germany, for example), political discourse may come again, in a few decades. But we can't keep seeking the high moral and political road, while the other side is ruining not just this country, but the rest of the world as well. Wake up, smell the roses, and look for the next Bill Clinton (as ultra-moderate as he was): a good southern boy, politically centrist, with a charming smile and a simple message. It still beats the hell out of what we got now.

(For more by Dr. Pigliucci go to www.RationallySpeaking.org)

Women & Islam in NYC

By Gerry Dantone

News Item: (Carol Eisenberg, *Newsday*, 3/10/05) In what was to be a historic first, a woman (was to) lead the traditional Friday Islamic prayers for men and women at a New York City art gallery (in late March 2005).

But the March 18 service (scheduled for) the Sundaram Tagore Gallery in SoHo, which sparked media inquiries from Saudi Arabia to south Asia, generated extraordinary controversy - including accusations of apostasy and even death threats for one participant, Asra Nomani.

"It is blasphemy, it is against Islam!!!" said one message posted to Muslimwakeup.com.

Reaction from the established Muslim community also has been strongly negative.

"Islam is a religion of faith and belief, but also of law," he said. "There has to be legal precedent. ... What is it that the people of Muslimwakeup understand that billions of Muslims throughout time have not?"

"This is the way that extremists try to shut us up and stop women's progress,"

said Asra Nomani, an organizer and former *Wall Street Journal* reporter who has been an outspoken advocate for Muslim women's equality. "Basically we're undeterred, but we want to protect everyone's safety. **If you can't protect women's rights in America, then where?"**

The gallery that was to host an Islamic prayer service led by a woman next Friday pulled out in the face of mounting threats, including one promising to "blow you up."

Organizers seemed taken aback by mounting threats, especially against the backdrop of heavy coverage of their plans in the Arabic media. Earlier in the week, a prominent New York City imam, Talib Abdur-Rashid, called the event "a publicity stunt," and hundreds of on-line posts have condemned them as "anti-Islamic..." Around the world, Islamic media trashed the event - one claimed "Enemies of Islam are using women's issues to corrupt the community. (End quotes.)"

Recently, literature available at the Ethical Humanist Society depicted the peaceful nature of Islam and its special and equal treatment of women. Quote: "Men and women are to be respected equally," and "It is one function of Islamic law to protect

the privileged status of minorities," which in this case would be this group of "apostates." Yet it would seem that it is precisely Islam and the Koran that is being used as a weapon against this group which, after all, seeks only to pray; and it would seem that the opposition is not coming from only the extremist fringes - but the **mainstream** as well, just as much (not all) of the mainstream of American Christianity has also embraced the proposed anti-gay marriage Constitutional Amendment, and many Christian denominations also do not permit female clerics. Is this an unfair snapshot of the situation? Note to Ms. Wadud **and everyone else:** Wouldn't it be better to simply adopt the principles of benevolence, courage, responsibility, fairness and justice and not worry whether such moral values are "religiously correct" or not?

CFI-LI Question of the Month:

Two years from now will Iraq be free or a theocracy? Will it be in a civil war? Will the US still be there? What scenarios would be acceptable based on the cost to the US? Responses to be printed in 2 years.

Send your answers to CFI-LI, PO Box 119, Greenlawn, NY 11740 or email to LI-SecHum@aol.com

QUICKIES!

By Gerry Dantone

Item: (AP) Honduras (Dec. 23, 2004) - Assailants claiming to be members of a revolutionary group opposed to the death penalty opened fire on a public bus in northern Honduras, killing at least 23 passengers and escalating an ongoing battle between gangs and a government dedicated to fighting them. The shooting took place Thursday evening in the northern Atlantic city of Chamelecon, 125 miles north of the capital Tegucigalpa. Police arrested a suspect driving a car similar to one identified by witnesses as having been present at the attack. The suspect is an alleged member of violent gangs that have terrorized residents, mostly in the poor neighborhoods of Honduras' major cities. The assailants left a large piece of paper taped to the front windshield of the bus with a message saying they represented a revolutionary group that opposes the death penalty. The message contained "vulgar words" against congressional President Porfirio Lobo Sosa and Security Minister Oscar Alvarez, Torres said. Lobo Sosa is one of four candidates who will compete in February to determine the ruling National Party's presidential candidate for November elections. Lobo has suggested instituting the death penalty for severe crimes such as murder, rape and kidnapping - crimes for which the gang members are often accused. Honduras abolished the death penalty in the 1950s.

