



CENTER FOR INQUIRY *Long Island* INQUIRER

Reason, Science, and Freedom of Inquiry

Center for Inquiry – Long Island Community
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February, 2007

Volume 10, Issue 2

Darwin Day Events!

Thursday, February 15, 2007, all day!

Darwin Day Information Table

Students will be staffing an information table in the Student Activities Center lobby, SUNY @ Stony Brook University, Nicolls Road, Stony Brook, Suffolk County, NY, all day. **Free and open to the public!**

Thursday, February 15, 2007, 7:30 p.m.

Darwin Day Lecture



Special Darwin Day Provost Lecture: Sean Carroll, the Howard Hughes Professor at the University of Wisconsin, will be speaking on the topic, "*The Making of the Fittest*" - lecture at Student Activities Center auditorium, Stony Brook University, Nicolls Road, SUNY @ Stony Brook, NY.

Get there early - every seat will be filled! After the lecture, Sean will be signing his book of the same title as his topic. **Free and open to the public!**

Friday, February 16, 2007, 7:00 p.m.

Darwin Day Panel Discussion

"Faith & Science: Is there an interface?"

Special Panel: Katy Hinman, Director, Georgia Light and Power; Rev. Richard Edwards, pastor, Stony Brook

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For info on weather-related or other emergency CFI-LI Comm. event cancellations, listen to **WBAB-FM (102.3)** or **WBLI-FM (106.1)**.

Visit our website: www.centerforinquiry.net/li

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.

The Next Step of Intelligent Design Theory



Rationally Speaking

a monthly e-column
by Massimo Pigliucci
at www.rationallyspeaking.org

I was waiting with trepidation to learn what ID proponents would be up to after the debacle last year at the Dover, PA trial. Predictably, I didn't have to wait long. A recent article in New Scientist has introduced the world to the Biologic Institute (get the pun? Bio-Logic??), based in Seattle and funded by the Discovery Institute, the major ID so-called "think" tank.

The goal of the Biologic is to provide laboratory evidence of the impossibility of evolution, as well as empirical support for Intelligent Design. Good luck to you, guys. In reality, of course, the goal is simply to provide ammunition to rebut one of the most damning statements in Judge John Jones's decision at Dover: "[in addition to its religious undertones, ID has not] been the subject of testing and research [and it has not] generated peer-reviewed publications." Hence, it ain't science.

The work going on at Biologic is so secretive that nobody there would speak to a New Scientist reporter, and when one of the directors, George Weber, finally did, he was immediately fired! Hmm, a splendid example of academic openness and freedom of intellectual debate, no doubt. Weber isn't a scientist, not surprisingly, but a former professor of business and the head of Reasonstobelieve.org – clearly the sort of credentials one would expect from the director of a scientific "research" institute.

Weber told the New Scientist reporter that "We are the first ones doing what we might call lab science in intelligent design." Yes, you might call it that, or you might more appropriately call it a thinly veiled exercise in public deception. "The objective" -- Weber continued -- "is to challenge the scientific community on naturalism." Except, of course, that naturalism is a philosophical position, so Weber should really be challenging the likes of Daniel Dennett, not the intellectual descendants of Charles Darwin.

Steve Fuller, a sociologist who testified in favor of ID at Dover (why a sociologist, and not a scientist? Nobody has ever denied that ID is a fascinating phenomenon from a sociological standpoint!) said about what Biologic is doing: "Regardless of whether the science cuts any ice against evolution, one of the virtues is that it could provide a kind of model for how religiously motivated people can go into the lab." Are you kidding me? In other words, who cares if the so-called science is crap, it's ok because it makes religious people feel good about playing scientists!

Of course, none of this is really new stuff. The Institute for Creation Research, a young-earth creationist propaganda machine, has been in operation since the '70s, and it has produced volumes on topics such as "flood geology," the difficult problem of making enough space for all ani-

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A Thumbs Up Publication
 Editor: Gerald Dantone
 Art Design: John R. Wilmarth

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Listen to the show for and by humanists, freethinkers, atheists, agnostics, etc. on **Sundays @ 6:30 PM, WBAI FM, 99.5** on the dial.

Letters to the Editor



Re: Iraq

1/12/07 The "best" course of action would be to adopt the old "Colonial Powers" position - Divide and conquer; divide the country up between the 3 major religious groups. Let them put their own governments in power and iron out their problems.

The U.S. has won the military victory over Saddam's troops; what it's losing is the political battle. Since we lack the will to force the people of Iraq to bend to our will, the country should be divided and the American troops re-

moved. Name withheld, via Internet.

1/12/07 There should be a full-scale investigation regarding our involvement in Iraq and impeachment proceedings—at the very least. Name withheld, via Internet.

1/15/07 Iraq is a very complicated problem. To simplify, I believe we should be working with all representatives of the Iraq people/government, as well as the surrounding countries of Iran and Syria, to aid in designing a govern-

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Community Church; Rev. Catherine Schuyler, SBU pastor; Rabbi Joseph Topek, Director, Hillel Foundation for Jewish Life and Director of the Interfaith Center; Jeffrey Levinton, SBU Distinguished Professor of Ecology and Evolution; Robert Crease, Professor and Chair of the Philosophy Dept. and Director of SBU-Templeton Trust Institute. At the Earth and Space Sciences Lecture Theater 001, SUNY @ Stony Brook University, Nicolls Road, Stony Brook, Suffolk County, NY.

Free and open to the public!

CFI-LI Philosophical Discussion Group



The Philosophy Group led by Dr. Philip Pecorino will be meeting on the first Thursday of the month, **February 1, 2007 at the Plainview-Old Bethpage Public Library, 999 Old Country Rd., Plainview, Nassau County, NY.**

TOPIC: Justice: What is Justice? Are there various forms of Justice? How do humans obtain or achieve Justice?

The 2 hours we have will be spent exploring the meanings and assumptions and presuppositions associated with those questions.

