

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

April, 2014

It's April, and is now the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by the suns of Nye and deGrasse Tyson? Well, maybe. Herein we consider the massive effects of mass-marketing reason, evaluate the religious rites of spring both seriously and poetically, wrist-slap the Religious Right a few more times, question why we question God, interview more candidates for our Board, promote a corporate good guy, and introduce a new service for you, gentle readers. Enjoy spring! – JR

SHOULD WE DEBATE IDIOTS?

John Rafferty

In these pages last month ("Some Contrarian Thoughts About the Nye-Ham 'Debate'", PIQUE, March) I offered the opinion that "debating" creationist wackos like Ken Ham is "... a waste of time at best, and an implicit validation of their nonsense in any case", and further argued that although Bill Nye clearly "won" the debate, it is nigh impossible that any minds, on either "side", were changed.

Here are a couple of responses, followed by a deflating follow-up.

ON THE NYE-HAM DEBATE, RAFFERTY IS WRONG

Donna Marxer

I have to disagree with John Rafferty's "contrarian" thoughts about the Bill Nye-Ken Ham "debate" at the Creation Museum in February, on three counts.

First, I agree with Bill Maher, who interviewed Nye later in the week, and said that it is important to get these faith vs. science issues out in the open in public forums.

And this forum was not just the 800-seat Creation Museum. There is an estimate that there may have been as many as three million TV viewers. Surely there were some doubters among that audience, ripe for persuasion. And I give The Science Guy the edge on persuasiveness.

Second, as for the venue, Nye showed courage by taking up the challenge, speaking where Ham could preach to his choir. Can you imagine Ham accepting an invitation to debate at, say, MIT?

Last, which man had the dramatic edge? As the evening progressed, Ham grew more restless, pacing, grayer and pinched. Nye, on the other hand, blossomed, grew expansive. His grin broadened, his hands danced, he

fairly bubbled with *joie de vivre*. Sometimes, body language is worth a thousand words, and is far more persuasive.

I always support open dialog because I grew up with an unhealthy silence on this subject, which meanwhile festered. Nye has a gift for keeping complex ideas simple. The Religious Right persuades because their talking points are simplistic, making Nye an ideal opponent. I say, keep the talk coming.

IT WASN'T EVEN THE RIGHT DEBATE

Joel Galker

I was curious enough to watch Ham's 30-minute opening and a few highlights of the back and forth, but I can't say that anything I heard changed my mind. The question I've heard in the secular community is, Should our camp be having public debates with believers, fundamentalist believers especially, at all?

One side believes that we should fight them on every front to reverse decades of letting them take over and in the process we may change the minds of some fence sitters. The other opinion is that debating them only lends a sense of legitimacy to their attacks on science and evolution.

But there is a third approach: understanding that militant Christian fundamentalism is not about promoting creationism. Creationism and science are just skirmishes on the way to fundamentalist Christian theocracy. At bottom, what the creationist agenda is really about is craziness and fundamentalist hegemony over government, society, culture and the planet.

The fundamentalists are sincere. They ardently believe that their version of the Christian myths are the true words of God, unlike the fairy tales of other religions. God is Christian and Secularism is just another religion to them.

We can chat about it but I doubt these sorts of

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debates change many minds, even of the fence sitters. If they serve any purpose it is to educate passive non-believers about the risks of theocracy. That wasn't what the debate was about but it's a debate I'd like to hear.

WHO WON? THE CREATION MUSEUM

Lindsay Abrams

(Excerpted from "Thanks to Bill Nye, the Creation Museum is getting a theme park" on Salon.com, 2/28/2014)

Who won the big evolution versus creationism showdown last month? According to Ken Ham, this one goes to the Creation Museum.

Ham, who founded the museum, announced Thursday that the attention generated by the debate spurred investors to kick up their support of a proposed 510-foot Noah's Ark, the cornerstone of a proposed \$73 million theme park aimed at making creationism fun. At the last minute, he said, a \$62 million municipal bond offering raised enough money to begin construction. It's set to be finished by summer 2016.

"It was a challenging time, one that ... required a miracle to overcome," Ham said. "And God in His providence supplied our needs" — in the form of Nye, apparently.

"It did help," Ham said of the Feb. 4 debate with Nye. "We obviously had a big spurt toward the end [of the bond deadline], and I think it was people who were involved in this, who really decided they were going to do something."

Comment: I told you! As per Jerry Coyne on newrepublic.com:

"The result, even if you think Nye gained a transitory victory in the debate, is that Ham will build yet another popular tourist attraction, one designed to promulgate lies to kids. Nye, of course, devoted his career as The Science Guy to precisely the opposite: teaching and exciting kids about science. In other words, Nye scuppered himself.

"This is why evolutionists should not debate creationists. It looks good on Ham's c.v.; not so good on Nye's. And now it looks great on Ham's balance sheet as well. Nye lost — big time."

So did we all. — JR

A SAMPLE OF CREATION SCIENCE FOR KIDS: THE "MYSTERY OF ELECTRICITY"

(Transcribed from creationist "science textbook", Science 4 for Christian Schools, posted by Opposing Religious Harm, and forwarded on Facebook by Eileen Regan)

Electricity is a mystery. No one has ever observed it or heard it or felt it. We can see and hear and feel only what electricity *does*. We know that it makes light bulbs shine and irons heat up and telephones ring. But we cannot say what electricity itself is like.

We cannot even say where electricity comes from. Some scientists say that the sun may be the source of most electricity. Others think that the movement of the earth produces some of it. All anyone knows is that electricity seems to be everywhere, and that there are many ways to bring it forth.

CATHOLIC LEAGUE: "COSMOS" SMEARS CATHOLICISM; INQUISITION SAVED "UNCOUNTED THOUSANDS"

William Donohue

(Editor: The following is excerpted, verbatim, from a March 10 Catholic League press release by League President William Donohue. The subject is the March 9 first episode of the new 13-part Fox series, "Cosmos". — JR)

The propagandists involved in this show, represented most conspicuously by Seth MacFarlane [*creator of the hit show "Family Guy", and co-producer of "Cosmos"-JR*], told viewers last night that "the Roman Catholic Church maintained a system of courts known as the Inquisition and its sole purpose was to investigate and torment anyone who dared voice views that differed from theirs. And it wasn't long before [Giordano] Bruno fell into the clutches of the thought police."

