

# PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

## Upcoming SHSNY Programs and Events

First Sunday & Last Sunday ZOOM  
Happy Hours of the Month, 5PM  
ZOOM

– See [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com) for details

Sunday Brunch & Conversation  
Sunday, March 19, 2023. Time:  
Noon–2PM, The Globe  
Restaurant, 158 E. 23rd. St., NYC  
Topic: TBD. Led by Dorothy  
Kahn

Non-Fiction Book Club, March 2nd,  
7:00 PM

– See [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com) for details.

Book: *The Nones Where they came from, Who they are, Where they are going*  
by Ryan P. Burge

– See [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com) for details

Fiction Book Club, March 8th,  
7:30 PM

Book: TBA

– See [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com) for details

## SHSNY Doings

We celebrated Darwin Day this month at Tony's diNapoli. Our speaker, Chris Johnson, gave us an A/V presentation showing clips of his great film, **A Better Life**.



This included interviews with Bob Barker, the co-head of FFRF,

Julia Sweeney,  
London philosopher A.C. Grayling,  
Daniel Dennett,

Patricia Churchland, who joyfully celebrates Christmas, and an avid young mountain climber who often experiences awe and wonder at the scenes of great natural beauty, without seeing any need to include the supernatural in it.

They recounted their various paths to secular humanism, and the various ways they find meaning in life. If you didn't get to see Chris at Darwin Day, you can pick up his movie at his website: <https://www.theatheistbook.com>

Our next live event, the Day of Reason, will feature Richard Carrier as speaker. We are holding it on May 7th at Stout NYC, 133 West 33rd Street, NY, NY.

The next **monthly brunch** will come on March 19<sup>th</sup> at The Globe restaurant, 158 East 23<sup>rd</sup> St. near 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave. At the end of the meal, Dorothy Kahn will conduct a discussion on a provoking topic.

The **Happy Hour** get togethers are held on the last Sunday of the month. Emails will be sent out on that Sunday giving the Zoom link, id and password.

The nonfiction bookclub meets next on Thursday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>. The fiction bookclub meets Wednesday, March 8<sup>th</sup>. You will find the Zoom id and password on the SHSNY calendar on the website: [www.shsny.org/calendar-of-events.html](http://www.shsny.org/calendar-of-events.html) and this will be sent out by email.



If you have a comment or material you'd like to appear in the next issue of PIQUE, please email it to [editor@SHSNY.org](mailto:editor@SHSNY.org)

## Upcoming Events

Three times a year we host an event at a Manhattan venue where we bring in a speaker, often giving an A/V presentation and a Q&A session afterward. Two more remain for this year:

**Day of Reason.** Our answer to the national *Day of Prayer* which every president in recent years has signed on to.

**Free Thought Day.** Commemorates *the end to the Salem Witch trials* in 1692. Cotton Mather wrote a letter imploring the court not to allow spectral evidence — testimony about dreams and visions. His son, Increase Mather, then-president of Harvard, denounced the use of spectral evidence: “It were better that ten suspected witches should escape than one innocent person be condemned.” By October of 1692, with 20 people dead and many indicted people yet to be tried, **Governor Phips** released many accused witches and **ordered the court to stop using spectral evidence.**

## A Reply to Alexandra Pelosi

By Anton Spivack

In 2007, as I was making my start as a hardcore atheist, Nancy Pelosi's daughter Alexandra, a documentarian, released the film *Friends of God*, about Evangelical Christians in the USA. What disturbed me the most was not the fanatic devotion, the denial of evolution (with children led into a sing-along about how Behemoth in the Book of Job was actually a dinosaur), how one subject who had initially wanted to be the first woman president ended up marrying and having ten children (with an eleventh on the way), Reverend Jerry Falwell and others having their followers vote against abortion and same-sex marriage, the equation of Planned Parenthood with the Holocaust, or even how one of its subjects, Ted Haggard, was soon afterward scandalized for hiring a (male) prostitute, but how Pelosi, despite her mother's left-of-center politics, supported and encouraged this zealotry. She said in one interview with ABC news: "There's a lot of secular television that provides bad role models. It is important to expose your kid to religion, any religion, otherwise they'll become uncharged, and those are the ones who may later in life fall into more extreme religions," later adding, "They were so organized, and that is something everybody can learn something from."

Note the use of "secular" and "bad role models" in the same sentence. She didn't just equate television with bad role models, she used the word secular, as to equate irreligiosity with bad behavior, one of the many common fallacies that justifies a lot of anti-atheist hatred. As for her claim that those raised without religion would fall into more extreme religion, did she really think that being indoctrinated into unquestioning dogma from a young age to wouldn't have the same effect? Despite what she had witnessed firsthand? "They were just so organized." Right. Just like White Supremacists and the Taliban.