READINGS: (as much or as little as you can handle):

On Justice <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Justice>

Plato on Justice <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-ethics->

politics/#2

Aristotle <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-politics/>

John Rawls at <http://www.iep.utm.edu/r/rawls.htm>

John Rawls Justice as Fairness <http://www.iep.utm.edu/r/rawls.htm#SH2d>

Rawls and the Original Position <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/original-position/>

Distributive Justice at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/justice-distributive/>

Example of Distributive Justice 9-11 Fund http://www.qcc.cuny.edu/SocialSciences/ppecorino/INTRO_TEXT/Chapter%209%20Social%20Philosophy/9-11-fund-distribution.htm

Distributive Justice Liberalism and Conservatism

[http://www.qcc.cuny.edu/SocialSciences/ppecorino/INTRO_TEXT/Chapter%209%20Social%20Philosophy/Liberalism and Conservatism.htm](http://www.qcc.cuny.edu/SocialSciences/ppecorino/INTRO_TEXT/Chapter%209%20Social%20Philosophy/Liberalism%20and%20Conservatism.htm).

For more info on the topics, email Dr. Philip Pecorino @ PPECORINO@qcc.cuny.edu.

Free and open to the public

TUESDAY, Feb. 13, 7:30 p.m.
CFI-LI Patchogue General Discussion Group

Usually the second Tuesday of the month, topic TBD; contact Warren Rothstein 631-869-5140 warrenrothstein@optonline.net to reserve a place (limited seating) and for directions.

For CFI Friends only!

Iraq and the Mission of the Center for Inquiry

By Gerry Dantone

"A 32-year-old Iraqi engineer encountered earlier this year in Baghdad, had this to say in a desperate e-mail message: "I am facing the most difficult times of my life here in Baghdad. Since I am a Sunni, I became a target to be killed. You know that our army and police are Shia, so every checkpoint represents a serious threat to Sunnis. During the last three weeks, two of my friends were killed at check points belonging to the police. They first asked to show IDs and when they saw the Sunni family name, they killed them." (From "Iraq's Biggest Failing: There Is No Iraq" by Roger Cohen, NY Times, 12/10/06, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/10/weekinreview/10cohen.html?_r=2&adxnml=1&oref=slogin&ref=weekinreview&adxnmlx=1165856851-NHvCxuVGpvgvkC1LpW4wwA.)

It will be four years in March 2007; yes the war in Iraq will have been raging for four long, deadly and expensive years very soon.

Thanks to the *Iraq Study Group (ISG)* headed by the conservative James Baker, it is now not even arguable that claiming that the War in Iraq is a disaster is mere political partisanship – it is now objective fact. Even if the ISG's recommendations were flawed or even dangerous, at least we can be grateful to the ISG for this one favor.

This world-changing situation is, as many (though not all) Center for Inquiry supporters expected, a direct result of the rejection of many of the values that the Center for Inquiry actively promotes. No, we're not talking about some kind of parti-

san politics since the Center is non-partisan; instead this current situation is the result of an embrace of an *anti-intellectual, anti-reason and most specifically, anti-scientific and anti-evidential mindset* that has gripped many in the administration and in society in general.

Indeed even in retrospect, a mythology about the war's origins has arisen. Have you ever heard an apologist for the war claim that "everyone believed that Iraq had WMDs"? Or that "no one could have anticipated such a strong insurgency"? This post-disaster myth-making has been applied to 9-11 and even predictable natural disasters such as Katrina. (A future use for this myth-making could be global warming and the resulting climate change. You can just imagine them saying, "Who knew that climate change would be such a disaster?")

Of course, the truth is quite different, and we ignored the facts that were **known at the time** at our peril.

Before the war, the administration provided no evidence for the existence of WMDs in Iraq that was not almost immediately and reasonably disputed by the UN's inspectors who were actually on the ground inspecting Iraqi facilities.

The mythology claims that it wasn't until *after* the US invasion that the truth became known but the facts prove that UN inspectors had many doubts before the war began. All those doubts were on display in an article printed **2/14/03** and titled, "Han's Blix's briefing to the security council." (Go to <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Iraq/Story/0,2763,895882,00.html>.)

Another creditable opinion **before the war** was that of former UN inspector Scott

Ritter who believed that we could be 90% to 95% certain that Iraq did not have a current WMD program. (Go to <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,351165,00.html>.)

But of course, the ultimate example is that of the Secretary of State, **Colin Powell** who said the following in a conversation with the Egyptian foreign minister in **February, 2001**: "The fact that the sanctions exist -- not for the purpose of hurting the Iraqi people, but for the purpose of keeping in check Saddam Hussein's ambitions toward developing weapons of mass destruction. We should constantly be reviewing our policies, constantly be looking at those sanctions to make sure that they are directed toward that purpose. That purpose is every bit as important now as it was ten years ago when we began it. **And frankly they have worked. He has not developed any significant capability with respect to weapons of mass destruction. He is unable to project conventional power against his neighbors.** So in effect, our policies have strengthened the security of the neighbors of Iraq, and these are policies that we are going to keep in place, but we are always willing to review them to make sure that they are being carried out in a way that does not affect the Iraqi people but does affect the Iraqi regime's ambitions and the ability to acquire weapons of mass destruction, and we had a good conversation on this issue." (Go to <http://www.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2001/933.htm>.)

Logic and reason dictated that we should have allowed the UN to continue inspections instead of ordering them out of the

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ment that allows for a speedier implementation of representative structure, an independent court system, a "cleaning out" of corrupt officials with special attention to Iraqi police and armed forces personnel, the elimination of foreign fighters (including, soon, ourselves).

Overriding all concerns should be progress towards an independent Iraq with secured peace with its neighbors.

Barring the above, we should be negoti-

ating with Iran and Syria for an agreement as to what their responsibilities are in the event that Iraq sinks into civil war, while we leave the country. At that point a congressional investigation should commence which explores the nature of the decision making process that both lead to our incursion as well as issues involving how the follow-up and planning occurred, with special attention to the lack of careful planning, the type that ran counter to experienced advice about the shortfalls of invad-

ing Iraq and how to keep the peace after the invasion. Harvey Miller via Internet.