The ignorance is appalling. "The Catholic Church as an institution had almost nothing to do with [the Inquisition]," writes Dayton historian Thomas Madden. "One of the most enduring myths of the Inquisition," he says, "is that it was a tool of oppression imposed on unwilling Europeans by a power-hungry Church. Nothing could be more wrong."

Because the Inquisition brought order and justice where there was none, it actually "saved uncounted thousands of innocent (and even not-so-innocent) people who would otherwise have been roasted by secular lords or mob rule." (*His emphasis.*)

As for Bruno, he was a renegade monk who dabbled in astronomy; he was not a scientist. There is much dispute about what really happened to him. As sociologist Rodney Strong puts it, he got into trouble not for his "scientific" views, but because of his "heretical theology involving the existence of an infinite number of worlds—a work based entirely on imagination and speculation".

In short, MacFarlane, who is no stranger to the Catholic League, has once again shown his true colors.

Comment: I complained angrily and at length on Facebook about the cartoons on the first episode (MacFarlane's signature, I'm sure), but after reading the above, I take it all back. — JR

Stop-Press March 17 Update: In support of LGBT people who were denied the right to march as LGBTs in the "official" Fifth Avenue St. Patrick's Day Parade, Guinness Breweries pulled out as a sponsor of the parade.

In retaliation, Mr. Donohue has urged all Irish and Irish-Americans to boycott Guinness and to stop drinking the dark brown stuff.

Uh-huh, good luck with that. — JR

IN CONTRAST TO HISTORY- AND REASON-DENYING BILL DONOHUE (ABOVE), COSMOS'S NEIL deGRASSE TYSON OFFERS THIS

For me, I am driven by two main philosophies: know more today about the world than I knew yesterday and lessen the suffering of others. You'd be surprised how far that gets you. □ *Neil deGrasse Tyson*

WHAT JEWS SHOULD CELEBRATE: THEIR REAL HISTORY

Barbara Lifton

So every year, some commentator talks about a “new” version of the Haggadah. Frankly, I’m tired of listening to childish mythology repeated as fact; I heard it *ad nauseum* throughout my childhood – enough!

The Biblical stories of the patriarchs, the Exodus and conquest of Canaan, etc., commonly taken for granted as true, are, rather, the creative expressions of a powerful religious reform movement that flourished in the 8th century B.C.E., in the Kingdom of Judah. There is no verifiable, valid and contemporaneous archeological record showing irrefutably that any of these events took place. These myths, based on historical kernels of stories passed down verbally, primarily reflect the ideology and world view of the writers of the Bible (See Finklestein and Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed*, 2002.) Attempting to credit these events to the intervention of an ancient supernatural deity is ludicrous.

For any Jew currently repeating these myths as fact, to insist that they actually happened, is to distort the importance of the remarkable history of the Hebrew clans arising in the mountains of Canaan, which became in modern times a people devoted to family, freedom and social justice. It is this history of the Jews that should be celebrated on “Passover” and every day of the year.

FREETHOUGHT HAIKUS FOR PASSOVER & EASTER

John Rafferty

MOSES’S WIFE MAKES THE FIRST SEDER

Why the rush to leave?
Get me the flour, I’ll make some
nice butter cookies.

THE FREED HEBREWS COUNT CADENCE ON THE MARCH ACROSS SINAI

Out of slavery!
Goin’ to Canaan! To get
some slaves of our own.

WAITPERSON AT THE LAST SUPPER

Twelve soups, twelve chopped
livers. Who’s the broken bread
and chalice of blood?

PETER IN GETHSEMANE

I stand on guard while
my Master prays. Uh-oh, here
come the cops. Who, *me?*

ON THE ROAD TO CALVARY

The cross is heavy.
But listen, what’s that He sings?
“*I...i...i...i love a parade.*”

TEN YEARS LATER

Someone get Peter.
Call Paul’s agent in Corinth.
We found the body.

JUST IN CASE YOU DON’T THINK THERE’S A RIGHT-WING WAR AGAINST WOMEN

John Rafferty

(Based on a Jodie Gummow *alternet.org* essay 3/14/2014)

The Religious Right and their allies in Congress are foaming at the mouth about strictures in Obamacare requiring insurance companies to cover women’s health care needs, including (*gasp!*) contraception.

Gynecological and sexual experts like Mike Huckabee and Rush Limbaugh—neither of whom have a clue about how female contraception works—predict that the new rules will “unleash women’s libidos”, resulting in a coast-to-coast orgy paid for by Your Tax Dollars.

So, no contraceptive coverage, ever! Even though birth control pills are often a medical necessity and are used for a number of non-sexual health issues. Not one penny. *Never!*

But, as mock-journalist Samantha Bee reported on *The Daily Show* on March 13, Medicare has spent \$172 million on penis pumps in the last five years, with which expenditure the mostly white, older, male members (yes, pun intended) of Congress don’t seem to have a problem.

“Medicare funds penis pumps,” she said, “at a cost of \$362 per penis, an expenditure which has never even been debated in Congress. Not once. *Never!*”

Every constitution written since the end of World War II includes a provision that men and women are citizens of equal stature. Ours does not. – Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

THE WOMAN WHO TOOK BIRTH CONTROL

Tom Tomorrow

(Transcribed from the cartoon, on *Daily Kos*, 3/17/2014)

(TV Reporter, microphone in hand, addresses young woman)

TV Reporter: ... We’re back. I’m here with a young woman who acknowledges using birth control.

Tell me – are you a mother who already has enough children?

Young Woman: No, I’m not a parent.

TVR: Well, then, perhaps you’re a young wife, postponing parenthood until you’re more financially secure?

YW: No, I’m not married.

TVR: I’m so sorry – you must have some sort of non-pregnancy-related medical condition necessitating use of the birth control pill.

YW: No, I’m fine, really.

TVR: Then, um ... I don’t understand. *Why* do you use birth control?

YW: Um, because I enjoy sex.

(*embarrassed silence*)

TVR: Aren’t you afraid people will think you’re a ... a ...

YW: ... a healthy human being? I’m okay with that.