Comment: If this weren't such an atrocity, it would a joke. Imagine protesting a possible reinstatement of the death penalty by killing innocent people! Yet the killers were probably serious - they indeed would be the targets of the death penalty were it to be reinstated. A thoughtful person would have to admit if there were ever an event that would convince people that the death penalty is justified, this would be it. What can supporters of abolishing the death penalty argue in the face of this insanity? There is no limit to human depravity and stupidity as well as human kindness and beauty. What solution can be offered in response to this kind of total irrationality?

Item: (Washington Post editorial, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A20986-2004Dec22.html?sub=new>) ... Since the publication of

photographs of abuse at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison in the spring the administration's whitewashers -- led by Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld -- have contended that the crimes were carried out by a few low-ranking reservists, that they were limited to the night shift during a few chaotic months at Abu Ghraib in 2003, that they were unrelated to the interrogation of prisoners and that no torture occurred at the Guantanamo Bay prison where hundreds of terrorism suspects are held. **The new documents establish beyond any doubt that every part of this cover story is false...**

Comment: The Washington Post strongly supported the war in Iraq; this is not a case of left-wing sour grapes. Instead, this is a case of one of the country's most important news sources making incredible charges - unpopular ones at that - with great risk to its own credibility and profitability. We, as a country, can ignore this at our own risk - which is the most likely course that will be taken.

Item: (AP) Israeli police indicted four antique dealers and collectors Wednesday for allegedly running a sophisticated forgery ring that created a trove of fake biblical artifacts, including some hailed as among the most important archaeological objects ever uncovered in the region. The forged items include an ivory pomegranate touted by scholars as the only relic from Solomon's Temple, an ossuary that reputedly held the bones of James, Jesus' brother and a stone tablet with inscriptions on how to maintain the Jewish Temple, officials said. The 27-page indictment charges Israeli collector Oded Golan, along with three antiquities dealers, Robert Deutsch, Shlomo Cohen and Faiz al-Amaleh, on 18 counts including forgery, receiving fraudulent goods and damaging antiquities.

The ossuary, with the words "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus," was touted as a major archaeological discovery - the oldest physical link between the modern world and Jesus. But last year, Israeli experts said that while the ossuary, a 2,000-year-old limestone box, was indeed ancient, parts of the inscription were added recently. The forgeries also include clay tablets with descriptions of biblical events, a stone menorah said to belong to the priests in the second temple, Judaism's holiest site which was destroyed by Romans in 70 A.D., and a

stone seal said to belong to Menashe, king of Judah.

Comment: Will these arrests receive the same coverage as the discovery of the Ossuary? Answer: Are you kidding?

Item: Senator Frank Shurden of Henryetta, OK is a busy legislator: He proposed a bill in the Oklahoma state legislature in response to the Columbine tragedy during May 1999 that would remind Oklahoma parents that they had the right to use "ordinary force" including spanking, paddling or whipping, to discipline their children. The bill was passed by the Senate (36-9) and by the house (96-4). Shurden had decided to initiate the bill after learning of the Columbine tragedy. He said: "I feel like the lack of discipline has led to what we are into now, total chaos and disrespect. Back when I grew up, we got our tails whipped at school, then got it again when we got home. We didn't have shootings."

He also has promoted lotteries, claiming George Washington used lottery money to finance the Revolutionary War. "Did God bless Gen. George Washington? I believe he did," Shurden said. "If it is evil, then I suppose we're an evil nation."