Response: One of the few things most people will agree upon is that whatever is proposed, it may not work. No matter what is proposed, Iraq might align with Iran, have a full blown civil war, split apart, become hostile to the US, remain hostile to Israel, repress freedom, torture its citizens, and destabilize other neighboring countries—for the worse. The possibilities for good things? Almost nil. G.D.

(Design from page 1)

mals on Noah's Ark, and the ever-popular documentation of humans and dinosaurs living at the same time (or was that a car-

toon series for kids? I get confused with these scholarly sources). None of this has helped because it's the same sort of science-looking smokescreen that supporters

of pseudoscience have always used, from astrologers to spoon-benders. And it's not going to work at Biologic for the same exact reason: it ain't science, baby.

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country as the US ultimately did. Even if the US were to later decide to go to war anyway, at least it would not have done so under false, or more charitably, incorrect pretenses – this would have made the current circumstances far easier to accept – at least the choice would have been made with the correct facts on the table.

Is this all merely 20/20 hindsight on our part?

Consider the following excerpt (Eds.' note: the emphases only are new – the words are unchanged) from the INQUIRER, circa April, 2003, (<http://www.centerforinquiry.net/li/documents/April2003newsletter2.pdf>) written as the war began:

“If one brave reporter had the guts to ask the above of the President (or of a dozen other powerful political leaders) then perhaps other reporters would be emboldened to say what has been unsayable – that we may be taking the bait and plunging full force into an ongoing holy war – an American ideological jihad, as envisioned in a 1998 memo by the Project for the New American Century (PNAC). This group, which consists of many individuals now in the Bush administration, has succeeded in co-opting the inexperienced (and ignorant?) President Bush into their camp.

*This is not mere frivolous speculation: The ideology is real, well articulated and not secret: American interests are paramount and our military might should remain unequalled and should be placed in play. The primary target has always been: **Iraq...***

Now, since war has begun, most will be forced to hope that the US prevails quickly, efficiently and with minimal casualties on all sides...

*Most will hope that Hussein is not as lucky as bin Laden. Most will hope that what follows Hussein is more free and/or democratic and not more Talibanlike. Most hope the now (supposedly) hidden weapons of mass destruction are not distributed to terrorists for spite. **(It would almost be worse if it turns out there were no such WMDs – that was the surface rationale for war.)***

*As this is written in March 2003, one can only wonder that even if the best Bush scenario occurs, such as a quick victory over Hussein, and a “friendly” Iraqi government installed, **whether we***

have created numerous bin Laden wannabees who will forever be terrorizing the US and using our inaction on Israel and our attack on Iraq as excuses to kill American civilians the world... whether the Iraqi people will hate us or love us for imposing US will and removing their tyrant. Will religion and dogma trump sanity all over the world?

QUESTIONS

Will the US score an easy victory with minimal bloodshed on all sides in an attack on Iraq?

Will the people of Iraq be thankful for the war that rids them of Hussein or be resentful of the destruction and US domination?

Will the US be able to install a workable government at all, post-Hussein?

Will the new government of Iraq be democratic, free and secular, or non-democratic, Arab and Islamic?

Will civil war break out in Iraq, post-Hussein?

*...Will the US use weapons of mass destruction? **Will we find weapons of mass destruction?***

Will some weapons of mass destruction fall into the hands of terrorists?

Will there be an increase in terrorism against the US or a decrease?

Will the US economy falter or progress after the war? Will interest rates rise?

*...The preceding questions are by no means complete but they make clear one thing; **anyone who claims to have certain answers is delusional.** At best we can assign probabilities to the above – and admit that the risk of a unilateral war is incredibly high and the outcome, aside from a US military victory, totally uncertain.*

What to Do?

... Whatever casualties the US endures, it will still prevail according to all “experts”...

Still, according to all experts (and we all know how reliable they are), the US will win at some point, and that will be that.

Then the really tough part starts.

After the war against the Iraqi army comes the battle to tame Iraq and prevent civil war, intervention by Iran, Turkey and/or Syria, prevent distribution of WMDs and prevent the destruction of oilfields. After the war comes the likelihood of increased terrorism against the

US on US soil and around the world.

After the war comes the possibility that other countries (Pakistan?) will not cooperate as fully in the real war on terror.

After the war, the UN would be pretty much pointless if the US went at it alone.

Anti-US sentiment around the world will most likely grow. An economic recession and inflation may be in the cards under the weight of the costs of war, higher (though some say they may go lower) oil costs and rebuilding.

This is a sample of what could happen after we WIN a military victory over Hussein’s army!

*The best we could hope for after the shooting starts is for as quick and as bloodless a victory as possible and as sensible and free an Iraqi government as possible that Iraqis could support. At best this government will be based on freedom and democracy and not on being “Arab” and Islamic while it would be able to mollify feelings of resentment and repression. **(Good luck!)***

*... Bush has screwed up the Afghanistan situation with poor follow-up and he can do it again in Iraq... The war itself will be a matter of weeks or months. **The years after such a war are key and where many more lives will be at stake. This is also the aspect of this war that many of those who opposed it feared the most.*** (End excerpt.)

As you can see, questions that were raised in a local CFI Community newsletter were likely never even considered at the presidential level!

It has been reported that expertise on the facts of Iraq, Islam, etc., were not considered to be important in the anti-terrorism department at the FBI (go to <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/n/a/2005/06/19/national/w072246D97.DTL>). Indeed, many there were ignorant of basic facts – just as the President and many in his administration were ignorant before the war. Now, these facts are dooming their efforts.

You can ask “how can this be?” but however this came about, the results are apparent.

This tragedy that is the Iraq War displays in stark terms the necessity of a reasoned, compassionate and scientific approach to solving human problems. Humanism must become the way that people (and nations) of diverse religious

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THE UNDESIRABILITY OF IMMORTALITY –Part II

By Dr. Philip A. Pecorino

For those who believe in the soul and the supernatural realm and believe in eternity there is the claim that there will be a happiness enjoyed by souls that is beyond the ability of a human to comprehend and that it is composed mainly of the pure joy or bliss of being in the presence of the deity and enjoying the "beatific vision".

