



CENTER FOR INQUIRY *Long Island* INQUIRER

Reason, Science, and Freedom of Inquiry

Center for Inquiry – Long Island Community
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Annual Fundraising Winter Brunch!

Sunday, January 28, 2007, 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

The popular CFI Community of Long Island annual fundraising brunch (one week before the Super Bowl) will be hosted by CFI Community of LI coordinator



Gerry Dantone and will feature a vast spread of bagels, coffees, teas, pastries, eggs and other brunching favorites! Meet your fellow Long Island and Metro area freethinkers and enjoy the great food and company! \$15/

person, children 12 and under free, R.S.V.P to Gerry Dantone, PO Box 119, Greenlawn, NY 11740. You will be receiving a mailing in January for this event! **Payments in advance please, for CFI Friends only!**

CFI Community of LI Philosophical Discussion

Thursday, January 4, 2007 at 7 pm

With Dr. Philip A. Pecorino

TOPIC: *“Religion, Theism and Reason; Is belief in God rational?”*

The evidentialist objector says "No" due to the lack of evidence. Theists who say "Yes" fall into two main categories: those who claim that there is sufficient evidence and those who claim that evidence is not necessary.

Theistic evidentialists contend that there is enough evidence to ground rational belief in God, while Reformed epistemologists contend that evidence is not necessary.

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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.

How Would You Give Away YOUR Money To Advance A Cause?

By Dr. Don Ardell



Where would you invest, let's say, a million dollars in a good cause? Granted a mil is not what it used to be, but assume for this process that it could start or boost worthy projects. Kindly accept a few guidelines. Imagine you wanted to **advance wellness, make your country a better place, improve the political process, protect**

the constitution and promote critical thinking. Given these objectives, where would you direct your million?

I'm inviting my website (www.SeekWellness.com/wellness) visitors and readers of the **ARDELL WELLNESS REPORT** to have a go at this exercise. I hope you will send something my way.

I know what I'd do if I were in this enviable situation. In fact, that's why I created this exercise - to segue into a discussion of how, if I were quite affluent, I would attempt to **advance wellness, make the country a better place, improve the political process, protect the constitution and promote critical thinking.** But, I'd also like to know how other wellness-oriented folks would distribute their spare million, if they had such largesse to pass along.

I do hope this motivates you to think about your passions and causes, and what you would fund, if given such an opportunity. If so, please share your commitments with the rest of us.

Here's my plan.

Basically, I'd put my money into promoting reason and science. I'd create an organization that would encourage critical thinking, especially as applied to politics. Here's how.

* **Set up an office** in the nation's capital to organize efforts to reach out to legislators, provide expert testimony before Congress, speak on issues when they are in the public eye, and submit amicus curiae briefs in science and religion cases before the Supreme Court.

* **Promote free inquiry** into all areas of learning, contrary to the current system of censoring potentially life-improving scientific inquiry based on religious dogma.

* **Help to enact public policies based on reason and science** and promote changes for better separation of church and state.

* **Provide a persuasive, informed, scientific and rational perspective** to counter the influence of religious doctrines on law and public policy. Offer decision-makers in Washington and elsewhere assistance in assessing supernatural, paranormal and occult beliefs.

* **Create a response team** of prominent scientists, noted public intellectuals, Nobel laureates and others to testify before policy makers. Help legislators put empirical scientific evidence first when crafting legislation.

(Money on page 3)



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

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Become a Friend of CFI-LI

Join CFI in challenging unreason and promoting the scientific outlook. Become a Friend of the Center today. Levels are available to suit every family and budget (please note new pricing):

- \$20 Student/low-income
- \$60 Individual
- \$80 Family
- \$125 Contributing
- \$250 Supporting
- \$500 Patron
- \$1,000 Benefactor

Friends of CFI-LI gain use of the CFI-LI Freethought library (contact librarian Paul Lozowsky, 516 799 5612; for a catalogue and requests, or if you want to register a book for others to borrow); invitations and discounts to local non-public functions, dinners, and perhaps movies and plays as well! All Friends of the Center receive:

- A colorful CFI vinyl decal
 - A handsome enamel CFI lapel pin (at contributing level or higher)
 - 10% off CSICOP and Council for Secular Humanism events
 - 15% off Prometheus book titles
- Send a check with your name, address and phone number to CFI-LI, PO Box 119, Greenlawn, NY 11740, or call 516 640 5491 with your Visa, Mastercard or Amex card ready.

WBAI 99.5 FM Radio
EQUAL TIME FOR FREE-THOUGHT!

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



12 7 06 I am happy to see that some nonbelievers are defending Dennett, Dawkins, and other advocates of "The



New Atheism" (Massimo Pigliucci, Vol. 9, issue 12). On the other hand, it is sad to see that some of the most outspoken critics of these leading thinkers are their fellow nonbelievers.

Rather than being happy that unbelief and naturalism are finally getting major attention in the media, many nonbelievers are unhappy about it.

