

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

March, 2005

In this last winter month before spring brings its annual promise of rebirth, renewal and life, we turn our attention to death—assisted especially. We visit two formidable feminists from America's past, introduce two enthusiasts who may shape SHSNY's future, count Christian noses in Congress and do Christian math. We announce our very own annual awards program for America's spectacularly stupid, and offer, for your delectation, an absolutely awful pun.

Save the Date: Thursday, March 10, 6:00 p.m.

**A Secular Humanist Society of New York
Roundtable Discussion**

Physician-Assisted Suicide

**Is it the next big human rights issue?
What are the moral and ethical questions?
Is P.A.S. consistent with humanism?
Who decides?
Should New York have a
Death With Dignity law?**

Join your fellow humanists and freethinkers for a free-ranging round-table examination of this vital question, moderated by SHSNY member Wayne Whitmore, M.D.

**Thursday, March 10, 6:00 p.m.
Muhlenberg Branch Public Library
209 West 23rd Street (at 7th Ave)
3rd floor (yes elevator)
Free admission**

Directions: #1 train to 23rd & 7th, F or V to 23rd & 6th, C or E to 23rd & 8th; #23 or 20 bus to 23rd and 7th.

**WE ARE OWNERS
OF OUR OWN LIVES
Garret Keizer**

(Excerpted from "Life Everlasting: The religious right and the right to die," Harpers, February, 2005)

I am ... skeptical when [physician-assisted-suicide] is opposed in the name of the poor ... [that] the reason we should not have an option for PAS is because it might tempt us to kill off poor people.

It is not physician-assisted-suicide that poses the greatest threat to the poor and the disabled but physician-assisted eternal life: the desire of the old and the rich to avoid death at any cost, especially if the cost can be passed on to another generation or another continent. The worldwide trade in organs—nine farmers in the Indian village of Rentachintala selling their kidneys to pay off debts to the pawnbrokers who lend them money to buy seed—is but one of the more egregious examples. The trade in ultra-desirable “fresh” human ova is likely to emerge as another. We already know the countries and the classes from which they’ll be harvested.

Is anything more indicative of the vast chasm that exists between rich and poor, between a minority in surfeit and a majority in woe, than the fact that a few should lobby for deliverance from high-tech medical care while millions clamor for the basics of a first aid kit? It is a well-known statistic that with less than 5 percent of the world’s population, Americans consume a quarter of the world’s nonrenewable energy. It is considerably less well known that within that all-consuming sliver, per capita federal spending on the elderly exceeds the amount spent on children by a ratio of 11 to 1. When I was younger and more romantic, I could imagine serving the poor by dying in a revolution. Now it seems as though the most truly revolutionary thing I could do is simply to die. ...

I believe that if our democracy manages to achieve a ripe old age, our descendants will view the wall of separation between church and state as of lesser historical importance than the distinction between a citizenry and a laity—a distinction we have yet to make. Indeed, our continued use of such an ecclesiastical metaphor as “layman” suggests that we have not so much separated church and state as we have joined a different church. On one level, PAS laws only serve to further that cult. They are little more than protocols for begging a doctor’s permission. We continue to make the ancient equation between a skill at reading entrails and the prerogative of pronouncing fate. But to take a longer view, PAS rests on two principles that are central to a liberal society.

The first is that we are owners of our own lives. That there is a well-defined domain, roughly coextensive with the boundaries of our own flesh, where we are permitted to have control issues. Permitted, but not obliged—and sometimes, it seems, not even inclined. Only 36 percent of Americans have living wills. In regard to death, our attitude toward physicians remains that of a coquette: we expect the doctor to order our dinner for us, reserving the right to complain if we don’t like what shows up on our plate. Or to leave him alone and in disgrace should he turn out to have ordered something not on the menu of “acceptable medical practice.”

The second principle, without which liberal individualism always devolves into preciousness, is that we are collective owners of the culture we produce collectively. The debate over PAS is not fundamentally about the Hippocratic oath or the Ten Commandments; it is about who owns the medicine. We continue to behave as though doctors invented, patented, and produced every pill they dispense. I believe doctors are the natural custodians of medicine; I do not believe that custodianship trumps citizenship—especially when a citizen grows too frail to harm anyone but herself or even to help herself, though she may know exactly how she wishes to be helped.