This attempt to defend the notion of eternal life and make it attractive does essentially call upon humans who would believe it (or hope for it) to thus accept that the human being with human consciousness would be transformed in some way not explainable into some other form of existence in order to survive or escape from the horror of infinite boredom.

It is not the human being that will have human consciousness survive and experience joy or bliss in eternity. It is some other kind of being. This is often overlooked by those who are blinded by hope and who do not see clearly with the use of careful reflective and critical thought what exactly is being promised with an eternal life of joy. Usually the defenders of such eternal bliss take refuge in a retreat from reason with the invocation of mystery and faith when proclaiming that matters related

to the infinite are beyond human understanding and a state of being known only to the deity. In this they may be correct in thinking that no human could understand how any human would have anything to look forward to as a human being except the prospect of the horror of infinite boredom and meaninglessness in eternity. The "I" that hopes to survive and enjoy eternal life will not be the being that lives on. If there is survival of the self and if it is to be in some mode other than suffering with the boredom of eternity then the "I" will be transformed into some other sort of being in order to endure eternity. So, the hope of salvation and eternal life for the "self" for "me" will not be fulfilled as promised for the "I" could not possibly be happy for eternity as a human consciousness.

For Bernard Williams and others who think very seriously about infinite existence for a human being there is a fundamental conflict between what makes a human life worth living and death deplorable and an infinite existence as a human being in an afterlife that can not have any meaning or value for a human being because human character itself is formulated with an awareness of mortality making human experiences are precious because they are finite.

Infinite survival in a limited physical

body involves continuation of human consciousness which is a consciousness that is finite and developed in awareness of the finitude of human life. This infinite survival would lead to infinite boredom and not joy or bliss as humans would experience everything (even an infinite number of things) an infinite number of times. So the infinite survival of a soul which would continue human consciousness would continue a finite consciousness for all eternity-infinite time. This leads to infinite boredom and not joy or bliss. So for some who think about this heaven begins to appear "As boring as Hell."

The prospect of an infinity of experiences for a human consciousness to encounter in infinite time (eternity) that both preserves the human consciousness (or else it is not the survival of the human as soul) and has neither boredom or pain associated with it is a prospect easy to conceive or speak or write but hard to imagine. The words have been presented in the previous sentence but what might they mean, if anything? Is it not possible that in an infinite amount of time or for all infinity (eternity) a soul could have constantly changing experiences? If so, there would be no boredom.

Well, humans find it hard to imagine

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beliefs guide their behavior towards others – not superstition or even secular myth-making. Science and objectivity, not dogma, must be used to understand reality.

Going forward, a current favorite political catch-phrase, it is probable that a good ending in Iraq is no longer possible. The sad story that opens this article points to the problem that politicians are loathe admitting: religion is an obstacle to peace.

The best course probably is to attempt to minimize the disaster: If Shiites take over Iraq, as expected, then it is important that Shiite Iran's power in the area does not hurt those governments that do not support terrorists (even if their populace does.) That means ensuring that Saudi Arabia does not fall into Al Qaeda hands because it is weakened by a almost certain losing intervention on the side of the Iraqi Sunnis being killed by Shiites in Iraq! The key might be Syria – it is not a theocracy, not completely Shiite, and has

some things it wants that the US could help obtain, such as the Golan Heights (occupied by Israel.) There is no way, diplomatically, that we should push Iran and Syria into a closer alliance – yet that is what the Bush Administration has been doing. We may have to concede Iranian influence in a Shiite dominated Iraq. That influence should end there however.

In Iraq, no increase in US troops in Baghdad or in Iraq in total, or more military training of Iraqis will bring Shia and Sunni together – it will only make them target US troops more often and eventually more efficient at killing each other.

The end result in Iraq may be an Iran aligned Shiite dominated country or conversely, though possibly simultaneously, Al Qaeda's best stronghold! Thanks, Mr. President.

Predicting this outcome before the war would have required assuming that the current administration was as completely incompetent and closed-minded as they ultimately have been proven to be. Many, though not all, always gave them

the benefit of a doubt – that perhaps they knew something others did not know, or that world leaders could not possibly be that ill-informed.

We now know that there is no limit to stupidity and incompetence at any level of responsibility and importance.

Another thing we should now realize: *it is entirely likely that nothing will be learned.* A well-known right-wing pundit, Bill O'Reilly, has proposed that what Iraq needs is a strong, non-democratic leader to take charge and ruthlessly crush the opposition. The ultimate irony is lost on the War in Iraq's most ardent supporters: they are now beginning to yearn for someone just like Saddam Hussein to rule again in Iraq.

Yes, until now, the only positive accomplishment of the war thus far has been the removal of this same Saddam Hussein.

History, apparently, teaches nothing if we are incapable of learning.

Arthur C. Brooks Slander Against Secularists

By Dennis Middlebrooks

Conservative scholar Arthur C. Brooks' new book, *"Who Really Cares? America's Charity Divide-Who Gives, Who Doesn't, And Why It Matters"* (Basic Books) has been ballyhooed by the Religious Right as further proof of the moral superiority of religious vs. non-religious Americans. Brooks has appeared on C-Span before the reactionary Heritage Foundation and his book was favorably reviewed in the 1/14/07 New York Post by right-wing financial consultant Richard Vigilante, and touted on the O'Reilly Factor by the loathsome Jon Stoessel. Brooks claims that religious people give, on average, over three times more than secularists to charity and devote far more of their time to the needy than their secular counterparts. Brooks also claims that secularists who are charitable were raised in religious families and owe their values to their God-fearing parents rather than to secular values.

