

Meetings

Roundtable

Dec. 2, 2007
Pellissippi State
Goins Admin Bldg.
10:30 AM

Presenter:
Jeff Kincaid
Topic: What is a Rationalist?

Book Club

Dec. 9, 2007
4:00 PM
Barnes and Nobel

God Is Not Great
by Christopher Hitchens

Lead by Joan Omarzu

Philosophy

Dec. 16, 2007
Pellissippi State
10:30 AM

Presenter: Homer Wilkins

Topic:
“George Lakoff’s Theory of Framing and His Models of the American Family”

George Lakoff, a University of California - Berkeley professor of linguistics, observed in the 1990s that facts don’t win elections. The “frames” put around the facts are what win or lose elections. He then turned his expertise to the analysis of political language and published his theory and observations in a book entitled, “Moral Politics.” This was followed in 2002 by, “Don’t Think of an Elephant.” He cites many examples of how “frames” are used in publications and speeches, especially by right-wing politicians. One of the elements of his theory is that in American society two distinctly different but powerful models of family structure and operation vie for control over many of our social processes (politics, education, religion, business, etc.).

In this program Homer will discuss briefly the theory and show how one of these models of the family is apparent in a college commencement address given by a high official of the George Bush administration. The he will offer a brief version of a (hypothetical) commencement talk based on the other model.

The Failed Earmark

Back in October an earmark was included in an appropriations report in the U.S. Senate. It would have funded curriculum that promoted teaching Creationism in science classrooms. This funding was to go to the Louisiana Family Forum to “develop a plan to promote better science education.”

This Forum’s mission is to “persuasively present Biblical principles in center of influence.” This group proposed among other things to supply an addendum to science textbooks. This addendum was written by a retired electrical engineer, Charles H. Voss who is also vice president of the young-earth Creationists Origins Resource Association. His addendum is available at TextAddOns.com. He has authored a pamphlet showing that God did not use evolution in creating life.

He takes state recommended textbooks and critiques them by page number. Essentially he states that only micro evolution (horizontal evolution) is what occurs not macro evolution (vertical evolution). Therefore, according to Voss, the finches beaks can change by evolution but dinosaurs could never evolve into birds (or any other animal).

He gets into some detailed arguments involving amino acids and sugars and base pairs that purport to disprove evolution and covers about all of the evidence provided in the science textbooks listed. He does a good job of sounding knowledgeable and objective to the non-scientist in his critique of evolution. But after his detailed arguments his conclusions sound very familiar.

“Now that the end of this addendum has been reached several conclusions should be obvious such as:

1. It is very misleading to use the term evolution without specifying whether it is micro or macro evolution being discussed.
2. Adaptation or micro evolution occurs at the species level and is provable using conventional scientific tests and principles. It is a fact.
3. The fact that adaptation of species (micro evolution) is true does not imply or prove that molecules to man evolution (macro evolution) occurs any more than the first cool days of October imply or prove that an ice age is beginning or because a person learns something from watching PBS for an hour imply or prove that watching PBS continuously will produce a genius. The major problems that Darwin recognized with his hypothesis are still true plus new ones as science has advanced. Some of these are:
 - Gaps in the fossil record.
 - Cambrian explosion
 - The fossilization process demands catastrophic happenings more violent than what we see today.
 - Similar genes do not necessarily produce similar structures.
 - How new meaningful information can be added to the DNA by random chance happenings.
 - Optical isomers preclude life evolving.
4. Other explanations for what is observed on earth should be examined.”

Basically the arguments are the same but, and this an important but, they are much more sophisticated and sound scientific. To the non-scientist it would take quite a while to find the errors, assumptions and contradictions in the arguments. This guy is a young-earth creationist but manages to manipulate the statistics and technical language in a manner that looks informed. It appears that Creationists have taken a page from the Star Trek writers. When the writers wrote the scripts and need a convincing sounding bit of techno-babble, they just left it blank and then speciality writers made up cool sounding pseudo-technical talk to insert into the fiction.

In the end, of this saga, a group of thirty-four organizations wrote a letter urging removal of the Creation Science earmark. It was removed seven days later. The organizations ranged from school administrators and teachers to religious, scientific and secular groups.

Winter Solstice Party - Kings' Home

Solstice Party! - Bring a potluck dish and enjoy fellowship and good times as we celebrate the 'return of the sun.'
Friday evening, December 21, 2007, 6:00 - 11:00 p.m.

1109 Venice Road, Knoxville, TN 37923

The notion that faith in Christ is to be rewarded by an eternity of bliss, while a dependence upon reason, observation, and experience merits everlasting pain, is too absurd for refutation, and can be relieved only by that unhappy mixture of insanity and ignorance called 'faith.'

Ingersoll

Book Club Schedule

December: God is Not Great by Hitchens.

January: Stumbling on Happiness
by Daniel Gilbert

February: Economics as Religion
by Robert H. Nelson

March: Atheist Universe: The Thinking Person's Answer to Christian Fundamentalism
by David Mills with a forward by Dorion Sagan

The B I B L E, yes that's the legal text for me.

Earlier in November a Blount county couple used the Bible for their defense in charges brought against them by the State Agriculture Department. It seems that they refused to become certified and inspected for pest and diseases that might be transmitted by nursery stock. They claim to own nothing since they are the "bond servants of Jesus" and to make matters worse the certificate from the agriculture department that they were supposed to sign was numbered "966" and therefore (somehow) equated to the deadly "666." Perhaps some sort of flip-floping dyslexia is involved? But then that wasn't really the issue since they could not sign any agreement with any organization or individual because of their religious beliefs.

They did ask the presiding judge to arrest the Assistant District Attorney and the Circuit Court Judge on various charges, including kidnapping, perjury, stalking, extortion and making false statements and more. The judge declined. The Roseburghs represented themselves (to the relief of many a public defender no doubt).

And who says that we don't need State/church separation?

RET Newsletter submissions

Feel free to submit news of interest. Submissions are welcomed but may be limited by space and topic relevance. The format may vary depending on the amount of information submitted. Short submissions are preferred but longer ones may be accepted if they can be published as a series over two or more issues. Text or Word format are best for submission. Text may also be included in an E-mail. Carl Ledendecker at: (ledendecker@earthlink.net) 2123 Stonybrook Rd., Louisville, TN 37777 982-8687 evenings

The Newsletter can also be found online at our Web site: www.rationalists.org. Scheduling: Philosophy (Michael Lance) lancem@ornl.gov; Round tables (Carl Westman) cawestman@bellsouth.net; Book Club (John McCaffrey) jkmccaffreytn@yahoo.com Newsletter: (Carl Ledendecker) ledendecker@earthlink.net, 982-8687 Material published in The RET Newsletter represents the views of the individual authors. Publication does not constitute an endorsement by the Rationalists of East Tennessee or its members.