However, this phenomenon cannot be understood in its entirety without recognizing that fear is also a motivating factor behind the criticism. To put it bluntly, some of the nonbelievers that are attacking these intellectuals do so because they are terrified of upsetting the religious majority. That is to say, many of them are so cowardly as to want to remain in the closet, or to basically suck up to theists. Others have bought into the millennia-old lie that it is in bad taste to criticize religion per se, and that theism is automatically deserving of everyone's respect.

I for one find it refreshing that a handful of courageous thinkers are giving naturalism and unbelief the kind of hearing that the critics would never

be able to give. Stop blasting them, indeed. While it is true that unbelief in and of itself will invariably alienate many believers, Dennett, Dawkins, et al., paradoxically, are gaining the attention and support of millions of other people. Does that not count for something?

Those that want nothing but polite dialogue with theists are free to pursue it on their own terms and in their own way. They are even free to repudiate Dennett and Dawkins to the delight of their religious friends. Others are free to cower in their closets. However, I hope The New Atheism is here to stay. To Dennett and Dawkins, I say keep on keepin' on. You have the support of millions, and for many good reasons. Sincerely, Norm R. Allen Jr. Associate Editor, FREE INQUIRY via Internet.

Response: Massimo's article reflected what many must have been thinking; why are people, and in particular fellow non-theists, condemning Dawkins and Dennett? Does every utterance have to be in perfect accordance with one's own view to be useful or edifying? Worse, many mischaracterize what these gentlemen are actually saying. In a world where belief in the supernatural is undoubtedly the underlying cause of the most miserable and unsolvable problems harming billions, it is long past time to "make nice." G.D.

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essary to ground rational belief in God (but that belief in God is grounded in various characteristic religious experiences).

Philosophical fideists deny that belief in God belongs in the realm of the rational. And, of course, all of these theistic claims are widely and enthusiastically disputed by philosophical non-theists.

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

- Religious Epistemology at <http://www.iep.utm.edu/r/relig-ep.htm#H1>
- Reformed Epistemology at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reformed_epistemology
- The Epistemology of Religion at [http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/religion-](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/religion-epistemology/)

[epistemology/](#)

A Chapter (8) in my textbook for Philosophy of Religion - http://www.qcc.cuny.edu/SocialSciences/ppecorino/PHIL_of_RELIGION_TEXT/CHAPTER_8_LANGUAGE/CONTENTS.htm

CFI Community of LI Patchogue
General Discussion Group
TUESDAY, January 9, 2007,
7:30p.m.

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.

CFI Friends only!

THE UNDESIRABILITY OF IMMORTALITY—Part I

By Dr. Philip A. Pecorino

When I think that so much of what people want to believe to be true about the tales spun by the religious traditions may be motivated by the desire to attain a life everlasting in some heavenly paradise I can not help but wonder about the lack of evidence not only for that belief in some form of continuation of one's own consciousness and sense of self for time without end but also the absence of any sign that people very seriously consider what an infinite existence might be like. The idea of a soul that survives the death of a body and goes on in some way to live forever is one that ought to be challenged directly as being an undesirable state of affairs for conscious human beings: a horror and not a paradise.

Some would argue that a good part of what makes human life valuable, if not the whole of it, are those experiences humans have while being alive. The fear of death would be the fear of loss of those experiences. In good part, if not the whole, the experiences most valued are experiences involving others as well as the self. Ideas about an afterlife may be generated by a desire to continue those experiences. However, when serious thought is given to the idea of having experiences an infinite number of times in an immortal mode of existence, some, if not all, of the value of those experiences is diminished, if not

removed entirely.

The problem for any human living on forever would be in the boredom connected with having every and any experience repeated over and over again, in an unending repetition through infinity that it not only removes the value of the experiences but also significantly alters the nature of human life into an unrecognizable form wherein each human being would no longer be capable of sustaining those traits most associated with and constitutive of their character as a unique human being. In imagination and in fact, human life would need to be so altered so as to make infinite existence other than horrific that it would no longer be "human" lacking in fundamental characteristics of human nature. Human life and character are linked to its finite duration.

It is undoubtedly comforting for some humans to think that they have souls that will survive the death of their bodies and that they would live on forever. Many humans spend some time imagining what that life would be like and project a continuation and a heightening of experiences that they have had as a human being in a human body on planet Earth. Some humans can go on for a few minutes imagining and fantasizing about life in the afterworld or life in heaven and eternal happiness. Again for a few minutes there can be some enjoyment in imaging very pleasant experiences. Some can visualize a life in the clouds, the heavenly realm, with won-

ders and pleasures such as a human mind can conjure. Some religious traditions even speak or hint of the pleasures of heaven and always in human terms and based on experiences in the body and experiences of the physical world and through the body. Some may go so far as to think of specific pleasures of the body and food and drink and even sex, even with 72 virgins! Such imaginings are usually based on the experiences of physically embodied beings and so they are projections of such experiences of a pleasurable or joyful nature. But the concept of the afterlife of the soul is one of an existence of infinite duration. The afterlife, the heavenly realm, or paradise is forever which means for all eternity which means for all time to come and, most importantly, time without end. Here we have the idea of infinity and the facts appear to be that few humans can fathom the idea of infinity. In an infinite amount of time every experience of any kind that any human being or soul could have will be had an infinite number of times. Infinity consists of an infinite amount of infinities. There are an infinite number of whole numbers: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 etc. and there are an infinite number of fractions between each pair of whole numbers; e.g., between 1 and 2 there are $1\frac{1}{2}$, $1\frac{1}{4}$, $1\frac{1}{8}$, etc...