Brooks acknowledged that his research was largely based on "conversations" with people selected by him, which is a far cry from analyzing IRS audited tax returns for representative samples of secularists and

religious conservatives to determine how much they *actually* gave to charity, rather than how much they *claimed* to give. As sex therapist Albert Ellis pointed out a number of years ago with respect to a sex survey which suggested that the religious were less likely to cheat on their spouses, the results were most likely skewed by the fact that religious people were far more likely to lie as to their marital fidelity because they are *expected* to be faithful to their spouses. The same principle would appear to apply here...religious folks are far more likely to *claim* they give high amounts to charity, for that is exactly what their churches and co-religionists expect of them!

Here is an example of Brooks' standards. He put a Red Cross donation pail in San Francisco and another one in South Dakota and determined that far more people gave in South Dakota than in San Francisco. This actually was cited by Jon Stoessel on the O'Reilly Factor as proof that religious people are more generous than the non-religious! Never mind the fact that secularists would appear to be less likely to support the Red Cross, a Christian organization, than they would be to support a secular charity. What if Brooks had placed an

AIDS donation pail in San Francisco and another one in South Dakota? What would the results have been then?

If Brooks' claims are correct, then the least charitable group in the nation with respect to money and volunteer work should be secular Jews, a group famous for their public philanthropy and support of civil rights for others. On the other hand, the most charitable groups should be the Hasidic Jews of Brooklyn, the Amish, and Christian Reconstructionists, all of which are famous for their insularity, and, in the case of the Hasidim, bloc voting tactics to receive preferential treatment from the government at the expense of other groups. Brooks might also wish to explain the billions of dollars donated to charity by atheists like Ted Turner, George Soros Bill Gates, and Warren Buffet. And let's not forget another prominent non-believer, i.e. Andrew Carnegie, who, as I recall, gave some money to charity.

I would be curious to see how much of charitable giving among the religious goes to 'outsider' groups, as opposed to donations to their own churches and to charities in their own communities, which are more likely to be small towns or rural areas than

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infinity let alone an infinity of constantly changing experiences. But if such a possibility is considered, then would it be something that would stave off boredom and be in some way pleasurable to the degree that the afterlife is a desirable state of being? No. Human consciousness needs points of reference and a framework in which to place experiences so that they are appreciated and understood. If there were an infinity of constantly changing experiences it might not be boring but it would very well be chaotic and certainly beyond what currently marks human consciousness. Human consciousness would be altered from its current nature in order for the experience the infinity of constantly changing experiences to be encountered in a state that would neither be perceived as boring or chaotic or in some way other than pleasurable.

Such a consciousness would not be that of the human who had lived in the body for a finite time and had its identity and awareness formed in that state. It would not be the survival of the soul of the human being but the continuing existence of

some other transformed entity.

In an infinite amount of time all experiences that were presented in the constantly changing set of experiences could be repeated an infinite number of times, but if they were not, one of the experiences that humans appear to value is repetition and so there would be the denial of that in the infinity of constantly changing experiences.

If repetition were allowed then you would not have the infinity of constantly changing experiences and there would need to be some way of providing for the repetition of experiences only to the point where boredom was approaching. This might be provided for by some all powerful being sensing the approach of the boredom threshold for each consciousness. But it would present to the conscious being (soul) the infinity of near constantly changing experiences with cycles of repetition just short of the point of boredom in an ever increasing infinity of experiences that would again transform finite human consciousness into some other form of being.

If infinite survival or eternal life is to

be desired it must be seen or thought about as involving joy or bliss or eternal happiness. If a human is to have eternal happiness that part of human nature that is human awareness or consciousness would need to be radically transformed so as to avoid the eternal torment of eternal boredom. Such a transformation of consciousness in the afterlife would change consciousness into one that is not human (not finite and not of the physical realm) and is not the consciousness of the person who lived life in the body as a human being.

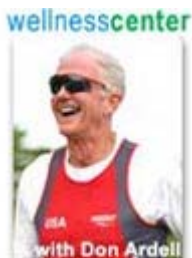
Then: If this transformation takes place there can not be a finite human body associated with that consciousness.

If this transformation takes place there can not be a consciousness that is identifiable as a human consciousness because such a state is finite and formed by awareness of finitude.

(Dr. Phil Pecorino is Professor, Philosophy, Social Sciences Department, Queensborough Community College, CUNY; Adjunct Associate Professor, Philosophy Department, Suffolk County Community College, SUNY. Visit his website @ <http://www2.sunysuffolk.edu/pecorip/SCCCWEB/>)

Where Are the Intelligent Designers When You Need Them?

By Dr. Don Ardell



"Man has been here 32,000 years. That it took a hundred million years to prepare the world for him is proof that that is what it was done for. I suppose it is. I dunno. If the Eiffel

tower were now representing the world's age, the skin of paint on the pinnacle-knob at its summit would represent man's share of that age; & anybody would perceive that that skin was what the tower was built for. I reckon they would. I dunno." ~ Mark Twain, *Was the World Made for Man*

An assessment of data from the Nurses' Health Study revealed that even modest weight gains double the risk of heartburn and acid reflux for women. Once the findings appeared in the *New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM)* on May 25, 2006, extensive articles on the significance of the report appeared in the media, including a feature story in the *Wall Street Journal* ("Modest Weight Gain May Cause Frequent Heartburn in Women," May 31, 2006, p. D8). In addition to the negative consequences of added weight gain and heartburn, the positive news was that overweight women who reduce weight have fewer such problems. Most women who lost twenty or so pounds were also able to eliminate the costs (and risks) of medications for heartburn and acid reflux.

The work was done at Boston University Medical Center and was based on data reported by 10,545 nurses. Plans are being made to determine if similar findings can

be expected in male populations.

The findings were not influenced by other obvious variables, such as smoking, drinking, diet and diabetes.

In my opinion, one of many reasons for scoffing at the notion of "intelligent design" (creationism, in other words) is that behaviors that sicken and kill take far too long to manifest themselves as assaults against nature ruinous to health. If there were a *Great Wizard in the Sky* who created everything, including us, surely he/she/it would have done a better job of it. The perturbations and horrors of life on earth, from mass extinctions to George W. Bush, make such a concept preposterous and offensive to reason.