And one more thing regarding the relevance of a Death with Dignity law to our democracy: we are free to try it out. We are free to take a step in that direction and then to rescind or expand that step. We are in fact free to do almost anything we wish—except to avoid the issue or deny the freedom. We stand in a place of aches and wonders, with

few discernible absolutes besides the necessity to choose and our evolving conviction that it is wrong to use a person as a thing. We can dare to walk on this ground of dubious footing, because we are holding one another up as best we can, and because it is we ourselves and not some deterministic logic that writes our civil laws. We can permit free speech and prosecute libel. We can maintain a military and forswear militarism. We can, with all due respect to ethicists who claim we can do no such thing, allow abortion and disallow infanticide, and we can do so for the simple reason that it seems like the best thing to do. We can sniff out our options and pick and choose among them, a birthright generally less appreciated by a dogmatist than by a dog.

“You are gods,” says one of the Psalms, adding that we shall all die anyway. Perhaps our best defense against the dangers of playing God (chief among them being a death less merciful than we allow to dogs), as well as our best hope of a compromise with those who would adorn our public squares with scriptures graven on tablets of stone, is to sing that verse as though we truly believed it, not in the blind credulity of any fundamentalism but with an intelligence approaching faith.

OUR DUTY IS STILL TO OUR PATIENTS

Wayne G. Whitmore, M.D.

Mystical or legal restraints on suicide have always seemed ridiculous to me as they probably do to most rational people. I felt that way even before I was willing to consider myself an atheist and an objectivist. I have no qualm with condoning physician-assisted suicide with appropriate justification (e.g.: the patient is dying painfully from incurable cancer). However, to prevent and allay fears of abuse, the circumstances must be very specific and above reproach. These should include independent confirmation of the prospective patient’s desires by people not likely to have some secondary gain from the patient dying or not dying. The patient’s desires should be known via a “Living Will” (something all of us New York State people can avail ourselves of now) or demonstrably (consciously) while competent, to both interested and disinterested parties.

I would not make this physician “skill” required training for medical students. Even though it directly violates the Hippocratic oath (“I will give no deadly medicine to any one if asked, nor suggest any such counsel”), few medical school graduates (if any — I’m not sure) take any sort of oath today, and I think that knowledge has advanced enough to change a rightfully conservative policy with regard to an esteemed “profession.” We understand certain human conditions (e.g.: quadriplegia) and terminal human illnesses (e.g.: some cancers) well enough today to predict with near certainty what the eventual course will be. Given that knowledge, physicians can assist these people in ending their lives with dignity. There are obviously ways for able-bodied people to help themselves die without resorting to gruesome, painful, or scary means, but physicians might be the best gatekeepers, in those cases where patients can’t avail themselves of the “right” that most of us take for granted.

“Life is short; art is long; opportunity fugitive; experience delusive; judgment difficult. It is the duty of the physician not only to do that which immediately belongs to him, but likewise to secure the co-operation of the sick, of those who are in attendance, and of all the external agents.” This aphorism of Hippocrates demonstrates his keen but humble intellect, which we as physicians can try to emulate. People live longer now, physicians have more experience with which to make judgments, but our duty is still to

our patients. I think that assisted suicide is a service willing physicians should be allowed to provide under clear circumstances as compassionate caretakers, to complete our patients' lives as human beings.

CARING, COMPETENT, CONSCIENTIOUS

Anonymous, M.D.

The only thing I can add to the debate is to try and put it in the proper context. Without exaggeration or embellishment, I believe that doctors, patients, and patients' families are making life and death decisions innumerable times a day across this country. Decisions to not prolong life can be mediated as simply and as subtly as by not ordering X-rays or blood tests that would demonstrate abnormalities advisable to treat if life were to be prolonged. The instances where these life-and-death decisions surface publicly under the designation of "physician-assisted suicide," in all likelihood, represent an infinitesimal portion of the whole. I believe the life and death decisions currently being made are, in the overwhelming majority of instances, being made in consultation with caring, competent, conscientious professionals. Although the system may not be perfect, I believe it is far more appropriate and causes far less harm than any legalistic approach that was designed to improve on it could be.