To exist forever or for eternity is to continue to exist through an infinite duration, without end. That is some thing that may

(Immortality on page 4)

(Money from page 1)

That's it - that's where I would want my million to go. Not everyone will be happy about this, but it's my money! I can direct it as I like. So can you, with your million dollars, in this exercise. I want my donations used to remove roadblocks to stem cell research and contraception education, as well to fund efforts to prevent teaching Intelligent Design in public-school science classes.

The good news is that the fantasy I harbor on which I would invest that million dollars I don't have is going to come to pass anyway!

That's right. All this is going to happen without my million (at least in the near-term barring the arrival of large amounts of cash in unmarked bills from anonymous sources), thanks to the creation of the **Center for Inquiry-Transnational** in Washington. The

Center's Office of Public Policy is considered "*a step toward a better, and better-informed, future for all Americans*." I plan to donate a substantial sum less than one million dollars to this new Center for Inquiry, and more later as my subscriptions increase by a few hundred fold.

The Center's specific goals are:

- * Identify sympathetic legislators and forge relationships with them.
- * Provide experts to give testimony in Congress.
- * Work on language in related upcoming bills before legislators.
- * Hold nationally televised press conferences on breaking issues.
- * Submit amicus curiae briefs in science and religion cases before the Supreme Court.

You can learn more about this initiative in a Washington Post article by

Marc Kaufman entitled, "[Think Tank Will Promote Thinking: Advocates Want Science, Not Faith, at Core of Public Policy](#)," November 15, 2006; Page A19. (Ed's. note: Or go to our website and hit the CFI Public Policy button!)

Enough about **my** fantasy of a one million dollar start-up donation; tell us about **yours** - even if your program has not come about as yet, let me/us know about it, please.

All the best in realizing your hopes for advancing wellness to make your country a better, improve the political process and protect the constitution - even if promoting critical thinking in the secular manner to my liking is not at all what you have in mind.

Be well and always look on the bright side of life.

Pinochet, Holocaust Deniers, and the Lessons of History



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

Former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet is dead, though a god could have done us the favor of calling him a few decades earlier, thus perhaps sparing the Chileans a brutal dictatorship that has been responsible for the deaths of thousands. During the same week, Iranian president Ahmadinejad hosted a “scholarly” conference where participants raised doubts about the Holocaust, denying that Nazi Germany killed six million Jews, or at the very least arguing that the figures have been greatly exaggerated in order to trick worldwide opinion into allowing an independent state of Israel

(as if people's national aspirations need a carnage to be taken seriously).

What did these two events have in common? At first glance, not much. But in fact they told us something interesting about the roots of the human tragedy. It was seriously disturbing, for example, to see images of “supporters” of Pinochet gathered outside the hospital where he died. Supporters of a brutal murderer? Yup, and they are (historically) not alone: there are people who would like to see Saddam Hussein back in power, skinheads who long for the good 'ol days of Hitler, plenty of Russians who think Stalin was not so bad after all, Italians who voted for Mussolini's granddaughter just in the same way in which their grandfathers marched under Benito's banner, and Serbs who think Slo-

bodan Milešević was the good guy and NATO the evil empire. How is this possible? What sort of ideological blinders do these people sport, and where on earth did they get them?

The answer, I think, is similar to that of the other unnerving question raised by that week's events: how can some people deny one of the best documented (and recent) historical events of all times? I mean, these guys have no trouble believing in unseen gods, or swallowing tall tales of miracles allegedly performed by long-dead prophets, but cannot bring themselves to accept the reality of an event for which there are still eyewitnesses around, that has been documented on film, and of which there are detailed historical records kept

(Pinochet on page 5)

(Immortality from page 3)

be conceivable but it is unimaginable. Most people can not get beyond a few visualizations of a few days with some really enjoyable experiences. Talk of the afterlife of Heaven or Paradise by believers and proselytizers is of wonderful earthlike experiences. It is not inclusive of the infinite repetition. In INFINITY there can be an infinite repetition of all possible imaginable experiences an infinite number of times and then varied in their ordering an infinite number of times and each of those variations experienced an infinite number of times and then one has not even begun to experience infinity!!!!

To exist with “eternal life” or to go on “forever” are two phrases that are quite easy to speak about and to write, but difficult to actually think about seriously let alone carefully and critically. Perhaps the reluctance of most humans to think seriously about infinite existence is precisely because if they do think about it very carefully and very seriously then the idea of eternal life becomes drained of the value it once offered to humans who would think about eternal life quite simply and who think about it as a much desired alternative to death and the end of all consciousness.