However, my colleague Dr. Wendy Shore noted that *"a true believer might counter by suggesting that it WAS an intelligent designer who made us so resilient to wretched self-abuse. Still, I agree with you -- no 'design' here or, at best, shoddy design by a mediocre deity-type who failed to safeguard one of many species against obesity and other slow-acting bad consequences of poor choices over time."*

On a very small scale, such as the situation described in the study that links weight gain to heartburn in women, the absence of a bloody designer is painfully obvious. A designer with any sense at all would have made self-destructive situations much more obvious than is the case with contemporary humans shaped instead by evolution and dumb luck, good or bad depending on your outlook. A truly sensible designer would have made a dramatic connection between dysfunctional lifestyles and mortal consequences.

Here are some examples of how things would be with a designer involved who possessed good sense:

Neglect daily exercise of a vigorous and sustained nature to the point of gaining unnecessary weight? Heartburn kicks in and DOES NOT LET UP until the proper fitness level is regained.

Smoke a few cigarettes? Pimples appear on the nose and even in bodily areas "where the sun don't shine." Persistence in smoking leads to escalating pestilence and grotesqueries. Result -- only totally crazy people continue to smoke. Bye bye, tobacco companies.

You get the idea. The human body has evolved to the point wherein it is far too resilient to self-abuses. We need a different kind of feedback system than any "designer," however intelligent, would likely imagine billions of years ago. As Sagan and others suggest, if all 4.6 billion years could be condensed to 24 hours, a highlight film narrator would not mention heartburn or cigarettes -- or humans, for that matter. I like to recall such facts as how, minutes after Earth condensed, it melted and reformed. Then a Mars-sized planet crashed into it, and a good chunk of Earth became our moon. Not so long after that, things went from bad to worse with the origin of life and, now, 23 hours and 59.99 seconds or so later, we're talking about overweight women, heartburn and acid reflux. Yet, the good news is we're also introducing wellness into the mix. What else can one do but give a whistle and look on the bright side of life?

(For more by Dr. Ardell go to www.seekwellness.com/wellness)

Darwin Day @Stony Brook University
Thursday, February 15, 2007, all day:
Darwin Day Information Table
Thursday, February 15, 2007, 7:30 p.m.
Darwin Day Lecture
Friday, February 16, 2007, 7:00 p.m. Darwin Day Panel Discussion

(Slander from page 6)
 large cities.

Brooks' C-Span appearance was illuminating in that he discounted a recent survey which, as he falsely stated, indicated that secularists have a "slightly lower" divorce rate than religious conservatives. The survey, conducted by a Baptist group, actually showed Baptists to have the highest divorce rate and atheists and agnostics to have the lowest divorce rate in the USA. According to Brooks, this is meaningless because secularists are far more likely to "co-habit" than religious people. But he failed to indicate how he

confirmed this or whether he verified how long co-habiting secularists stayed together. He also failed to explain how this would explain why secularists who *did* marry (and as far as I know the majority do) were less likely to divorce than religious couples. He concluded his talk to the fawning right wing audience by noting that "notwithstanding all this, the divorce rate among Christians is much too high". Why would he care? His research was about charitable donations.

The Heritage Foundation host thanked Brooks and noted that it was clear that the disparity in charitable giving, as calcu-

lated by Arthur Brooks, was all about "values". Or as reviewer Vigilante crowed in the N.Y. Post "it is those who turn themselves over to God in prayer who also do His will in their lives."

I guess that explains the higher crime rates, the higher rate of out of wedlock births, the higher divorce rates, and lower levels of welfare payments, Medicaid benefits and support for education in the religious conservative "Red States" vs. the more secular "Blue States".

(Dennis Middlebrooks is from FANNY, Freethinking Activist Non-Believing New Yorkers.)

Standing Up for the Constitution is Not Popular!

By Gerry Dantone

NY Times, 12/18/06: *Before David Paszkiewicz got to teach his accelerated 11th-grade history class about the United States Constitution this fall, he was accused of violating it.*

Shortly after school began in September, the teacher told his sixth-period students at Kearny High School that evolution and the Big Bang were not scientific, that dinosaurs were aboard Noah's ark, and that only Christians had a place in heaven, according to audio recordings made by a student whose family is now considering a lawsuit claiming Mr. Paszkiewicz broke the church-state boundary.

"If you reject his gift of salvation, then you know where you belong," Mr. Paszkiewicz was recorded saying of Jesus. "He did everything in his power to make sure that you could go to heaven, so much so that he took your sins on his own body, suffered your pains for you, and he's saying, 'Please, accept me, believe.' If you reject that, you belong in hell." (End quote.)

Just to make sure that the message was understood, when the teacher was asked by students whether a popular Muslim girl student was also going to hell, Mr. Paszkiewicz replied in the affirmative.

When Matthew LaClair began this class in September 2006, he could not believe what he was hearing from the teacher, Mr. David Paszkiewicz. Knowing that no one would believe him based on his word alone, Matthew then proceeded to tape the daily class lectures and sure enough, the teacher continued with the preaching.

When the student went to school officials later with a complaint, school officials did not believe the accusations, and predictably, Mr. Paszkiewicz denied that he had ever made the statements. Of course, at that point, Matthew produced CDs with the recorded statements on them.

Since then, the school has not made any announcement about what disciplinary action it would take, or apologize to Matthew for the out of bounds remarks. The teacher, however, has since not repeated these statements in class but no other affect can be detected. The suspicion is that the school is simply waiting for Matthew LaClair to graduate and then revert to past ways.

It is not remarkable that a specific teacher holds these opinions; many Americans do, particularly in the so-called "Bible Belt." What is surprising is the enormous support that the teacher has received from students, townspeople, faculty and the school administration in Kearney, New Jersey, not far from New York City.

Town bulleting boards (www.kearnyontheweb.com) have printed statements by others accusing Matthew of violating the First Amendment and suggesting he be suspended!

Friends have shunned Matthew LaClair; the student body and fellow teachers are apparently mostly on the side of the teacher as is the school administration; and the school has not even bothered to issue a statement condemning subsequent death threats against Matthew LaClair.