ON THE FUNDING OF CONTRACEPTION AND ABORTION

Bill Chapman

The Republican Party is currently doing everything it can to inflict as many unplanned, unwanted children on the world as possible.

Liberals call this the “War on Women”. I don’t like this term, because the war is not just against women – males lose from this Republican strategy as well. Boys are the ones who get beat up in school by the street gangs that the unwanted children tend to join. Men as well as women get mugged by the juvenile offenders that unwanted children are more likely to become. The Republican efforts are better described as the “War on Common Sense”.

And the Republicans are not just going after abortion, they’re fighting against insurance covering birth control.

It takes a lot of discipline to use condoms consistently enough to avoid pregnancy. For people in a long, monogamous relationship where disease transmission isn’t a big concern, really reliable and convenient birth control is best achieved through more expensive methods. That money pays for itself a hundred fold in improved quality of life for everyone, male and female.

A common argument that is made is that since some people have a conscientious objection to abortion and birth control, they shouldn’t be required to pay taxes or insurance premiums that cover either one.

We tax people to fund actions that are against their individual consciences all the time. When this country was founded, we had a lot of pacifist Quakers, and we taxed them to fund our military. We tax vegetarians to pay for meat inspectors. We tax technophobic New Age hippies to fund the National Science Foundation. We taxed communists to pay for bombing Hanoi. We tax Jehovah’s Witnesses to fund blood transfusions.

I’ve got a proposal to settle this dispute. Everyone would have a choice of two taxes to pay – either they could pay \$100 a year to fund birth control and abortion, or they could pay \$10,000, which would fund welfare payments to single moms, and the social workers, cops, and prison guards we’re going to need for the unwanted children. That way we could pursue a sane public health strategy, and no one would have to fund activities they object to.

A CHRISTIAN SAYS “NO!” TO THE SELFISH RELIGIOUS RIGHT

Paul C. McGlasson

(Excerpted from Mr. McGlasson’s book, No! A Theological Response to Christian Reconstructionism, excerpted on delanceyplace.com, 2/26/2014)

Consider the issue of state obligation to care for the poor. [Some among the religious right] systematically deny that the state has *any* obligation to the poor; indeed *any* obligation to the general welfare of its citizens overall. Care for the poor is assigned solely to families and churches. ... In an era when the income gap between wealthy

and poor is only growing greater, the question is hardly insignificant. We will proceed along two levels.

Our first answer is to point out that the Bible does in fact assign care of the poor to the state, without any ambiguity. Psalm 72, perhaps written by David for Solomon to describe the duties of the ideal king, stresses obligation to the poor:

“May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy and crush the oppressor ... For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight.”

This is not describing a family, or the church; this is a clear mandate to *state* obligation for the poor in a description of the *ideal* government. Again, the book of Proverbs likewise describes the duties of the ideal king in very similar terms:

“Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

It is precisely the role of the king to give voice to the voiceless in society. But [on] a deeper, more profound level. Jesus describes a final judgment in which all nations – not families, not churches, but *nations*, including their governments – will be gathered before him (Matt 25:31-46).

Notice that the much vaunted issue of national exceptionalism is a divine prerogative, not a human one; only Christ alone has the right to decide which nations are truly exceptional. How will he decide? He makes it crystal clear in this passage. Care for the poor is not *an* obligation of the state; it is in some sense *the* obligation of the state.

Nations will not be judged by whether they have a powerful military; nor whether they have a strong middle class. Nations – all nations – will be judged, not by a fallible human judgment, but by the only judgment that really matters, by the Lord of all nations – on one basis only: how did you care for the weak and the needy? Did you feed the hungry among you, or let them struggle to survive? Did you give the thirsty something to drink, or watch callously as they scrambled for every scrap? Do you provide for the health and well-being of the sick and the dying, or force them to choose between the medication they need and food to keep alive? Did you welcome the stranger to your shores, or with hardness of heart build walls to keep them away? Did you treat even the prisoners among you with the humanity they still retain, despite their mistakes in life? Did you provide clothing to the naked, or turn away from what is “no concern of mine”?

This is not a question of “social policy”. Christ makes it all too clear that far more is at stake. How nations – including their governments – treat the poor, is how they treat Christ himself: “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.”

Comment: How is it that so many people today who profess to be Christians insist that government should not help the poor, in spite of Matthew 25, while so many of us on the atheist/agnostic/humanist left are in sync with the Apostle? – JR

AN ATHEIST SAYS “NO” TO ARGUING ABOUT BELIEF

Louise Antony

(Excerpted from “Arguments Against God”, in *The Stone*, on *NYTimes Opinionator*, 2/25/2014)

(Gary Gutting interviews Prof. Antony, editor of *Philosophers Without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*. I have extracted less than a quarter of the interview here, and recommend readers go on line for all the riches. – JR)

Louise Antony: O.K. So [your] question is, why do I say that theism is false, rather than just unproven? Because the question has been settled to my satisfaction. I say “there is no God” with the same confidence I say “there are no ghosts” or “there is no magic”. The main issue is supernaturalism – I deny that there are beings or phenomena outside the scope of natural law.

That’s not to say that I think everything is within the scope of human knowledge. Surely there are things not dreamt of in our philosophy, not to mention in our science – but that fact is not a reason to believe in supernatural beings. I think many arguments for the existence of a God depend on the insufficiencies of human cognition. I readily grant that we have cognitive limitations. But when we bump up against them, when we find we cannot explain something – like why the fundamental physical parameters happen to have the values that they have – the right conclusion to draw is that we just can’t explain the thing. That’s the proper place for agnosticism and humility. ...

I’m challenging the idea that there’s one fundamental view [about God]. Even if I could be convinced that supernatural beings exist, there’d be a whole separate issue about how many such beings there are and what those beings are like. Many theists think they’re home free with something like the argument from design: that there is empirical evidence of a purposeful design in nature. But it’s one thing to argue that the universe must be the product of some kind of intelligent agent; it’s quite something else to argue that this designer was all-knowing and omnipotent. Why is that a better hypothesis than that the designer was pretty smart but made a few mistakes? Maybe (I’m just cribbing from Hume here) there was a committee of intelligent creators, who didn’t quite agree on everything. Maybe the creator was a student god, and only got a B- on this project.