However, the hope for salvation and eternal life becomes one that is banished by the clear light of reasoning when reasoning reveals an eternal life to be one of both infinite possibility and infinite actualities so that the thought of living on forever offers not the hope of eternal bliss

but of infinite eternal boredom. No wonder then that the Buddhist idea of Nirvana is linked with the total extinction of the soul, Buddhists consider their salvation as the complete end of consciousness. Anything short of that extinction is marked by suffering and in the case of eternity it would be the suffering of eternal boredom and meaninglessness. At least one person has responded to the prospect of eternal boredom and meaninglessness with the humorous response: “Thank God for the Buddhists”.

Thinking about eternity is a challenge for humans formed of finite awareness and experiences. A life of any sort that would have an infinite duration may be unimaginable in two senses.

1. It is not possible in a finite time or in a few seconds or minutes or hours to form images or to entertain the possibility of continuing existence for an infinite duration.

2. Attempts to imagine about continuing existence for an infinite duration will so quickly present the prospect of an existence drained of interest and value and meaning that humans recoil from doing it and so it is “not imaginable”. Humans recoil from such a prospect of seriously imagining eternity because they fear loss of the hope for an eternity of joy.

Claiming that one has imagined something may not be the same thing as actually imagining it, particularly when what is to be imagined is unimaginable. Unimaginable things are either logical contradictions (square circles) or complexities (milagon) or extremely repugnant

(the details of heinous acts) or threatening to the would-be imaginer (loss of that which provides comfort or hope).

If one accepts that the meaning and value of human life are inextricably linked to both its finite duration and the human awareness of its finite duration then one might conclude that, rather than being a necessary condition for life to be meaningful, immortality would in fact render life meaningless.

On the one hand there are those who may think that “Only if a man lived forever...could there be any point in living at all.” But, on the other hand, there are those who think that living forever would remove the worth of all human experiences as their infinite repetition would drain value from them.

Those who would object to critiques of immortality for human beings raise the possibility that some altered state of affairs for humans who have reached their eternal mode of existence might hold off the boredom born of the tedium of repetition of all possible experiences in an infinite amount of time. Is it possible that a human might be altered and freed of limitations and contingencies born of mortality without which humans might find everlasting life to be completely fulfilling and meaningful? In reply are the notices that endless life would be a meaningless life and that there can be no reason for living eternally a human life. What could possibly prevent the boredom of infinite existence that deprives it of all meaning and value? *(End of Part 1—to be continued.)*

Ted Haggard

By Gerry Dantone

"At the end of the day, this comes down to bringing Jesus into politics," he says. "Right now, it's not Ted Haggard on trial. It's Jesus. This is about the God he represents. When you make yourself a public figure and you fall, you bring the perception of your God with you." -- David Kuo, author of "Tempting Faith."

Unfortunately, the still religious Mr. Kuo himself does not follow where his own logic should take him.



As has been reported in the last two months, Rev. Ted Haggard was accused by a self-described mail prostitute of having a three year homosexual affair while using illegal drugs, including methamphetamine (a.k.a. "speed"). After initial denials, Haggard released a statement admitting his "sexual immorality."

Oh yes, Rev. Haggard is also a vociferous opponent actively campaigning against homosexuality and gay marriage in Colorado, as well as preaching to his large congregation that faith can answer any problem.

And as if to show that the Haggard scandal is not an aberration, in December 2006, Pastor Paul Barnes, founder of the 2100 member Grace Church in the Denver, Colorado area, who preached that homosexuality is a sin (but unlike Haggard neither he nor his church took a stand on a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage) also has admitted to being gay before an imminent "outing."

In a confessional video shown to the congregation, Barnes said he became a Christian at age 17 and felt it would help him give up homosexuality, but the feelings never went away, he said.

Still, he said he cannot accept that a person is "born that way," adding that he believes sexuality is influenced by childhood experiences.

(Go to <http://www.365gay.com/Newscon06/12/121106pastor.htm>.)

As an interesting aside for skeptics, the Haggard story also showcased a scientific controversy involving a well-known practice.

The accuser "failed" a "lie detection test" and this fact was widely reported in the media. It is not well-known that there is much scientific skepticism regarding "lie detector" tests.

CSICOP, a project of the Center for Inquiry reports:

"The secret of the polygraph-the polygraphers' own shameless deception-is that their machine is no more capable of assessing truth telling than were the priests of ancient Rome standing knee-deep in chicken parts. Nonetheless, the polygrapher tries to persuade the unwitting subject that their measurements indicate when a lie is being told. The subject, nervously strapped in a chair, is often convinced by the aura surrounding this cheap parlor trick, and is then putty in the hands of the polygrapher, who launches into an intrusive, illegal, and wide-ranging inquisition. The subject is told, from time to time, that the machine is indicating "deception" (it isn't, of course), and he is continuously urged to "clarify" his answers, by providing more and more personal information. At some point (it's completely arbitrary and up to the judgment of the polygrapher), the test is stopped and the polygrapher renders a subjective assessment of "deceptive response." Even J. Edgar Hoover knew this was senseless. He banned the polygraph test from within the ranks of the FBI as a waste of time.... The truth is this: The polygraph is a ruse, carefully constructed as a tool of intimidation, and used as an excuse to conduct an illegal inquisition under psychologically and physically unpleasant circumstances. Spies know how to beat it, and no court in the land permits submission of polygraphs, even to exonerate the accused." (Go to <http://www.csicop.org/si/2001-07/polygraph.html>.)