He also proposed a law, written as a series of amendments, to be added to the Oklahoma Firearms Act and the Oklahoma Self-Defense Act, which says in part that "no person, property owner, tenant, employer or business entity shall be permitted to establish any policy or rule that has the effect of prohibiting any person, except a convicted felon, from transporting and storing firearms in a locked vehicle on any property set aside for any vehicle." Sen. Shurden, said that what was at issue was the safety of the workers, especially those who travel to or from work at off hours.

His crowning achievement however, must be a plan for saving Oklahoma's gamefowl industry now that cockfighters are legally prohibited from pitting birds fitted with razor-like spurs.

Sen. Shurden, a longtime defender of cockfighting, is suggesting that roosters be given little boxing gloves so they can fight without bloodshed. The proposal is in a bill the Democrat has introduced for the legislative session that begins Feb. 7.

"Who's going to object to chickens fighting like humans do? Everybody

(QUICKIES! from page 7)

wins," Sen. Frank Shurden said.

Oklahoma voters banned cockfighting in 2002. The practice is still legal in Louisiana and New Mexico.

Removing the blood from the sport takes away the main argument animal rights groups have against cockfighting, Shurden said.

"Let the roosters do what they love to do without getting injured," Shurden said.

Gamecocks would wear sparring muffs, which are padded gloves placed over their natural spurs.

"To me it answers everything. It saves the industry, takes blood sport out and generates revenue for Oklahoma," Shurden said. Shurden's legislation would create the Oklahoma Pari-mutuel Gamecock Boxing Act. Shurden believes it could be incorporated into horse racing, providing the boxing between horse races.

Comment: Sounds like presidential material to me.

Item: (USA Today) One in three U.S. high school students say the press ought to be more restricted, and even more say the government should approve newspaper stories before readers see them, according to a survey being released Monday.

The survey of 112,003 students finds that 36 percent believe newspapers should get "government approval" of stories before publishing; 51 percent say they should be able to publish freely; 13 percent have no opinion.

The survey of First Amendment rights was commissioned by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and conducted last spring by the University of Connecticut. It also questioned 327 principals and 7,889 teachers.

Comment: Of course the government should check what journalists are writing: as we have now found out, the government is paying them to write in the first place! Question: Exactly when did the Talibanization of our youth take place?

Item: (Media Matters, <http://mediamatters.org/items/200412100002>) FOX News host Bill O'Reilly lashed out at Media Matters for America and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) on the December 9 Radio Factor with Bill O'Reilly. He called Media Matters "the most vile, despicable human beings in the

country"; called the ADL "an extremist group that finds offense in pretty much everything"; and labeled ADL president Abraham Foxman "a nut."

The controversy began when Media Matters highlighted a remark that O'Reilly made to a Jewish caller on his December 3 radio show, and ADL president Abraham Foxman wrote to O'Reilly in protest.

When the caller on the December 3 Radio Factor objected to "Christmas going into schools" and explained that he "grew up with a resentment because I felt that people were trying to convert me to Christianity," O'Reilly informed him that the United States is "a predominantly Christian nation" and declared, "if you are really offended, you gotta go to Israel then." O'Reilly labeled the caller's concerns "an affront to the majority," insisting that "the majority can be insulted too." In his letter protesting the comments, Foxman wrote, among other things, that O'Reilly's comment "plays into one of the oldest anti-Semitic canards about Jews, that they are not full citizens of a country and are not entitled to all of the rights afforded to the majority."

Comment: If Public Schools began promoting "Ramadan," would O'Reilly be OK with that? Answer: Are you kidding? It is sad but true that it is not only the "Religious Right" that is uncomfortable with rights accorded to every person in this country – it is also the "mainstream" conservative, or as O'Reilly puts it, "Traditionalists" who do not like what the Constitution guarantees as well. In this country, our individual "rights" are NOT subject to a majority vote. In this country, the government (e.g.: a Public School) is to be neutral towards all religious sects and between religion and non-religion.