In any case though, I don’t see that claiming to know that there is no God requires me to say that no one could have good reasons to believe in God. I don’t think there’s some general answer to the question, “Why do theists believe in God?” I expect that the explanation for theists’ beliefs varies from theist to theist. So I’d have to take things on a case-by-case basis. ...

Knowledge in the real world does not entail either certainty or infallibility. When I claim to know that there is no God, I mean that the question is settled to my satisfaction. I don’t have any doubts. I don’t say that I’m agnostic, because I disagree with those who say it’s not possible to know whether or not God exists. I think it’s possible to know. And

I think the balance of evidence and argument has a definite tilt.

Gary Gutting: What sort of evidence do you have in mind?
L.A.: I find the “argument from evil” overwhelming – that is, I think the probability that the world we experience was designed by an omnipotent and benevolent being is a zillion times lower than that it is the product of mindless natural laws acting on mindless matter. ...

No one needs to defend their religious beliefs to me – not unless they think that those beliefs are essential to the defense of the policy they are advocating. If the only argument for a policy is that Catholic doctrine says it’s bad, why should a policy that applies to everyone reflect that particular doctrine? “Religious freedom” means that no one’s religion gets to be the boss.

But usually, religious people who become politically active think that there are good moral reasons independent of religious doctrine, reasons that ought to persuade any person of conscience. I think – and many religious people agree with me – that the United States policy of drone attacks is morally wrong, because it’s wrong to kill innocent people for political ends. It’s the moral principle, not the existence of God, that they are appealing to.

G.G.: That makes it sound like you don’t think it much matters whether we believe in God or not.

L.A.: Well, I do wonder about that. Why do theists care so much about belief in God? Disagreement over that question is really no more than a difference in philosophical opinion. Specifically, it’s just a disagreement about ontology – about what kinds of things exist. Why should a disagreement like that bear any moral significance? Why shouldn’t theists just look for allies among us atheists in the battles that matter – the ones concerned with justice, civil rights, peace, etc. – and forget about our differences with respect to such arcane matters as the origins of the universe?

EMPTY ENVELOPES FOR MARCH PIQUE’S “PRINCE OF THE CHURCH”

John Rafferty

Remember Archbishop Myers of Newark, whom we featured last month (“If You’re A ‘Prince of the Church’ You Live in Princely Style, Right?”, March PIQUE)? He of the 4,500-square-foot vacation home (with swimming pool), who is building a half-million-dollar, 3,000-square-foot addition (with added luxuries) with church money, while his archdiocese closes schools and pleads poverty?

Well, his parishioners remember him, and more than a few of them have found a way to register their disgust with “His Grace” (his preferred title). They’re mailing in their annual-appeal donation envelopes ... empty.

As *patheos.com* reports:

“The only language the church understands is money,” said Maria Bozza, 69, who has urged fellow parishioners at Holy Family Church to withhold contributions to the archdiocese. “We need to start an ‘empty envelope month’ ... then they will get the message.”

No, Ms. Bozza, they probably won’t.

SHSNY CALENDAR: APRIL - JUNE 2014

SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURS, APRIL 3, 7-8:30 pm
THE COMMUNITY CHURCH
OF NEW YORK
28 East 35 St. (Park-Mad)
 (3 doors West of the church - red door)

We'll discuss
WHO'S IN CHARGE?
Free Will and the
Science of the Brain
Michael S. Gazzaniga

In this remarkable book, the "father of cognitive neuroscience" makes a powerful and provocative argument that counters the common wisdom that our lives are wholly determined by physical processes we cannot control.



Gazzaniga's case against the idea that ours is a "determined" world is fascinating and liberating, solidifying his place along with Oliver Sachs and other bestselling authors exploring the mysteries of the human brain.

Gazzaniga convincingly argues that even given the latest insights into the physical mechanisms of the mind, there is an undeniable human reality: *We are responsible agents who should be held accountable for our actions, because responsibility is found in how people interact, not in brains.* – Paper & Kindle

Join us even if you haven't finished reading.

The SHSNY Book Club is open to all ... and free!

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AND MEET US ON MEETUP

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SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURS, MAY 1, 7-8:30 pm
 at Community Church of NY
 28 East 35 Street (Park-Mad)
A FIT OF PIQUE

John Rafferty

Here is the SHSNY President's selection of a dozen years worth of his own essays from the pages of this newsletter. Church and State, evolution and creationism, Hitchens and Dawkins, Newt Gingrich and Tony Soprano, Ronald McDonald and "Touch-down Jesus" – they're all here, in a collection Chuck Debrovner, past President of the Humanist Institute, calls, "a treasure trove of wit and wisdom from the humanist perspective". – Paper & Kindle

SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURS, JUNE 5, 7-8:30 pm
 at Community Church of NY
GODS IN THE
GLOBAL VILLAGE:
The World's Religions in
Sociological Perspective
Lester R. Kurtz

The question that faces us as a human community is not "Which religious tradition is true?" or even "Is any religious tradition true?" but rather "How can we enable the various religious and secular traditions to coexist peacefully on the planet?" Kurtz believes the sociology of religion – itself a pluralistic discipline – can provide invaluable insight into the most pressing problems of our time.

Book Club Editor Elaine Lynn notes: "While the new Third Edition of this entry in the *Sociology for a New Century Series* is expensive, it can be bought used and, probably just as useful for our purposes, the 2006 edition costs very little."

BRUNCH & CONVERSATION
SUNDAY, APRIL 20, 12 NOON
MONTHLY CASUAL BRUNCH
The Stag's Head
252 East 51 St.



The Stag's Head offers an American-traditional brunch menu of eggs and omelets several ways, crepes, burgers, frittatas, burritos and short-rib hash (all in the \$10.95-12.95 range) and a full pub-grub menu for the hungry splurgers among us.

Join 19 other freethinkers and humanists (private space in back seats 20) for food, fellowship and well-fed fun.

April After-Brunch Discussion: Yes, it's Easter. Let's talk about that.