Since the primary allegations ultimately are not being challenged by the accused, it would seem that this test "failure" was not all that newsworthy after all, but that the unreliability of such tests should be newsworthy. Chalk one up for the doubters of "lie detection" tests.

Getting back to the main story, though, it would be fair, then, to conclude that Rev. Haggard has some deep problems. Cheating on a wife while using "speed" is indefensible; and of course, the monstrous hypocrisy that a person in his position must possess only magnifies the situation.

But many will not mention Rev. Haggard's (and Pastor Barnes) biggest problem of all: he, like so many others, lives in a world that denies reality – on a massive basis. Rev. Haggard lives in a complete world of denial.

Is the Bible really inerrant and without contradiction? Is the earth and universe really 6000 years old? Was Jesus really God? Does Accepting Jesus really save? Is homosexuality really immoral? Is Rev. Haggard's moral system really absolute?

The overwhelmingly likely answer to all the above questions is "no" yet Rev. Haggard is (or was) absolutely certain that the answer to all is "yes".

In fact, going through the questions one by one, it is *easy* to find contradictions within the Bible: one cannot for instance reconcile the key chronology of the crucifixion of Jesus nor the text of the sign placed on his cross by the Romans as obvious examples.

Further, there is no scientific evidence that points to a young earth; none whatsoever.

There is also no way to determine the "divinity" of a person, particularly one who is long dead, such as Jesus. Are there any suggestions as to such a methodology?

As far as morality goes, is there really a need for a moral system that does not relate morality to harm or help to others, but instead is based on supposed offenses

(Haggard on page 6)

(Pinochet from page 4)

not by the victims, but by the perpetrators! Evolution deniers are pure dilettantes in comparison with Holocaust deniers.

The commonality between these cases is provided by the frightening effects of ideological blinders on human thinking. While Dawkins, Dennett and Harris

(justly) rail against the damage caused by religions, they are missing the broader and most important point: *unquestioning ideological commitment* is the real enemy, be that in favor of a religion or political position, in reverence of a prophet or a political leader. Ironically, I think our tragic tendency to fall for facile ideological brainwashing may be the result of

the fact that, despite our literature, science, and technology, we are still little more than a species of social chimpanzees – and we instinctively align ourselves with the alpha male, regardless of how much stupidity and suffering may result from it.

Salman Rushdie Defends Freedom to Blasphemy

By Dr. Austin Dacey

In a wide-ranging lecture and discussion presented by the Center for Inquiry-New York on October 11, Salman Rushdie defended an uncompromising right of blasphemy and diagnosed the failure of Western liberals to confront Islamic radicalism. He began by describing his recent efforts to defeat the passage of a law in Britain that would have made it illegal to offend the religious sensibilities of fellow citizens, commenting, *"Islamaphobia a victimless crime. It must be, in any free society, OK to be as open as you want to be about your dislike of a set of ideas. Otherwise it becomes impossible to think. It becomes impossible to have any kind of interchange of thoughts."*

Addressing Western liberals whose ani-

mus towards American foreign policy leads them to seek allies among Islamist movements, Rushdie said, *"Islamic radicalism is not interested in creating a world of greater social justice. It's not interested in liberating women. It's not interested in tolerance for minorities and sexual dissidents. It's not interested in democracy. It's not interested in economic redistribution. It's not interested in any of things that you would call social justice. It's interested in what the Taliban is interested in. It's interested in creating a new, religious, fascist rule over the planet; the new caliphate, the Talibanization of the earth. For the left to refuse to understand the nature of the people that they are refusing to criticize, is a historical mistake as great as those who were the fellow travelers of Stalinist communist in an earlier age."*

Throughout, Rushdie was candid about

his own unbelief, remarking, *"Religion will break your heart."*

The evening with Salman Rushdie was the first of the Center's *Voices of Reason 2006-2007 series*, and its most successful public event to date. Media coverage included *C-SPAN Book TV*, *CNN IBN* (an Indian sister station), *WBAI*, *Democracy Now*, *Air America*, *the New York Observer*, and others.

A written transcript is available at www.cfinc.org. Portions of the event will be available at www.pointofinquiry.org. If you wish to receive an email notice about the *Book TV* broadcast, you may also sign up for CFI-NYC's email bulletin at www.cfinc.org.

Austin Dacey is the director of the Center for Inquiry -- New York City.