IT'S AN INDIVIDUAL'S RIGHT

Chic Schissel, D.D.S.

I am very much in favor of assisted suicide, prudently supervised, of course, and preferably authorized with a living will. (My wife and I both have living wills.) I think an individual has the right to decide to end his life when it becomes unendurable with no prospect of improvement. We recently watched a dear friend succumb to Parkinson's, over several excruciating years. The last year she couldn't communicate, could hardly move a muscle; she had no life quality and probably was in continuous discomfort. Her life (her agony) was prolonged by extreme and expensive life support techniques. The decision to terminate life support is a horrible challenge for a loved one. A living will, clearly stated, moderates the guilt and makes it easier.

THE DUTCH HAVE THE RIGHT IDEA

Conrad Claborne

I have always believed that quality-of-life issues are at the center of happiness or unhappiness in an individual's life. One should be able to take part in, experience and enjoy things that bring a person pleasure. In my case it's my love of music, and if I could not perform even such simple tasks as selecting what music to listen to, pick up a record and feed it in and out of a music system — not being able to do these things would cause me to seriously question continuing to live.

I have felt for a long time that the Dutch have the right idea: a "good-bye" party while the subject is still capable of enjoying it, organized by friends and relatives, to which everyone who wishes can come for the sendoff — that's a quality ending-of-life. Afterwards, whether later in the evening or the next day, the physician helps the person slip away. I think that's a far better way to run one's life and society.

INDIVIDUAL CHOICE IS NOT EUTHANASIA

Ed McCartan

Objections to physician-assisted suicide seem to stem from ancient religious attitudes—based on ignorance—that all life is sacred; “life” meaning a beating heart. Ancient religious leaders knew nothing about the functioning of the brain, but they could feel, hear, and see the heart. Current religious types cling to that in spite of what we know about the mind. The heart cannot stop pain, loss of human function, incurable disease, and loss of dignity, but stopping the heart can. This should be an individual choice; it is not euthanasia.

Michael Medved wrote that the Oscar nominations for [Clint Eastwood’s] “Million Dollar Baby” and “The Sea Inside,” which feature plots about assisted suicide ... “illustrate Hollywood’s profound, almost pathological discomfort with the traditional religiosity embraced by most of its mass audience.” ...

It’s funny that the moviemaker stirring up the fuss is an icon of the right [but who, in 1995] said he was more libertarian than conservative: “The less you mess around with people, the better off people are.” That attitude is passe in the Republican party. The Christian right thinks the more you mess around with people, the better off people are. — *Maureen Dowd in The New York Times, 3/7/05*

WHEN DEATH CALLS, CALL EPICURUS

David Voron, M.D.

Part 1 of a review of

Facing Death: Epicurus and His Critics,

by James Warren

(Reprinted from E-Skeptic #43: “Beautiful Evidence and Facing Death,” copyright Michael Shermer, 2004.)

We skeptics must face death without the consolation of a religious person’s belief in an afterlife. When our heart stops beating and our neurons stop firing, there will be no pearly gates waiting for us. We have no image of a transcendent suprahuman being to provide us with solace as the end approaches. So, when Death comes knockin’, who ya gonna call? Epicurus, the death-buster, that’s who! says James Warren, author of *Facing Death: Epicurus and His Critics*.

Epicurus (341-270 B.C.) is the founder of Epicureanism, one of the schools of thought ... that dominated philosophy during the Hellenistic Period ... beginning with the death of Alexander in 323 B.C. and ending, by convention, with the victory of Octavian over Mark Antony in 31 B.C. Today, “epicurean” means enjoying sensual pleasures and possessing sensitive and discriminating tastes. However, Epicurus himself, and Hellenistic Epicureanism in general, advocated the pursuit of simple pleasures such as friendship and aesthetic contemplation. In his *Letter to Menoeceus*, Epicurus writes:

For it is not continuous drinking and revels, nor the enjoyment of women and young boys, nor of fish and other viands that a luxurious table holds, which make for a pleasant life, but sober reasoning, which examines the motives for every choice and avoidance, and which drives away those opinions resulting in the greatest disturbance to the soul.