The tide began to turn only after the NY Times article and support for Matthew LaClair began to come from other parts of the country.

The Center for Inquiry Community of Long Island contacted Matthew via a friend we had in common: **Anne Klaeyesen**, leader of the Ethical Humanist Society of Long Island. It turns out that Matthew is a humanist, and in support, CFI has offered to supply **Ed Tabash** as a guest speaker to Kearny's high school to speak on the topic of church-state separation, or better yet, to debate teacher Paszkiewicz on any number of topics.

Will the school board in Kearny finally get behind this courageous student or will it continue to enable the teacher? We'll keep an eye on the situation and we'll certainly hope that Ed Tabash has the opportunity to set the record straight by talking directly with the students.

QUICKIES!

Item: In an interview with New Yorker editor, Sen. Barack Obama addressed the topic of religion saying, *"It's not 'faith' if you are absolutely certain,"* and noted that he didn't believe his lack of "faith" would hurt him a national election. He added, *"Evolution is more grounded in my experience than angels."*

Comment: It's sad but his (or anyone else's) even tepid support for a more scientific approach to reality may cost votes at the ballot box. For the record, Obama's Muslim father converted to atheism.

Susan Jacoby Joins Washington Post Column "On Faith"

CFI's Susan Jacoby has been asked to join the new online panel produced by Newsweek and [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com), **On Faith**. Discussions are moderated by Newsweek managing editor Jon Meachum and Washington Post writer Sally Quinn. Other panelists include Madeleine Albright, Martin Marty, George Weigel, Elie Wiesel, and Desmond Tutu. **Visit Susan's "On Faith" blog @ http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/susan_jacoby/ to view an archive of her discussions.**

"On Faith" panelist Susan Jacoby is the author of *Freethinkers: History of American Secularism*, (2004) which was named a notable non-fiction book by The Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times.

CAMP INQUIRY!

Camp Inquiry is a summer program for young people ages seven to sixteen years old, with special junior counselor programs for young adults. There are also opportunities for college students, guests and adult counselors.

The Center for Inquiry and its affiliates, the Council for Secular Humanism and the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, are the sponsors of Camp Inquiry. The dates for 2007 are July 15th to July 21st. The location we have chosen to host our summer camp is located in Holland, New York and is called Camp Seven Hills. The cost is \$500 and includes everything. For all the information, go to <http://www.campinquiry.org> or call (716) 636-4869.

Be Sure to Watch:

"The Humanist Perspective" hosted by **Joe Beck, David Koepsell, DJ Grothe** and others, on Cablevision Public Access can be seen:

Woodbury: Fridays @ 9:30PM on Channel 115

Hauppauge/Brookhaven: Fridays @ 7PM, Channel 20

CFI-LI ON CABLE!

"What is Secular Humanism?" This is a self-produced CFI-LI one-hour show and will be shown:

Woodbury: Sundays @ 8PM on Channel 115

Hauppauge/Brookhaven: Thursdays @ 7PM, Channel 20

THURSDAY, February 1, 7:00 p.m.**CFI-LI Philosophical Discussion**

The Philosophy Group led by **Dr. Phil Pecorino** will be meeting on the first Thursday of the month at the Plainview-Old Bethpage Public Library, 999 Old Country Rd., Plainview, Nassau County, NY, **in the auditorium this month only**. For info on the topics, email Dr. Pecorino @ PPecorino@qcc.cuny.edu. **FREE and open to the public!**

TUESDAY, February 6, 7:00 p.m.**CFI-LI Book Discussion Group**

The Book Discussion Group will usually be the **first Tuesday** of the month; this month is the book, "*Evolution vs. Creationism: An Introduction*," by **Eugenie Scott**. *Confirmed* to be held at **Ayhan's Shish-Kebab Restaurant, 379 South Oyster Bay Rd., Plainview, Nassau County, NY**, at the corner of Woodbury Rd. If you want to have dinner at Ayhan's, arrive before 5:45PM. Contact Bob @ Bbrains@optonline.net for info. **Still FREE and open to the public!**

TUESDAY, February 13, 7:30 p.m.**CFI-LI Patchogue General Discussion**

Usually the second Tuesday of the month, topic TBD, contact Warren Rothstein 631-869-5140 warrenrothstein@optonline.net to reserve a place (limited seating) and for directions. **For CFI Friends only!**

Darwin Day Events!**THURSDAY, February 15, all day!****Darwin Day Information Table**

Students will be staffing an information table in the [Student Activities Center lobby](#) all day.

Thursday, February 15, 7:30 p.m.**Darwin Day Lecture**

Special Darwin Day Provost Lecture: **Sean Carroll**, the Howard Hughes Professor at the University of Wisconsin, speaking on the topic, "*The Making of the Fittest*" - [LECTURE AT STUDENT ACTIVITIES CENTER AUDITORIUM, Stony Brook University, Nicolls Road, Stony Brook, NY](#). **Get there early - every seat will be filled!** After the lecture, Sean will be signing his [book](#). **Still FREE and open to the public!**

Friday, February 16, 7:00 p.m.**Darwin Day Panel Discussion: "Faith****& Science: Is there an interface?"**

Special Panel: **Katy Hinman**, Director, Georgia Light and Power; **Rev. Richard Edwards**, pastor, Stony Brook Community Church; **Rev. Catherine Schuyler**, SBU pastor; **Rabbi Joseph Topek**, Director, Hillel Foundation for Jewish Life and Director of the Interfaith Center; **Jeffrey Levinton**, SBU Distinguished Professor of Ecology and Evolution; **Robert Crease**, Professor and Chair of the Philosophy Dept. and [Director of SBU-Templeton Trust Institute](#). At the [Earth and Space Sciences Lecture Theater 001](#). **Still FREE and open to the public!**


TUESDAY, March 6, 7:00 p.m.**CFI-LI Book Discussion Group**

The Book Discussion Group will usually be the **first Tuesday** of the month. *Confirmed* to be held at **the Jericho Library, One Merry Lane, Jericho, Nassau County, NY**. Contact Bob @ Bbrains@optonline.net for info. **Still FREE and open to the public!**