MONDAY, APRIL 14, 7:00 pm
SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)
THE MASTER

Philip Seymour Hoffman, Amy Adams and Joaquin Phoenix (all nominated for acting Oscars) team up in this 2012 drama inspired by L. Ron Hubbard's (Hoffman) founding of Scientology (here it's called "The Cause"), as well as the early, alcoholic life of the writer John Steinbeck (Phoenix). "Altogether amazing", said *The New York Times*.

After-film discussion: Okay, Scientology's a cult – but what makes a cult?

SHSNY Movie Night is FREE. (But put something on the bar beside your elbow.)

SHSNY CALENDAR: APRIL - JUNE 2014

GREAT LECTURES ON DVD

WED, APRIL 23, 7 pm
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)

ROSS v. STENGER:

Creationism v. Science

Dr. Hugh Ross is a Canadian astrophysicist who propounds Old Earth Creationism, believes that science affirms the God of the Bible and thinks he has evidence to prove it. He rejects evolution and abiogenesis as explanations for the origin and history of life, and is associated with the interdenominational apologetic ministry, "Reason to Believe".



Dr. Victor Stenger is a particle physicist, an emeritus professor at the University of Hawaii, and has been a visiting professor at Oxford, Heidelberg and the U. of Colorado. He is associated with New Atheism, has written twelve books for general audiences, and is best known for the dictum: "Science flies you to the moon; religion flies you into buildings."

Great Lectures on DVD is FREE.
(But put something on the bar beside your elbow.)

PLANNING AHEAD

The usual SHSNY schedule is ...

Book Club: First Thursday
at the Community Church of NY

Movie Night: Second Monday
at Stone Creek Lounge.

Brunch: Third Sunday
at The Stag's Head

Great Lectures: 4th Wednesday
at Stone Creek Lounge.

Humanism 101: Last Monday
at the Community Church of NY

More info: www.shsny.org,
and/or 646-922-7389

Reserve early!

SUNDAY, MAY 4, NOON
6th Annual Day of Reason
Brunch at Pete's Tavern

129 East 18 Street

LIZ HEYWOOD

RELIGIOUS OVERDOSE: My Survival of Childhood Medical Neglect

Liz Heywood grew up in Christian Science and at age 13 was prayed over rather than medically treated for a bone disease. As an adult she ended years of pain by having a leg amputated, and has since become a leading advocate for child victims of religious abuse.



Don't miss her gripping story, and join 40 or more of your fellow freethinkers for one of SHSNY's best annual get-togethers.

Brunch is \$25, all in. Save 20% (\$5) by reserving now at shsny.org

HUMANISM 102

MONDAY, APRIL 28, 6:30-8:30
Community Church of New York
28 East 35 Street (red door)

Meeting/Discussion #6:

*The Sleep of Reason in America:
From UFOs to Birthers*

Readings - Books:

Susan Jacoby: *The Age of American Unreason*

and if you have the time ...

Carl Sagan: *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*

Readings - Online: TBD. Check the Calendar of Events for Apr 28 at www.shsny.org

Note: Humanism 102 is a study group, not a book club. If you have not done the reading, you may still audit the discussion - all are welcome!

OTHER REASONABLE NEW YORK EVENTS

www.reasonablenewyork.org

CFI-NYC. Mon, Apr 14, 10 pm,
Googie's Lounge (Upstairs at the
Living Room), 154 Ludlow St.:
"Skeptics on the Mic Karaoke".

New York Philosophy: Fri, Apr 11,
6-10 pm: 49 Grove, 49 Grove St at
Christopher St/Sheridan Square:

Various topics (100 attendees expected). RSVP: nyphilosophy.com

NY Society for Ethical Culture:

- Sun, April 6, 2 pm, Sunday Assembly-NYC Talks: *New Beginnings*, Free.

- Mon, April 7, 1 pm, Ethics in Literature: *The Everything Store: Jeff Bezos and the Age of Amazon* by Brad Stone. Snacks & Bevs, \$5.

- Fri, April 4, 7 pm, Ethics in Film: 1984. Snacks/Bevs, \$5 suggested donation.

- Fri, April 18, 6:30 pm, Ethics and the Theater: George Bernard Shaw's *The Millionairess*. Reception/Refreshments, \$10.

See the full RNY calendar at
reasonablenewyork.org

PLUS

Agnostic A.A.: Twelve weekly AA-endorsed meetings. agnosticAANyc.org/meetings.html
Atheism History Week - With SHSNY's John Rafferty, 5:30 p.m. every Wednesday, MNN Ch. 1997 in Manhattan, and live streaming on your computer anywhere at www.mnn.org.

Drinking With Atheists: Every Friday, fun and conversation.

meetup.com/GothamAtheists/
Feminist Freethinkers of New York: Check schedule at

feministfreethinkers.org

Manhattan History Buffs: Every 3d Tues, 6:00, dinner/talk at Lili's rest, 83-84th/3rd. Apr 15: TBA.

Info at 212-802-7427

PEEK

Newsletter of the Sexual Humorist Society of New York

April 1, 2014

In keeping with an ancient tradition (2007), on this date and on this page we put aside philosophy, theology and politics to consider really important stuff, like the lachrymal propensities of plaster statues and the historicity of a chocolate-egg-less Easter. But first, news that's Fox-worthy! – JR

Breaking News:

BENEDICT, IN POST-MIDNIGHT COUP, TAKES BACK PAPACY!

VATICAN CITY, April 1: In a stunning middle-of-the-night move that has sent shock waves around the world, Bernard Ratzinger, the former Pope Benedict XVI, left his private apartments at the head of a phalanx of rogue Swiss Guards and seized the Papal throne, deposing Pope Francis.

"Enough with the Dago and his *idiotisch* 'Who am I to judge?'" , Benedict was heard to say as Francis was led away, adding, "*Keine netter Kerl*" (No more nice guy). Vatican spokesman Monsignor Guido Sarducci told reporters that ex-Pope Francis was "delighted" to accept an appointment to a mission in the Patagonia region of his native Argentina.

In an equally stunning move, the re-newed Pope dissolved the College of Cardinals that had been working on Francis's proposed reforms, and reconstituted it – packing it with 85 new members – as the Council of Gauleiters.

At dawn, the new pontiff celebrated mass under the name he has chosen for his second pontificate: Adolph I.