If you don't like church you shouldn't force your children to go either, otherwise it's hypocritical. Second, the culture war is a lot more than a choice between Paris Hilton and Jesus. For starters, the former's existence has been factually verified. Also the left is not all celebrity worship and decadence, regardless of what the right claims. The culture wars have much higher stakes, such as science versus superstition, allowing the government to control women's bodies, marriage equality and inequality, and many other freedoms at risk.

I've been meaning to get this off my chest for years:

Dear Alexandra Pelosi,

My name is Anton Spivack and I am concerned about the pervasive influence of the Christian Right in this country. I have seen your film "Friends of God" regarding the Evangelical movement and subculture in the United States and I have found myself disturbed by what your film presented. What I found most unsettling were families who convinced their children that evolution is false, wives who were instructed to willingly submit to their husbands in all cases, and church leaders who urged their congregations to oppose homosexual rights and stem cell research. Perhaps you chose these subjects so as to create a positive image for the evangelical community, one that would not smack of extremism. But nonetheless I saw these people as fanatics, noting how far they would go on the basis of pure faith, showing a complete disregard to reason and respect for the outside community. They and many other fundamentalist Christians behave as though they want nothing short of a theocracy, with their inherently dangerous

ideology imposed upon the entire United States population. Many United States citizens such as myself recognize this as a threat to civil liberties, particularly the first Amendment of the United States Constitution, which begins “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” If the evangelical lobby had its way, many people, especially members of other religions or none at all, would be adversely affected.

However, I was even more upset by the comments you made in interviews regarding what you have just seen. What surprised me is that you were not at all bothered by this extremism, but instead you supported it. As a secular humanist I believe that religion is not essential or even conducive to morality, so I especially take umbrage at your comments regarding religion and morality.

In an interview with ABC News you claimed that children needed any kind of religious instruction from a young age or else they would become religious extremists. In response I ask, how is indoctrinating someone into a religious dogma from early onward supposed to keep that person from adopting an extreme religious position? Would not a person carefully taught not to question their religious upbringing become the least likely to question it? I feel compelled to ask for an explanation of this. I must also raise objection to your stance that any religion is better than no religion at all, because as a member of the large and growing irreligious community in the United States, I view this as a contribution to the difficulties we face in our efforts to gain acceptance by mainstream society.

Writer Susan Sontag observed, in her acceptance speech for the 2003 Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, that “the United States is a generically religious society. That is, it’s not important which religion you adhere to, as long as you have one.” And those of us who do not adhere to any religion are reduced to the status of second-class citizens. I am not certain whether or not you are aware of this, but the non-religious face discrimination in this country. I’ve read reports of people being kicked out of their clubs, their schools, their jobs, and even their homes and neighborhoods for not believing in a God. The Boy Scouts exclude nontheists from membership, sending a message that those without religious faith cannot become model citizens and do not belong in society. And in the rare instances when nontheists are presented in the media, they are depicted as little more than “lost souls,” and are usually contrasted with religious zealots, who are presented more sympathetically. In these cases, while faith is associated with humility, optimism, and concern for humanity, atheism is equated with intellectual pretense or adolescent rebellion or cynical disillusion, and is never vindicated. Even Scientology is afforded more respect than atheism.

On the political front, George H. W. Bush stated during his 1988 election campaign that atheists should not be regarded as citizens. If he had replaced “atheists” with “Jews” or “Blacks” he would probably not have gotten elected. Polls indicate again and again that most people in the United States would not vote for an atheist, even one who shared their views and was well qualified. In fact, in seven states—Arkansas, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas, atheists are forbidden to hold public office, which clearly violates Article VI of the U. S. Constitution, which states “no religious test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public trust under the United States.”

I read a book of quotes pertaining to religion, and one from an anonymous author put it best, “Morality means doing what is right regardless of what you are told. Religion involves doing what

you are told regardless of what is right.” It is a common perception that people need to obey God in order to be moral. But I disagree with this notion, and so do many others, that people cannot behave properly without the carrot and stick of Heaven and Hell, or even the moral authority of a God. We believe that humanity has the power to decide for itself what is right and wrong without having to rely on external authority. This is what makes it more ethical, since it comes from our personal choices within and is not dictated by outside force. A society can indeed function without religion, as humanity has done before the first religions came into being, since early civilizations could only survive if their members cared for each other instead of simply serving themselves, and we have inherited this morality as an evolutionary trait. This very ethos is what defines Secular Humanism, to determine what is right by logic and reason rather than by merely accepting dogma.