The US Enabling Act: Comparisons with Hitler's of the Same Name

By Steven Jonas, MD, MPH

It was an event little noted by persons other than those of us who are devoted to the American Dream of Constitutional Democracy. But it will be long remembered by the whole world, if there is a future history to record it. On Sept. 29, 2006, the Congress of the United States passed what can be termed "The US Enabling Act." It is the equivalent of the Act by the same name passed by the German Reichstag on March 23, 1933. The latter gave the German Chancellor, Adolf Hitler, the power to over-ride the protections for

freedom and liberty written into the German (Weimar) Constitution of the time, if he determined that so doing was necessary to protect the nation from terrorism and "actions endangering the state." It was under that Act, of course, that Hitler established his dictatorship.

As is by now well-known to many readers of this newsletter, the US version gives the President the power to over-ride Articles I, II, V and VI and Amendments I, IV, V, VI and VIII of the US Constitution if he determines that it is necessary to do so to protect the nation from terrorism, if a person "purposefully and materially supported hostilities against the United States." We

do not know at this time whether the long-term outcomes of the events of this week in the US will be in any way similar to those that befell the German nation and the German people, as well as the people of much of Europe, under the Hitlerites. But it will be much easier to fight the Georgites if people will begin to see the similarities between them and the Hitlerites.

A friend said to me recently, "isn't it amazing what is happening here, the drive towards fascism?" ("Fascism," in its simplest terms, can be defined as: "a politico-economic system in which there is: total executive branch control of both the legis-

(Enabling on page 7)

(Haggard from page 5)

taken by an invisible omnipotent and omniscient deity who created everything in the first place, including the human nature that some will claim leads to those very offenses?

And finally, on what basis does Rev. Haggard and all the other absolutists expect others to buy into their moral system and follow their leadership when it is clear that they themselves are clueless?

Rev. Haggard's absolute certainty about everything in life must be called what it is: delusional. Although he called Richard Dawkins "arrogant" and "elitist" in an interview that Dawkins had with Haggard, the plain truth is that there is nothing more arrogant than certainty itself (and being able to identify something as inerrant) or more elitist than believing

that one has been created in the image of a God.

Religious apologists such as David Kuo decry the mixing of religion and politics and of hypocrisy; but they will not deal with other troubling facts: if the literalists and absolutists are wrong in their certainty, then the moderate interpretation is even more suspect. It takeschutzpah to "compromise" or make judgments about the Word of God, does it not?

If the story of Noah's Ark is not "literally" true, then what is it? Answer: a myth.

If the story of the Ten Commandments being "literally" written by God and given to Moses for all to obey is not true, then what is it? Answer: a myth.

Who is David Kuo or anyone else to question or modify the Word of God –

unless it cannot be proven to be the Word of God after all? If that is the case, agnosticism would seem to be the only approach with integrity; if that is the case, then a failure to believe in a God based on lack of *reasonable* evidence (also known as atheism) would subsequently be completely reasonable.

Although not all persons who claim **certainty** about the inerrancy, absolutism and unfailing accuracy of their Biblical belief system turn to illicit sexual affairs and drugs, they are also delusional. The tragedy is the living of their only known and verifiable life in pursuit of a heaven there is no reason to believe follows.

This, of course, will NEVER be reported in the mainstream media, as obvious as it is. And it is the underlying story and lesson of the Rev. Ted Haggard.

Religious Bigotry Will Not Die Easily

By Gerry Dantone

(USA Today) *Conservative columnist Dennis Prager has blasted just elected Minnesota Democrat Keith Ellison's decision to take the oath of office Jan. 4 with his hand on a Quran, the Muslim holy book. "He should not be allowed to do so," Prager wrote, "not because of any American hostility to the Koran (Ed's note: Hah!) but because the act undermines American culture." He said Ellison, a convert from Catholicism, should swear on a Christian Bible -- which "America holds as its holiest book. ... If you are incapable of taking an oath on that book, don't serve in Congress."*

Spokesperson Dave Colling said Ellison's office has received hundreds of "very bigoted and racist" e-mails and phone calls since Prager's column appeared. "The vast majority said, 'You should resign from office if you're not willing to use the book our country was founded on,' " Colling said.

If this were the rantings of a solitary Religious Right nut, this would be no big deal. But it is not.

(Enabling from page 6)

lative and administrative powers of government; no independent judiciary; no Constitution that embodies the Rule of Law standing above the people who run the government; no inherent personal rights or liberties; a single national ideology that first demonizes and then criminalizes all political, religious, and ideological opposition to it; and total corporate determination of economic, fiscal, and regulatory policy." Sort of like the Cheney dream of a "Unitary Executive" in fact.)

I replied that what was amazing to me was not that a group like the Georgites was attempting it. Rather, I told him that I was amazed that there was so little awareness of the parallels between what is going on here now and the Nazi German experience. At least the German people could be excused in part for what happened because at that time there were no historical parallels to look back upon. But *we* do have such parallels. There are differences, of course. Interesting among them are differences in the mode of the taking of total power in the two instances.

Hitler was appointed Chancellor (the

In an informal and unscientific poll taken by America Online, 54% agreed with Mr. Prager; all elected officials should take the oath of office on the Bible, no matter what their faith (or lack of faith) is.