SARAH PALIN: LET'S CELEBRATE EASTER THE WAY JESUS DID

(Excerpted from dailycurrent.com, 10/23/2013, forwarded by Max & Eliane Hahn)

In an interview with Fox and Friends this morning, the former Alaska governor promoted her new book about the left's "War on Christmas" and argued that all Christian holidays should return to the traditional versions practiced by Jesus.

"It makes me so gosh darn angry", Palin explained. "The liberal left in this country has targeted Christian holidays and is trying to secularize them right out of existence.

"When Jesus celebrated Easter with his disciples there were no Easter bunnies or egg hunts. There were no Easter sales at department stores or parades in the street. Easter was a special time of prayer and Christian activism.

"Jesus would gather all the townspeople around and would listen to their stories about the meaning of Easter in their lives. Then he would teach them how to love one another, how to protest Roman abortion clinics and how to

properly convert homosexuals.

"You can't even do things like that these days without getting called out by some wacko left-wing human rights group. Christians had more freedom under Roman rule than we do now in our own country! We need to return Easter back to the way it was when Jesus was alive."

VIRGIN MARY STATUE CRYING FOR NO GOOD REASON

(Excerpted from The Onion, 4/7/01, 1/3/2011)

WORCESTER, MA—Nearly a week after a statue of the Virgin Mary began shedding what appeared to be actual tears, worshippers at St. Alphonsus Catholic Church told reporters Wednesday they had lost patience with the figure's nonstop whining and carrying on.

"Like everyone else, I got sucked in at first", said the Rev. Paul Doherty, the pastor of the church, who admitted he had once kissed the tears streaming from the eyes of the 5-foot wooden altarpiece. "But now it's just too much—crying in the morning when I come in, crying during baptisms, crying, crying, crying all the time. I've called around to other parishes, and all of their Marys are doing fine, even the cheap plaster ones that have to stand outside in the wind and rain. There must be thousands of Marys in the Greater Boston area, but ours is the only one who can't hold it together."

"To think I actually thought it was a miracle", added Doherty. "The real miracle would be if Old Faithful over here would turn off the waterworks for five seconds."

Longtime church organist Agnes Wright told reporters that the weeping statue had become a distraction and that she now privately hoped someone would lay a drape over the self-indulgent figure.

"I know she's sad, but c'mon, she's acting like the world revolves around her or something," said Wright, adding that Mary's incessant sorrow had made receiving communion a "chore".

"Show a little dignity," Wright continued. "The statue of Jesus has nails through his hands and feet, for God's sake, but you don't see him crying."

– PEEK, the Newsletter of Sexual Humorist Society of New York, ends here.

THE CANDIDATES SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES

As per our bylaws, this is the third of three notices in PIQUE of our triannual election of members to the SHSNY Board of Directors. Statements by several of the candidates appear herein, as did several published in March. All the statements, along with ballots, will be mailed to all dues-paid members on April 15 (two ballots to Family Memberships). Returned ballots will be due May 15, and election results will be announced in the June issue. The new 3-year Board terms will begin June 1.

All dues-paid members of SHSNY are eligible for election or appointment to the Board. For details about nominating yourself or another, see February PIQUE or leave a call-back number at 646-922-7389.

Mike Weiss

I have personally benefitted greatly from my membership in SHSNY for the last five years and I am pleased to run for re-election to the board on which I have served since 2012. I believe that SHSNY is an important asset for the NYC community, not just current free thinkers, and I want to contribute to its future success.



I am a long-time East Sider, and since 2011, a recently retired business insurance broker. I was a founder of my company's LGBT Employee Resource Group, and represented the organization at national Out & Equal workplace diversity seminars. I had a gradual transition to atheism in adulthood, but the call of rationality – and humanism – did win out over an all-Catholic education. That started with the Sisters of Charity (a seven-year choir boy at all-Latin High Mass, no less!), followed by the Irish Christian Brothers at Iona Prep, ultimately graduating from the Jesuits' Fordham University.

I am strongly committed to the goal of moving society to a non-theistic approach to human values. My involvement with SHSNY and the secular community is the best way I can contribute to that goal. To that end, I might add that I have participated/benefitted from the start in the enlightening Humanism course that John leads, as have assorted newcomers. I advocate for the message that ethics and morality neither require nor benefit from a belief in mythologies and a supernatural realm. I believe that accepting that we all have only one life to work with is the best way to go. I also strongly oppose the absolutist and archaic moral systems that are built into much organized religious belief and have caused much human suffering. There's nothing like being gay to drive that last point home. Also, the progress that the LGBT community has recently made underscores the important lesson of being OUT as both an atheist and a humanist in order to move the rationality cause along. I admire the intellectual integrity, emphasis on reason, critical thinking and progressive values that epitomize SHSNY. I consider myself fortunate (not blessed) to be on the team and wish to continue to be on-board.

Robert A. Murtha, Jr.

The Christian Right continues to press its reactionary agenda on us in many areas, including school prayer, stem cell research, homosexuality, contraception, abortion, separation of church and state, and much more. If you ask them (or don't ask) they say that we are unfit to serve the public office or even belong to the polity. They draw support from conservative Catholics, Jews and Mormons. They are especially active in education and run thousands of candidates for school boards everywhere. Once elected they push for the teaching of creationism and intelligent design. In Texas they control the State Board of Education and are busily ordering up bespoke textbooks that fudge evolution and fail to explain it to biology students. They also minimize the role of free thinkers such as Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine in American history. They seek to educate a generation of brainwashed ignoramuses.

These people must be opposed.

My qualifications include a law degree, an M.A in history and a measure of political experience.



Maria Astifides

A freethinker since childhood, the secular mindset has been a mainstay in my life. Wishing to be active in the secular movement, I have joined various organizations during the years. The Secular Humanist Society of New York offers a positive balance that I enjoy, therefore my interest in serving in an official capacity with SHSNY.

Born and raised in NYC, I have witnessed a disturbing shift of intolerance in our city. Religious factions have emerged which have pit factions against each other. Secular humanism provides an option of fairness which I find most accepting. The religious right has been a primary instigator in this process, and working with SHSNY is a way to thwart the process in its tracks. I hope that my actions in the organization will prove fruitful in providing an endpoint to closed-minded thinking.