TUESDAY, March 13, 7:30 p.m.**CFI-LI Patchogue General Discussion**

Usually the second Tuesday of the month, topic TBD, contact Warren Rothstein 631-869-5140 warrenrothstein@optonline.net to reserve a place (limited seating) and for directions. **For CFI Friends only!**

FRIDAY, March 16, 7:00 p.m.**CFI-LI monthly forum**

 **Nica Lalli**, author of the new Prometheus book, "*Nothing: Something to Believe In*," will speak at the Plainview-Old Bethpage Public Library, 999 Old Country Road, Plainview, Nassau County, NY. For more info contact Gerry @ LISecHum@aol.com. **FREE and open to the public!**

TUESDAY, April 3, 7:00 p.m.**CFI-LI Book Discussion Group**

The Book Discussion Group will usually be the **first Tuesday** of the month. *Confirmed* to be held at **the Jericho Library, One Merry Lane, Jericho, Nassau County, NY**. Contact Bob @ Bbrains@optonline.net for info. **Still FREE and open to the public!**


THURSDAY, April 5, 7:00 p.m.**CFI-LI Philosophical Discussion**

The Philosophy Group led by **Dr. Phil Pecorino** will be meeting on the first Thursday of the month at the Plainview-Old Bethpage Public Library, 999 Old Country Rd., Plainview, Nassau County, NY. For info on the topics, email Dr. Pecorino @ PPecorino@qcc.cuny.edu. **FREE and open to the public!**

TUESDAY, April 10, 7:30 p.m.**CFI-LI Patchogue General Discussion**

Usually the second Tuesday of the month, topic TBD, contact Warren Rothstein 631-869-5140 warrenrothstein@optonline.net to reserve a place (limited seating) and for directions. **For CFI Friends only!**

FRIDAY, April 20, 7:00 p.m.**CFI-LI monthly forum**

 **Dr. Massimo Pigliucci**, author and popularizer of science will speak! His latest book is "*Making Sense of Evolution*." The title of his talk is, "*The Demarcation Problem: What Science is (and is not)*". For more about Dr. Pigliucci, go to www.rationallyspeaking.org. At the Plainview-Old Bethpage Public Library, 999 Old Country Road, Plainview, Nassau County, NY. For more info contact Gerry @ LISecHum@aol.com. **FREE and open to the public!**

TUESDAY, May 1, 7:00 p.m.**CFI-LI Book Discussion Group**

The Book Discussion Group will usually be the **first Tuesday** of the month. *Tentatively* scheduled to be held at **the Jericho Library, One Merry Lane, Jericho, Nassau County, NY**. Contact Bob @ Bbrains@optonline.net for info. **Still FREE and open to the public!**

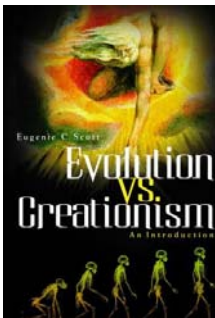
National Day of Reason Event!**THURSDAY, May 3, 7:00 p.m.****CFI-LI Philosophical Discussion**

The Philosophy Group led by **Dr. Phil Pecorino** will be meeting on the first Thursday of the month at the Plainview-Old Bethpage Public Library, 999 Old Country Rd., Plainview, Nassau County, NY. In honor of the **National Day of Reason**, Dr. Pecorino will discuss the work of **Dr. Susan Haack**, an expert on logic, coherence and reason. For info email Dr. Pecorino @ PPecorino@qcc.cuny.edu. **FREE!**

Book Discussion Club!

If you are interested email Bob at Bbrains@optonline.net.

TUESDAY, February 6, 7:00 p.m.



"*Evolution vs. Creationism: An Introduction*," by **Eugenie Scott**. *Confirmed* to be held at **Ayhan's Shish-Kebab Restaurant, 379 South Oyster Bay Rd., Plainview, Nassau County, NY**, at the corner of Woodbury Rd. If you want to have dinner at Ayhan's, arrive before 5:45PM. Contact Bob @ Bbrains@optonline.net for info. **Still FREE and open to the public!**

TUESDAY, March 6, 7:00 p.m.

The Book Discussion Group will usually be the **first Tuesday** of the month. *Confirmed* to be held at the **Jericho Library, One Merry Lane, Jericho, Nassau County, NY**. Contact Bob @ Bbrains@optonline.net for info. **FREE!**

POINT OF INQUIRY

Point of Inquiry is the Center for Inquiry's radio show and podcast, drawing on CFI's relationship with the leading minds of the day including Nobel Prize-winning scientists, public intellectuals, social critics and thinkers, and renowned entertainers. Each episode combines incisive interviews, features and commentary focusing on CFI's issues: religion, human values and the borderlands of science. To hear Point of Inquiry, go to **www.PointOfInquiry.org**.

Secular Organization for Sobriety!

SOS is a support organization dedicated to recovery from addiction without reference to a Higher Power. Open to all those who need sobriety in their life.

For more information, contact Eric Chinchon @ 716 636 7571 ext. 226 or email @ echinchon@centerforinquiry.net

SOS on TUESDAYS

7:15 p.m.

Smithtown Group: The Pederson-Krag Center, 11 Hauppauge Rd. (Route 111), Smithtown, NY (Suffolk County). Contact: Mark, 631 395 8040.

SOS on THURSDAYS

7:30 p.m.


Deer Park Group: 280 Suburban Avenue, #F, Deer Park, NY (Suffolk County). Contact: Drew, 631-242-2498.

New Online Forums!

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

Dr. Pigliucci's website: <http://www.rationallyspeaking.org/>
Gerry Dantone's blog: <http://journals.aol.com/lisechum/GerryDantoneblogspot/>
Dr. Pecorino's website: www2.sunysuffolk.edu/pecorip/SCCCWEB
Dr. Don Ardell's website: <http://www.seekwellness.com/wellness>

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 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.

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