Among “those opinions resulting in the greatest disturbance to the soul,” according to Epicurus, were religious beliefs and the fear of death. Epicurus disputed ... popular

Greek religion, which he recognized as the source of the fear of divine judgment and eternal punishment. Warren quotes Epicurus' *Tetrapharmakos*, his fourfold remedy for these disturbances of the soul:

God should not concern us.
Death is not to be feared.
What is good is easy to obtain.
What is bad is easily avoided.

That "death is not to be feared," asserts Epicurus, can be demonstrated by rational argument. The simple summation of Epicurus' thesis is his well-known statement that "death is nothing to us" because at the moment we die—the instant we cease to exist—we experience nothing. As Warren says, "for something to be good or bad for some person, that something . . . must be perceived by that person." Death is not perceived by the individual because the cessation of life marks the cessation of all sensation, including that of physical and mental pain. Death is merely the termination of a stream of consciousness. It is unreasonable, says Epicurus, for us to be fearful of a future event that will not harm us when it occurs. "What is no trouble when it arrives is an idle worry in anticipation," Epicurus explains in his *Letter to Menoeceus*. Warren notes that Epicurus limits his thesis to the attitude he believes it is reasonable for the individual to hold regarding his or her own death, not to pain before death, or to the death of others.

Epicurus grants that it is not irrational to fear the possibility of pain prior to death, or to the experience of losing a loved one. However, if we have a dying friend or family member who approaches death with an Epicurean perspective, some of the pain of our own grief may be lifted. Additionally, the fact that "death is nothing to us," does not prevent us from recollecting with fondness pleasant memories of our loved ones. In fact, looking back allows us to edit out past painful experiences by simply choosing not to recall them.

(Part 2 of Dr. Voron's essay will appear in April PIQUE)

OUTNUMBERED 527 TO 6

John Rafferty

(Based on "Religious Affiliations of Congresspeople" in News & Views of Humanists of North Jersey, Feb, 2005)

According to a report by Americans for Religious Liberty, 54 percent of all members of the new 109th Congress are either Roman Catholics (153), Baptists (72), or Methodists (61).

The rest? 50 Presbyterians; 41 Episcopalians; 37 Jews; 24 nondenominational Protestants; 20 Lutherans; 15 Mormons; 14 nondenominational Christians. Also, 8 United Church of Christ; 5 Christian Science; 4 Eastern Orthodox; 4 Assemblies of God; 3 Unitarian Universalists; 2 African Methodist Episcopal; 2 Seventh-day Adventist; 2 Christian Reformed; 2 Disciples of Christ; 2 Church of Christ; 1 Quaker; 1 Evangelical; 1 Reorganized Latter Day Saints; 1 Evangelical Methodist; 1 Church of the Nazarene; 1 Congregationalist Baptist; 2 unaccounted for, and ...

"No religious affiliation"? Six.

So, you have to figure that when the current administration (in which we're outnumbered however-many-thousands to zip), suggests that in the name of national security America's godless be relocated to someplace like, oh, say, Vieques (not many

unexploded artillery shells left) or Molokai (the last few lepers are almost dead), the vote in Congress is a slam-dunk. Maybe we can count on the Unitarian Universalists, the Quaker and most of the Jews (don't expect any help from Joe Lieberman), but when the "Secular Safe Haven Relocation Act" is introduced, pack your toothbrush.

**FEMINISTS FROM AMERICA'S PAST
STAR AT THE SHSNY BOOK CLUB**

Donna Marxer

Comparing and contrasting recent biographies of two fascinating female freethinkers produced a lively January book club event. First, the little-known (who shouldn't be) Anne Hutchinson, who has been called "Our Founding Mother," is presented by her descendant, author Eva LaPlante in *American Jezebel*, with painstaking historical accuracy. Born in 1591 in London, Anne Marbury was the daughter of a reform Puritan clergyman, who himself was imprisoned three times for insubordination. He educated his brilliant daughter in his own image, in the classics and theology.

She married Will Hutchinson, a quiet and supportive man, apparently happily—as 16 pregnancies occurring regularly every 18 months might attest. The Hutchinsons emigrated to the Massachusetts Bay Colony, where Anne got herself into trouble with those brains of hers and the eloquence she couldn't keep to herself. No freethinker as we would know the term today, but rather a reformer within the church, she espoused an Antinomian "covenant of grace," in opposition to the conventional wisdom of the colony's church elders led by Governor John Winthrop. The nit-picking distinction between her "covenant" and the Governor's is incomprehensible to modern readers, but it was important enough to Hutchinson's conscience that she started her own meetings and Bible study in her home, with the ranks of her listeners growing to as many as 80, both men and women. And that was too much for the Governor, who engineered her trial for heresy.