John A Wagner



I have served on the board of the SHSNY for three years, and I retain my belief that our main priority should be to attract new members by providing services and activities that will appeal to families with children, people that are in school and those just entering the work force.

I am currently the administrator of our Facebook page, which has grown to over 700 members; and I believe that we have to redouble our efforts to use social media to attract new members and to educate the public about humanism.

I am also the co-chair of the Secular Coalition for New York, a lobbying organization that has been endorsed both by the SHSNY and the American Humanist Association.

I serve as a liaison between the SHSNY and the Secular Coalition for New York. I want to increase the involvement of members of the SHSNY in secular politics and provide opportunities for productive actions. Key issues can be found at: <http://states.secular.org/states/new-york/key-issues-%E2%80%93-secular-coalition-ny>.

I believe that we should use our affiliation with the American Humanist Association to develop our organization and that we should create synergies with the Humanist Society of Metropolitan New York, the other AHA chapter in NYC. We should continue to work cooperatively with other free-thought groups in NYC and maintain our membership in Reasonable New York. I believe we should strive for a higher public profile and take credit for ongoing activities and services produced by SHSNY. I will work with other members of the board to organize social and educational activities.

I am a Professor of Neurology & Neuroscience at Weill-Cornell Medical College in NYC. I have been a freethinker and humanist since I was a teenager. I grew up in Iowa, received a Ph.D. from Princeton, continued my studies at the U. of California, San Francisco, and was on the faculty at Harvard Medical School. I am a member of SHSNY, the American Humanist Association, NYC- Atheists, American Atheists, Gotham Atheists, The Freedom From Religion Foundation, the Iowa Atheists & Freethinkers, the Council for Secular Humanism, and Center for Inquiry-NY.

Mirta Cotto

I want to be on the SHSNY board because I want to be part of an organization dedicated to advance the atheist/humanist cause in New York and ultimately the United States. I think that our present situation as a society compels me to further our cause in whatever capacity I have. I want to be on the board because I want to be part of a movement that is trying its best to change the current trend toward the cradle of idiocy to which the US is heading.



David Orenstein

There are few higher callings than to be called a humanist. To take action and thrive on the connections we each make to serve humanity. As we have evolved we now stand at a point where our human condition, or technology and our experience allows us each to make the world a safer, kinder and richer place because we choose to do so for one another and not for an unseen or unproven deity. We are perhaps all born atheists, but it is the philosophy of secular humanism, with its optimistic emphasis on humanity, the joy of seeing the world as it is rather than through magic or theology, and the choices we make to trust humans and our science that brings us all closer together as one human family each member equally part of a prior African descent. Down from the trees just a few million years ago, creating cities and



great civilizations only 10,000 years ago, and now in the 21st century, ready to reach out to the stars and begin an even longer human journey.

I pledge to you that as an SHYNY Board member, I will treat everyone with respect and dignity. I will work to improve and grow our association, and I will work to support the programs, the social and political actions and the alliances created all in the best interest of the organization's membership and that of the Board.

WHEN "LIVING OUT YOUR FAITH" IS RELIGIOUS-BASED DISCRIMINATION

Jonathan Engel

The issue of religious-based discrimination has become a contentious one in this country of late, the latest skirmish in a seemingly endless battle known as the "culture wars". By now most people know that on February 26 Governor Jan Brewer of Arizona vetoed a bill passed in the Arizona legislature that would have given business owners the right to refuse service to gay men, lesbians, and other people on religious grounds. But while I applaud Governor Brewer's veto (even though it seems clear that she rejected the bill based on its feared negative economic consequences and not because it was just plain wrong) I am sure that we have not heard the last of this issue. Other states are considering similar legislation, and the Supreme Court has yet to rule on a challenge to the Affordable Care Act's mandate that health insurance policies include contraceptive coverage, such challenge being based on objecting business owners' religious beliefs regarding the "morality" of using artificial birth control. In the February 27 *New York Times*, Steve Yarbrough, an Arizona State Senator who supported the vetoed bill, was quoted as having said "this bill is not about allowing discrimination. This bill is about preventing discrimination against people who are clearly living out their faith". Actually, these concepts are not mutually exclusive, and this bill was really about both: it would allow certain types of discrimination to be practiced by people so long as they claimed that their desire to do so was religion-based.

First, a few words about discrimination. It happens all the time and, depending on the circumstances, is perfectly legal, and should be. The question that needs to be asked is "What is the basis of the discrimination, and is it rational and reasonable?" For example, virtually every institution of higher learning in this country discriminates in its entry criteria based on standardized test scores, particularly the SAT. This is acceptable because SAT scores are seen (rightly or wrongly) as a predictor of how well the person will do in the college. Admitting individuals who are incapable of the level of scholarship generally practiced at a college does no favor to either the college or the student. The perception is that SAT scores are rationally related to a college's mission, and so discrimination based on those scores is seen as rational and reasonable, and is therefore legal.

Did you know that the New York City Police

Department discriminates based on age? That's right, if you are over the age of 35 you are ineligible to even take the NYPD's entrance exam. Again, age is rationally related to a person's ability to do this fast-paced, physically-demanding job, and so discriminating on that basis is legal. Hell, every time an employer picks one job applicant over another they are engaged in discrimination based on criteria such as education, experience, skill sets etc., all of which is legal and ethical so long as the basis of the discrimination is rationally related to anticipated job performance.

Even in public accommodations we allow some types of discrimination, so long as they are rational. Restaurants can have dress codes. Movie theaters can practice age discrimination by having lower prices for seniors or children, or by not allowing kids in to see R-rated movies. Amusement parks often have signs next to certain attractions that say you have to be "this tall" to go on the ride. Such rules are based on understandable safety concerns. All of these are examples of discrimination that is legal because there are rational reasons for them.

But what of religious-based discrimination? There are times when such discrimination is reasonable, rational and legal. For example, if a Methodist Church wants to hire a new minister, they can limit job applicants to Methodist ministers. They are not required to give the position to an otherwise qualified Jewish rabbi, as being both Methodist and a minister are reasonable job requirements for such a position. But that's not what we're talking about here. The Arizona bill, if it had been signed into law, would have allowed discrimination in public accommodations by non-religious business entities and individuals based on the business owner's or the individual's religious beliefs, even if not rationally related to the business at hand. That is a whole other kettle of fish.