I can understand why you would want to humanize Evangelical Christians, and I respect and encourage such a choice. However I am disappointed that you did not extend the secular community the same respect. Instead you told the New York Times that you would favor the Evangelical community in the culture wars because from your perspective, it was a choice between Paris Hilton and Jesus. I view this assessment as not only simplistic (keep in mind that Paris, like many other celebrities whom you might consider bad role models, sometimes wears a crucifix as a fashion accessory), but unjust. You also expressed admiration for the Evangelicals for being dedicated to their cause. Dedication to a cause does not make an unjust cause just, since the Aryan Nation and the Ku Klux Klan are also “committed to their causes.” The cause of the Christian Right—to establish a theocracy at the cost of human rights and sound science—can hardly be considered just. Many secular humanists such as myself are working hard to oppose this threat to our basic liberties since—despite claims of ours being a “Christian nation”—our country was actually founded on the separation of church and state, as the Treaty of Tripoli confirms. To deny this fact is to sacrifice facts in favor of a falsehood that theocrats would want us to believe. Yet when most people, especially members of the religious right, envision a secular society, they use Nazi Germany or Communist Russia or China as examples, equating a lack of religion with totalitarianism. (On a side note, when the same people are reminded of theocracies such as those in the Middle East, or the Puritan colonies, they will likely attribute the severe human rights violations to false religions and assert that “true Christians” would never do such a thing.) Whether or not you agree with right-wing pundits who equate secularism with “leather bars” (such as Bill O’Reilly did when he interviewed you, and aside from this connection lacking merit, attending leather bars does not infringe on personal freedom as much as disallowing same-sex marriage or vetoing STD vaccines or imposing prayer in school does) you did, intentionally or otherwise, help to enforce the narrow and misguided public perceptions of irreligious people and secularism in general.

My final comment pertains to your decision to indoctrinate your infant son into church, even though you yourself dislike church, so he would have “more than himself and capitalism to believe in.” I find this approach hypocritical, to say the least, unless of course you are also willing to become a churchgoer. I recognize that, as a new mother, you would want positive role models for your child, but I must express my dismay with parents who look to a theocracy for positive role models. If you do not like church, you should not force your children to go there. You may be doing your son more harm than good. There are many secular parents who raise their children without religion and see their children turn out well, partly because they are taught to think for themselves instead of unquestioningly accepting what they are told. Perhaps if you met some of

[www](#) them, your fears would be put to rest. I strongly encourage you to do this, and also that you attend a secular humanist meeting. You might make a follow-up film regarding the secular

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population, possibly including families who have faced discrimination for their opposition to religion. If you do this, I ask that you afford us the same respect you gave the Religious Right, because if you do not, then you are only promoting and legitimizing what may be the only widely acceptable prejudice left in our society. We are not all "Paris Hilton." We are doctors, scientists, teachers, soldiers, mothers, fathers, lovers, friends, and most importantly, people. Thank you for considering this perspective."



David Frum  @davidfrum · 20h

This joke is the story of the Biden economy

 David Frum  @davidfrum · Oct 27, 2022

A woman and her grandson are walking on the beach. A sudden wave pulls the boy to sea. Distraught, she prays, "Lord God, return him safe, and I will keep your mitzvot and give to charity." Another wave deposits the boy, wet but well. The woman turns to heaven.

"He had a hat." [twitter.com/Reuters/status...](https://twitter.com/Reuters/status...)

[Show this thread](#)

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## What is secular humanism?

### Classical Roots



Secular Humanism traces its heritage back to the writings, artists, and poets of ancient Greece and Rome. Its origins can be glimpsed in early Greek philosophy, especially in its efforts to develop a philosophical and scientific outlook on nature, in its emphasis on rationality, and in its conviction that the good life can be achieved through the exercise of human powers and the fulfillment of human nature.

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Humanist strains can be seen in Socrates and Plato, who rejected the Homeric myths and sought to base ethics on rational inquiry.

## Modern Secular Humanism

The emergence of modern science in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries enabled secular humanism to assume a recognizable form. Benedict **Spinoza**, a bridge between the medieval and the modern outlook, defended freethought and rejected biblical revelation as a source of ethics.

The first major protest by what we may recognize as modern secular humanism was the defense of freedom of inquiry against ecclesiastical and political censorship. In part because of this, secular humanism and freethought are closely identified in the modern world. The fates of Giordano Bruno, burned at the stake, and Galileo Galilei, shamed and sentenced to house arrest for challenging traditional views of the cosmos are central to the humanist call for freedom.



## New York State — RELIGION is the DEFAULT

from [FFRF.org](http://FFRF.org)

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is dismayed that Governor Hochul is moving to veto a secular recovery bill. The legislation, S7313A, would have given individuals mandated to attend recovery support programs the option for secular recovery programs over religiously focused ones. The impetus for the law was when people were compelled to choose between jail or a religious treatment option. "It's disheartening to see secular individuals required to attend a religious recovery program," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "The separation of church and state must include secular addiction recovery resources in the public realm."

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and an Endorsing Group in the Secular Coalition for New York (SCNY).