Since women had no voice in those days, her ideas would not now be on record were it not for the trial in which she testified, was convicted, excommunicated and banished from the colony. She and her family went into exile where she, along with Roger Williams (although she did not get much credit for her part) formed the new Rhode Island Colony, a more liberal community. When her husband died, Anne, fearing that Rhode Island would be annexed by Massachusetts, moved to the more liberal Dutch colony of New Amsterdam at what is now Pelham, New York. There, tragically, her life was ended at 51, when she was scalped by Indians, along with six of her children.

But she achieved a kind of immortality. The bay and river on which she lived were named for her and, eventually, so was the Hutchinson River Parkway. Nathaniel Hawthorne immortalized her as well, using her as the model for Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*. Anne was a "good girl" by all reports, in spite of the Massachusetts church elders' attempts to besmirch her reputation, and Hawthorne used her rebelliousness rather than her licentiousness for his inspiration.

Fanny—Frances Wright—on the other hand, wasn't a good girl at all. Born two hundred years after Anne Hutchinson, she'd come a long way, Baby. *Fanny: A Fiction*, a novel by the witty Edmund White, is a rollicking story of two Fannys, the other being the book's "narrator," Frances Trollope, writer of romances and travel lore, mother of Anthony, historical friend of Wright and, for the conceit of this book, her biographer.

Scottish Fanny Wright was spoiled, rich, somewhat attractive, bold, and a rebel with some solid and some crackpot ideas. In love with America, she was a true freethinker in terms of religion (atheism), social progress, and freedom of all kinds, a Utopian living unfortunately under a lot of illusions. She had great ideas that were expressed but not pursued in her failed community of Nashoba, Tennessee. Later she joined Robert Owen in his New Harmony experiment, also a bust. She lacked follow-through, seeming to embrace “magical thinking,” in that she believed that something was “done” just because she had thought of it. Does that sound familiar? So history has dismissed her even more flatly than it did Anne Hutchinson. But Fanny was certainly entertaining, as “Mrs. Trollope’s” descriptions of several of Wright’s famous affairs attest, including one with the elderly Marquis de Lafayette, and maybe even one with Thomas Jefferson in his dotage.

Fanny’s adventures “as told by” the equally spirited Fanny Trollope make for a lively read, more so than the drier *American Jezebel*. For one reason, the gifted White really “takes you there.” You can shiver in the unheated American winter, smell the damp dirty clothes, envision the tobacco-spittle stains on the ladies’ skirt hems.

Review of both of these books led to a spirited round table discussion of today’s feminism, specifically: “Where’d it go?” Come join us next time. You’ll enjoy yourselves even if you haven’t read the book(s).

FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE: 1638

(Excerpted from American Jezebel, by Eve LaPlante)

These men [*the 19 who signed the original Rhode Island compact on February 2, 1638, including Anne Hutchinson’s husband Will, her brother-in-law, three of her sons, and two sons-in-law*] were determined, following [hers and] their experiences in Massachusetts, to guarantee freedom of conscience in Rhode Island. One of their first written rules upon arriving was “No person within said colony, at any time hereafter, shall be in any wise molested, punished, disquieted or called into question on matters of religion—so long as he keeps the peace.” These first Rhode Islanders valued religious liberty, a freedom that, in large part because of them, the constitutions of Rhode Island and the U.S. would later proclaim.

TONY SOPRANO, MEET THE REBBE

John Rafferty

The New York Times of February 1 reports that “the Orthodox Union, the country’s largest and most powerful certifier of kosher products for consumers ...” has given “a coveted seal of approval” to Triaminic, the children’s cough syrup. It’s the first non-prescription, over-the-counter medicine ever to win approval from the Union. But it won’t be the last.