Truly this details the problem that our society is up against: while decrying sectarian division around the world (examples: Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon, Kashmir), many are promoting the same divisiveness here in our own country.

The theocrats do not understand that the problem is theocracy itself – they ignorantly think it's the fact that their specific belief system is not law.

If America stands for anything, it certainly is not the Bible. The Dark Ages, perhaps, stood for the Bible, but the US is notable for its secularist form of government and its prohibition against any religious test for any office in government. We have the First Amendment which guarantees our right to worship any god we choose, or no god at all. Theocrats have the First Commandment which requires worship of one specific god only. I prefer the First Amendment.

Mr. Prager is a composite of the worst attributes of an American: he hates the Constitution as written and he despises all

of those who differ from him. He has no morals, only *supernatural taboos* that cannot be substantiated in any way, yet he is certain in his absolutism and righteous about it as well.

Mr. Ellison and all elected officials logically should swear their oaths of office on a copy of the Constitution; however, since current practice allows for other items, the Koran cannot be specifically banned. May I venture that a part of the so-called "War on Terror" is proving to Muslims that our secularist way of life is good for them as well? This bigotry is certainly no way to promote an acceptance of separation of church-mosque-temple and state, is it? Mr. Prager apparently is on the side of the other religious fundamentalists the US is trying to defeat.

There is no other explanation available for this controversy other than religious bigotry. But then again, this is religion doing what it does best – divide humanity for no other purpose than its own propagation.

(For Mr. Prager's entire column, go to http://www.townhall.com/columnists/DennisPrager/2006/11/28/america_not_keith_ellison_decides_what_book_a_congressman_takes_his_oath_on/.)

equivalent of Prime Minister) by the German President, Field Marshall von Hindenburg, on Jan. 30, 1933. The Enabling Act was passed less than two months later. It has taken the Georgites close to six years to get similar powers. Hitler actually went through the formal process of amending the Weimar Republic's Constitution with a 2/3's vote of the German Parliament, the Reichstag. The vote was fixed a bit, to be sure. Hitler banned the large number of elected Communist Party members completely (and had arrested all he could lay his hands on). Most of the Socialist members were banned or under arrest also. The Nazi members, less than an elected majority, showed up for the vote wearing their SA "Brownshirt" uniforms and the hall was surrounded by SA troopers in uniform. However, Hitler at least went through the motions of amending the Constitution.

In the US, the Republican Congress, with some Democratic allies has amended the US Constitution without bothering to go through the amendment process provided for in that document. Neither force nor the threat of force as applied to the members of Congress was necessary.

Why is Bush so successful, despite the fact that (like Hitler) he has only a minority of the population behind him? First he has had the Congress. He has had it in large part because of the un-Constitutional re-districting for House seats; the grand tilt to the under populated, right-wing states in the Senate caused by the two-seat formula; and the Rovian Grand Theft Election machine (active in Congressional as well as Presidential elections). Second he has his vast Privatized Ministry of Propaganda, such as the Fox "News"Channel and the O'Reilly-Hannity-Limbaugh crews and their clones, what I like to refer to as "O'R'Hannibaugh." As many observers have noted, it's a contemporary Orwellian World.

Despite what did and what did not happen on Nov. 7, the Georgites remain in control of the major governmental levers of power. They may well right now be planning how to keep hold of them after Jan. 20, 2009. In fighting against the Georgite fascist tide, knowing what happened in Nazi Germany surely can be helpful.

QUICKIES!

News item: The Texas GOP has "accused" a candidate for the Appeals Court, E. Ben Franks, of being an atheist. They believe this means he is out of touch with the public and would fail to uphold the laws of Texas.

According to Law.com, "The Republican Party noted in its recent newsletter that Article 16, §1(a) of the Texas Constitution prescribes the oath of office for all elected or appointed officials. The officeholder swears to faithfully execute the duties of the office and, to the best of his or her ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States and of this state **"so help me God."**"

His Republican opponent, Bailey C. Moseley, says he *thinks* (but is obviously not sure) an atheist can take the oath and is bound to support the laws and Constitution of Texas.

"I think it's pertinent," Moseley says of the allegation. "In east Texas, a person's core beliefs are important." Jeff Fisher, the state Republican Party's executive director, says there are other sources of the allegation that Frank is an atheist. Fisher says "some people who know Franks" -- people whom Fisher did not identify -- have told him that Franks professes to be an atheist.

Fisher says the GOP sent the newsletter to people who subscribe to the party's e-mail publications to inform them about Franks.

Comment: Yes, in Texas, unless you believe in talking snakes, and a 6000 year old earth, you're "out of touch." Exactly how commonplace and routine must be anti-atheist bigotry be for a major political party to be so comfortable airing their bias? Answer: Very commonplace and routine.

What were the chances of E. Ben Franks being elected? Answer: Moseley defeated Democrat Ben Franks of Texarkana with a 58 percent margin (92,255-65,944).