Religious-based discrimination of this kind is not based on rationality because religion itself is not reason-based. In the movie "Miracle on 34th Street", the lawyer played by John Payne tells the little girl played by Natalie Wood "faith is believing in something when common sense tells you not to". Precisely. And if there is no evidence for a particular belief, it cannot be said to be based on "reason". The Bible has admonitions against homosexual conduct, but it also has admonitions against all sorts of things, including wearing clothes that are a blend of two or more different fabrics.

As religion is inherently non-rational, to allow discrimination based on religious beliefs will allow discrimination based on non-rational thinking, which is something that we as a society have rejected, and such rejection has been codified into our laws. Remember, Christianity is not the only religion that the First Amendment allows us to practice. You are allowed to make up your own religion, and it can be irrational in just about any way you choose.

As a country and a society, we only allow discrimination based on rational reasons, but religion (as communicated by the lawyer to the little girl in "Miracle on 34th Street") is faith-based, not reason-based, and so to allow discrimination based

on religious beliefs would, in effect, allow discrimination based on just about anything. It would also fly in the face of our social compact, hard-won over hundreds of years, that to discriminate in public accommodations is wrong and unlawful unless there is a clearly rational and reasonable rationale for doing so.

READERS RESPOND TO MARCH PIQUE

To the Editor: The March issue of PIQUE is excellent, as usual. Specifically, it opens with four outstanding pieces (by John Rafferty, Roy Speckhardt, Joshua Holland and CJ Werleman) illuminating the tragedy of slavery and incarceration in today's America and the obscene privatization of our bloated prison system. However, only Rafferty mentioned the shameful racial underpinning of the system that penalizes "... our black underclass and brown 'illegal' immigrants for minor offenses ... while letting white folks off."

I would like to have seen this inequity addressed – or at least mentioned – in the other three pieces as well. It is surely relevant. – *Peter Rogatz, M.D.*

To the Editor: March PIQUE is another winner! You should consider sending your excellent article on prisons to the *NY Times* Op Page, although, I hardly read it these days. Those who still do read it should be made aware of the criminality and stupidity of our for-profit prison system.

Since I don't attend your lectures, nor have time to read all the books you bring to our attention, reading PIQUE is an advanced course on what is relevant in the world of Secular Humanism. I particularly liked Sam Harris's article: his remark on consciousness seems as good an explanation of what I experience: "the reality of consciousness becomes no less wondrous, and the difference between happiness and suffering no less important. Nor does such a view suggest we will ever find the emergence of mind from matter fully intelligible; consciousness may always seem like a miracle." One might extend the miracle to include "life", if there were a difference. For me this would be true even, if it turns out, we are living in a "simulated world". – *Remo Cosentino*

To the Editor: Re: "The Humanity of Science" (March PIQUE), when I saw Bronowski step into the pond during the first airing of the "The Ascent of Man" all those many years ago I cried like a baby. It was the most affecting bit of heart wrenching theater I had ever seen. It confirmed me in a search for reality away from the sacred texts of the world that I had pursued. People with fixed answers became untrustworthy, and scientific and humanistic inquiry the better path. Over the years, I've often related the pond scene and my reaction to my children and younger friends, and it never fails to bring a tear and choking (to me, my audience simply tolerates my effusion, or says, "Oh, daddy.")

The simple message that the greatest villainy comes from unexamined truth and those who can no longer laugh at themselves will stay with me as long as I have a mind to use. Thanks for PIQUE. -- *Bob Ondricek*

**WE NEED A NATIONAL “GOOD GUY”
– AND EVEN A “GOOD COMPANY” –
ANNUAL AWARD**

At the annual Apple shareholders meeting a month or so ago, a representative of the National Center for Public Policy Research (NCPPr), which is “dedicated to providing free market solutions to today’s public policy problems”, rose to challenge Apple CEO Tim Cook over Apple’s environmental efforts. Those efforts include three-quarters of its facilities (including the Cupertino headquarters) running on renewable energy sources and Cook’s hiring the former head of the EPA to direct the company’s sustainability efforts.

In a prepared statement, Justin Danhoff of NCPPr demanded that the company stop concerning itself with unprofitable environmental issues, and claimed that Apple’s approach did not “[promote] shareholder value”.

Tim Cook shot right back, angrily.



“When we work on making our devices accessible by the blind, I don’t consider the bloody ROI. ... If you want me to do things only for ROI reasons, you should get out of this stock. ... We do a lot of things for reasons besides profit motive. We want to leave the world

better than we found it.”

Three cheers for a corporation, and three more for a corporate “suit”.

**CALLING ALL SHSNY ARTISTS, PERFORMERS,
LECTURERS, ET CETERA: THERE’S A NEW
FEATURE IN PIQUE JUST FOR YOU**

John Rafferty - Editor

On March 18, as I sat in the magnificent auditorium of St. Peter’s Church and listened to Mary Bopp’s brilliant performance of the Mozart Piano Concerto No. 13 in C with the Chamber 16 Orchestra she co-founded, I had what I think is a good – and long overdue – idea.

In the audience with me were three other members of SHSNY – Donna Marxer, Carl Marxer and Martine Reed (Chamber 16 regulars Irv Millman and Edith Finell couldn’t make it) – enjoying the talent of another SHSNYer, Mary, and I wondered, Why just four of us? Why not 14? Or 24?

So, starting with the May issue, we’ll run a new feature, “*Our Members are doing ...*” – listings of other-than-SHSNY events in which some of our members are involved, and about which all of our members ought to be aware.

Here are the rules:

1. Dues-paid members of SHSNY only.
2. The event must be open to the public.
3. You must be *personally* and actively involved in the event, e.g., an artist or photographer having a show, a musician in performance, a speaker lecturing or on a panel – *not* just promoting some other organization’s event.

A caution: Send the event information to editor@shsnyc.org as soon as you have it; PIQUE is a monthly, and the May issue will be fully formatted by April 20.

Page 12
Promote yourself in PIQUE
performers, speakers:
Calling all SHSNY artists,

Page 8
PEEK
If it's April 1, it must be

Page 2
the new “Cosmos”?
Guess who hates

Page 1
Should we debate idiots?

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