Item: A judge in Washington State refused to grant a woman long separated from her imprisoned abusive husband because she was pregnant by another man. The judge, Paul Bastine ruled that it was the policy of the state "that a marriage cannot be dissolved when one of the parties is pregnant." No such prohibition in any state law could be found to support this contention. The effect of this kind of ruling could be for abusive husbands to deliberately impregnate their wives or for wives to abort fetuses contrary to their preference. The husband called the

wife's grandmother from jail and claimed that the pregnancy was "a sign from God" that the couple should be together.

Comment: How, exactly, does one prove that something is or is not a "sign from God." What if God is a cruel sick dude? He allows tsunamis; why not screw up someone's life in some incomprehensible way? Maybe God's just testing with this poor woman via this judge and husband.

Item: (The Washington Post) 15% of African Americans embrace the theory that government scientists created AIDS to control or wipe out their communities, according to a study by Rand Corp. and Oregon State University. Nearly half believe that HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, is man-made.

A professor of psychology at Florida State, Na'im Akbar said, "this is not a bunch of crazy people running around saying they're out to get us." Akbar cited the Tuskegee experiment that allowed black men to suffer from syphilis and not be treated.

Phill Wilson, exec. Director of the Black AIDS Inst. said, "The whole notion of conspiracy theories and misinformation... removes personal responsibility. If there is a bogeyman, people say, 'why should I use condoms...'"

Comment: Although we often think of irrational beliefs in a religious context, there truly is no limiting irrational thinking. There is almost nothing that someone doesn't believe. There are too many things to count that are perfectly incredible that many do believe, even if the results of this belief leads to human misery. For info on HIV causing AIDS go to www.quackwatch.org/04ConsumerEducation/hiv-aids.html.

Item: A Taiwanese spiritual leader said he had used his magical powers to take the island's new premier on a tour of Paris without going there physically. Sung told reporters he took Premier Frank Hsieh, a former follower, on a "cosmos-roaming" tour of Paris, including a stop at the Eiffel Tower, during a gathering at another follower's home last year. Hsieh wouldn't directly comment on Sung's claims. "You can take this as fodder for a joke after a meal," he told reporters.

Comment: I guarantee that there are people who believe this actually happened.

LI Humanist Coalition Calendar

By Rosemary Dantone

FRIDAY, APRIL 1

7:00 p.m. **CFI-LI/LISH**, Book Discussion Club, Book: de Botton, Alain, "The Consolations of Philosophy," Discussion Leader: Barbara Braine. Plainview-Old Bethpage Public Library, 999 Old Country Road, Plainview, call Bill Wade @ 631 765 2941 or write to him @ Box 631, Southold, NY, 11971. **FREE!**

TUESDAY, APRIL 5

7:30 p.m. **CFI-LI/LISH**, Patchogue Philosophical Discussion Group, first Tuesday of the month, topic TBD, contact Warren Rothstein 631-869-5140 or waremmy@optonline.net to reserve a place (limited seating) and for directions.

THURSDAY, APRIL 7

7 p.m. **CFI-LI**, the great debate: "Does God Exist?" with Ed Tabash arguing for the negative, and Frank Gambino religion teacher, in the affirmative. At the Charles B. Wang Center, room 401, Stony Brook University, Stony Brook, Suffolk County off Nicholls Road.

FRIDAY, APRIL 8

7 p.m., **CFI-LI**, free forum, Ed Tabash guest speaker, "Why There Really is No God." Location to be announced. Call 516 742 1662.

7 p.m., **CFI-Metro NY**, Forum, "The True Meaning of the Separation of Church and State" with guest speaker Eddie Tabash, Queensborough Community College, Room M136, 56th Avenue and Cloverdale Boulevard, Bayside, Queens. Call 516.742.1662

SATURDAY, APRIL 9

2:00 p.m. **Queens Community for Cultural Judaism**, The Resurgent Religious Right, Presenter Mel Cooperman, \$5 for nonmembers, location at GOVAC, 257-02 Union Tpk., Glen Oaks, Queens

SUNDAY, APRIL 10

6:00 p.m. **SHSNY/CFI** Book Club to discuss *EcoHumanism.*, a collection of essays edited by Robert B. Tapp, Dean of the Humanist Institute, will attend the meeting; free admission, R.S.V.P. John Rafferty at 212.371.8733 or john@rafferty.net; John Rafferty's and Donna Marxer's apartment, 141 E. 56th Street (10F), between Lexington and Third.