(For the whole article by Mary Alice Robins go to: <http://www.law.com/servlet/ContentServer?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/Preview&c=LawArticle&cid=1160125527178>)

New item: Ohio executed a religious cult leader in October 2006 for murdering a family of five followers who were taken

one at a time to a barn, bound and shot to death. The youngest was a girl just 7 years old.

Jeffrey Lundgren, 56, died by injection at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility. "I profess my love for God, my family, for my children, for Kathy (his wife). I am because you are," Lundgren said in his final statement.

The evidence against him in the deaths of the Avery family - Dennis, 49, Cheryl, 46, Trina, 15, Rebecca, 13, and 7-year-old Karen - was compelling.

Upset by what he saw as a lack of faith, Lundgren arranged a dinner hosted by cult members. Afterward, he and his followers led the family members one by one - the father first, young Karen last - to their deaths while the others unknowingly cleaned up after dinner.

Lundgren shot each victim two or three times while a running chain saw muffled the sound of the gunfire.

Lundgren argued at his trial in 1990 that he was prophet of God and therefore not deserving of the death penalty.

"It's not a figment of my imagination that I can in fact talk to God, that I can hear his voice," he had told the jurors. "I am a prophet of God. I am even more than a prophet."

Comment: What, exactly, would be the believers argument against Lundgren the "Prophet." That he's not a prophet? And how would one know that if one also believes that prophecy actually has occurred and may occur again?

If one argues that God wouldn't be giving such messages to anyone, then one has admitted that God can be judged by human-based standards of morality. If one argues that humans, however, cannot create moral standards, however, then one must just "accept" what God orders, as Mr. Lundgren did. Who is Mr. Lundgren to question God? How can Mr. Lundgren or others tell whether God really speaks to them or not if we are not able to judge God's morals?

The whole point of revelation is that its "truths" lie beyond reason. To mount a coherent argument against a particular revelation requires rejecting all of revelation itself, doesn't it? What makes one revelation better than another? Could it be its verification by testing its claims scientifically? At that point, it is either testable or useless. If it is testable, it becomes just another scientific question,

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, 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, January 4, 2007, 7:00p.m.**CFI-LI Philosophical Discussion Group**

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. **Topic:** "Religion, Theism and Reason; Is belief in God rational?" For more info on the topics, email Dr. Pecorino @ PPecorino@qcc.cuny.edu. **FREE and open to the public!**

**TUESDAY, January 9, 2007, 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!**

Sunday, Jan. 28, 2007, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.**Winter Brunch**

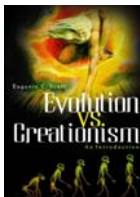
The popular CFI-LI Community annual fundraising brunch will be hosted by CFI-LI Community coordinator Gerry Dantone and will feature a vast spread of bagels, coffees, teas, pastries, eggs and other brunching favorites! Meet your fellow Long Island and Metro area free-thinkers and enjoy the great food and company! **\$15/person, children 12 and under free, R.S.V.P to Gerry Dantone @ LI-SecHum@aol.com! For CFI Friends only!**

**THURSDAY, February 1, 2007, 7:00 p.m.****CFI-LI Philosophical Discussion Group**

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, 2007, 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 5:45 P.M. Contact Bob @ Bbrains@optonline.net for info. **Still FREE and open to the public!**

TUESDAY, February 13, 2007, 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!**

TUESDAY, March 6, 2007, 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, 2007, 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, 2007, 7:00 p.m.**CFI-LI monthly forum**

David Koepsell, Executive Director of the Council for Secular Humanism will speak! For more about the Council, go to www.secularhumanism.org.

At the Plainview-Old Bethpage Public Library, 999 Old Country Road, Plainview, Nassau County, NY. For more info contact Gerry @ LI-SecHum@aol.com. **FREE and open to the public!**

TUESDAY, April 3, 2007, 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!**

THURSDAY, April 5, 2007, 7:00 p.m.**CFI-LI Philosophical Discussion Group**

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, 2007, 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, 2007, 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 @ LI-SecHum@aol.com. **FREE and open to the public!**

TUESDAY, May 1, 2007, 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!**

THURSDAY, May 3, 2007, 7:00 p.m.**National Day of Reason Event!****CFI-LI Philosophical Discussion Group**

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 on the topics, email Dr. Pecorino @ PPecorino@qcc.cuny.edu. **FREE and open to the public!**

**TUESDAY, May 8, 2007, 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!**

May 9th to 19th, 2007**Following in the Footsteps of Darwin
A CFI Trip to the Galapagos Islands!**

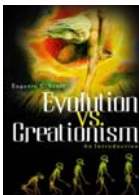
Go to: <http://www.cfitravel.org/galapagos/>
SOLD OUT!

Book Discussion Club!

If you are interested email Bob at Bbrains@optonline.net. All meetings are **7 PM at the Plainview-Old Bethpage Public Library, 999 Old Country Road, Plainview, on Fridays**, unless otherwise noted. **FREE!**

TUESDAY, February 6, 2007, 7:00 p.m.

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, March 6, 2007, 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. Still **FREE and open to the public!**

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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