12:15 p.m. **EHSLI**, Cookbook Coming Out Party, (516) 741-7304, Meeting Room at the Ethical Humanist Society of Long Island, 38 Old Country

Road, Garden City, NY 11530. Come enjoy the free food and buy a cookbook or two or three (\$15 each/4 for \$50). Reservations are not necessary. Open to the public.

SUNDAY, APRIL 12

6:30 p.m. **CFI-Metro NY**, Cornelia Dean, science editor of the *New York Times*; Is the dearth of women in high-level science and math attributable, at least in part, to innate genetic differences between the sexes? NY Academy of Sciences, 2 E. 63rd St, \$10 admission, reservations not required, you may pre-pay by check or credit card, call 212-265-2877

Wednesday, April 13

1:30 p.m. **LI Havurah for Humanistic Judaism**, Bible/Philosophy Workshop, The prophet Amos, plus common fallacies of logic, @ home of Eve Levinkind. Call Len @ 516 (516) 889-8337 for info.

TUESDAY, APRIL 19

7:30 p.m. **CFI-LI/LISH** "Plato's Footnote, a Philosophy for All Café!" discussion group, third Tuesday of each month, topic: "Love's Complications", an article from *The Philosopher's Magazine* about the concept of love and some alternative views of it. Contact Warren Rothstein 631-869-5140 or waremmy@optonline.net to reserve a place (limited seating) and for directions. For further info about the topic, contact Massimo by phone 631-632-1097, or e-mail at skeptic@rationallyspeaking.org.

7:30 p.m. **EHSLI** Advocating for Your Child in the Public, (516) 741-7304, Meeting Room at the Ethical Humanist Society of Long Island, 38 Old Country Road, Garden City, NY 11530. \$10 per person - EHS members free Dr. Alan R. Cohen was a school psychologist and special education administrator in Nassau County. He became a professor of special Education at Adelphi University where he is currently the Assistant Dean of the School of Education.

FRIDAY, APRIL 22

8:00pm, **Co-Sponsored by: CFI-NJ, Ethical Culture Society of Bergen County, The Logos Project**, Finding our way back to the Enlightenment, Thomas De Zengotita / Stephen Eric Bronner, Ethical Culture Society of Bergen County, 687 Larch Avenue, Teaneck, NJ.

SUNDAY, APRIL 24

1:30 p.m. **LI Havurah for Humanistic Judaism**, Twilight Passover Seder

(secular). Call Len @ 516 889 8337.

6:00 p.m. **Queens Community for Cultural Judaism**, Passover Seder at La Baraka, paid reservations required, Ed Klein, queensccj@aol.com, 718-380-5362

1:00-4:00 p.m. **CFI-Metro NY**, Harlem meeting, Freedom Hall, 113 West 128th Street, **Contact:** Sibanye by e-mail (preferable) or 212.265.2877. We usually meet on the fourth Sunday of the month.

WEDNESDAYS

6:30-7:30 p.m. **CFI-Metro NY, Secular Organization for Sobriety (SOS)**--Manhattan Group, Center for Inquiry, 1 Rockefeller Plaza, Suite 2700, NYC. Contact Eric Chinchon, NY State Coordinator for SOS, at 716.636.7571 x 226 for details. **A photo ID is required for admission to the building.**

THURSDAYS

7:30 p.m. **Secular Organization for Sobriety (SOS)**, 280 Suburban Avenue, #F, Deer Park, NY (Suffolk County). Contact: Drew, 631-242-2498.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 4

6:30 p.m. **CFI-Metro NY**, Frederick Crews, contributor to The New York Review of Books and principal author of "The Memory Wars: Freud's Legacy in Dispute". Topic: "Junk Science, Irrationalism and Superstition in American Culture," The New York Academy of Medicine, 1216 Fifth Avenue (at 102nd Street), Benefactor dinner to follow. We are proud to offer educational forums of this caliber, but we cannot do it without your financial support. As always, you will be able to attend this lecture for a \$10 admission fee. As an incentive to give generously, we are offering donors of \$500 or more, the opportunity not only to attend the lecture but to meet and talk personally with the speaker at a dinner directly following the public program. Your donations will not only support this and future lecture programs but a wide variety of other, community-based activities. **Call 212 265 2877 for info and reservations.**

FRIDAY, MAY 6

7:00 p.m. **CFI-LI/LISH**, Book Discussion Club, Book: John R. Searle, "Mind: A Brief Introduction," Discussion Leader: **Massimo Pigliucci**. Plainview-Old Bethpage Public Library, 999 Old Country Road, Plainview, call Bill Wade @ 631 765 2941 or write to him @ Box 631, Southold, NY, 11971. **FREE!**

Book Discussion Club!

If you are interested call Bill Wade @ 631 765 2941 or write to him @ Box 631, Southold, NY, 11971. All meetings are at **7 PM at the Plainview-Old Bethpage Public Library, 999 Old Country Road, Plainview, on Fridays**, unless otherwise noted. **FREE!**

Date: 1 April 2005, Book: de Botton, Alain, "The Consolations of Philosophy," Discussion Leader: Barbara Braine.

Date: 6 May 2005, Book: John R. Searle, "Mind A Brief Introduction," Discussion Leader: Massimo Pigliucci.

Date: 3 June 2005, Time: 7:00 pm, Place: Dorothy Burns' house, PLEASE CALL DOROTHY IF YOU PLAN TO ATTEND, 388 West Hills Rd., Huntington, NY 11743, 631-673-1061, dornburns@suffolk.lib.ny.us, Book: Hopkins, Keith, "A World Full Of Gods," Discussion Leader: David Hartman.

Date: 1 July 2005, Book: Shermer, Michael, "The Science of Good and Evil: Why People Cheat, Gossip, Care, Share, and Follow the Golden Rule" Discussion Leader: Arno Arrak.

New Online Forums!

CFI-LI now has its own home on the web. Join in the conversation at <http://www.campusfreethought.org/forum> where discussions relating to the Book Club, Philosophical Discussion Club and Plato's Footnote can be found! It's free and easy.

CFI-Metro NY Program:

Cornelia Dean, science editor of the New York Times, will discuss the controversial issue of whether the dearth of women in high-level science and math can be attributed, at least in part, to innate genetic differences between the sexes.

Dean wrote a provocative personal essay on the subject after Harvard University President Lawrence Summers set off a firestorm by suggesting that nature, not nurture, might explain the continuing pre-eminence of men in scientific research—both on and off university campuses.

Location: New York Academy of Sciences, 2 E. 63rd Street on April 12 at 6:30 p.m. Admission is \$10. Reservations are not required, but you may prepay by check or credit card to avoid a wait in line. For further information call 212.265.2877.

TIME TO GROW SOS!

The Council for Secular Humanism is requesting donations specifically for SOS programs administration.

Send your donations to:

CSH, PO Box 664, Amherst, NY 114226, note that the gift's for **SOS – NY**.

SOS (Secular Organizations for Sobriety/Save Our Selves), a support organization for people recovering from alcohol and drug abuse, have a local group. Meetings are held Thursdays at 7:30 P.M. at, 280 Suburban Avenue, #F, Deer Park, Suffolk County, NY. Open to all persons who need sobriety in their life. For info about this meeting or directions, contact Drew @ 631 242 2498.

The home page of SOS is <http://www.secularsobriety.org>. This web site has much information for downloading on running SOS groups.

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Editor: Gerald Dantone
Design: John Wilmarth



A Thumbs Up
Publication

Secular humanism is the philosophy of life guided by reason and science, freed from religious and secular dogmas, motivated by an appreciation of life and the lives of others, seeking to reach goals of human happiness, freedom and understanding on this earth, in this life.

**CFI-LI
Box 119
Greenlawn, NY 11740**