“Marketing experts,” the article explained, “said getting a kosher certification had become a shrewd way for a company to gain market share” among the estimated 15 to 20 million Americans who will buy kosher products this year. Now the makers of other OTC medicines are lining up to pay to have their products tested and certified kosher by the Union. Because if they don’t, they’ll be shut out of an \$8.5 billion market.

Sort of puts the Orthodox Union—an outfit run by a bunch of old guys in black hats who thank G-d every morning that they're not women—in the catbird seat, doesn't it? Get our certification, or lose lots of business.

And how is that different from Tony Soprano's organization suggesting to a restaurant owner that he have his linens supplied and garbage picked up by Tony's own vendors ... or lose even more than business?

A difference in degree, maybe, but not in kind.

CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION: MATH

(From Precalculus for Christian Schools, a text published by Bob Jones University, forwarded by Colin Rafferty.)

If you are given the length of two sides and the angle measure opposite one of those sides, you can use the law of sines to solve the triangle. However, this does not always determine a unique triangle. As a result, it is called the ambiguous case. "Ambiguous" means open to multiple interpretations. Some people say that you can interpret the Bible in any way that you want. However, there is no ambiguity in the Bible.

CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION: SCIENCE

(From the website of Bob Jones University, bju.edu, as reported in The Humanist Monthly, newsletter of the Capital District (NY) Humanist Society, Feb, 2005)

The Christian teaching of science requires not only a good command of basic subject matter, but also the spiritual perception to discern truth from error in a great variety of contexts. As a prerequisite for this, the Christian teacher of science must be thoroughly grounded in the Word of God. Moreover, he must have firmly implanted in his mind a biblical framework of truth, which serves as the touchstone for his decision making.

True science will fit that framework; anything that fails to fit the biblical framework must be rejected as erroneous.

AND THE DUMBTH AWARD GOES TO ...

Star Jones, the egregious TV talk-show personality and shoe saleswoman who has said that atheists are not qualified to be president, and who mistakenly believes that the oath of office includes the words "so help me God," has topped even herself in mind-boggling self-absorption. On her show—*The View*—in January, rather than focusing on or sympathizing with the quarter of a million people killed by the Christmas-week tsunami, Ms. Jones claimed that she was "blessed" by God, Who, she implied, delayed the disaster until after her November honeymoon vacation in the Maldives.

So, *whew*, Almighty God spared our Star by just a month and a thousand miles. Praise His name on network TV! And pay no attention to those 250,000 unimportant dead who don't have their own talk shows.

In 1992, PIQUE Editor Warren Allen Smith proposed that SHSNY give Dumbth Awards to "those who deserve to have their illogic pointed out." Dumbth? It's the coinage of secular humanist and humorist Steve Allen, and the title of his book, *Dumbth, the Lost Art of Thinking, With 101 Ways to Reason Better and Improve Your Mind*.

So, who gets a Dumbth Award? Mr. Smith suggested, as an example, "a person who falls five floors down an elevator shaft, is rescued by a policeman who crawls into the dark hole unaided, is saved by EMS personnel who rush to the scene, is operated on by a

skilled surgeon, is nursed back to health by therapists, and who then credits God with “a miracle.”

Or ... a self-centered TV “Star” who thanks God for timing a regional disaster so as not to spoil her vacation.

Let’s revive the SHSNY Dumbth Awards!

And the first nominee for the 2005 SHSNY Dumbth Award is ... (cue drum roll) ... *Star Jones!*

Send *your* nomination(s)—a person, a group, a company, a country, and include the reason-why—via snail mail to the P.O. box, or email to the website. The nominating process is open to every reader of PIQUE, and all year until December 1. We’ll poll readers in December, and in January 2006, we’ll announce to the press and present the attractive horse’s-ass award pictured here to the unlucky (and probably unwilling) winner.

Let’s do it right, with a gala January membership night-out event, *The SHSNY Dumbth Awards Dinner*, in a Manhattan restaurant (any suggestions?).

SOME MORE USEFUL WEBSITES

You can use www.govtrack.us to keep track of specific legislation, of any of thousands of political subjects, and of the doings and sayings of your (or any other) Representative and Senators. Users can also have GovTrack send them regular emails about it all.

And/or try thomas.loc.gov (no www prefix, and named in honor of Thomas Jefferson), the Library of Congress’s legislation-tracking site. The House of Representatives is at www.house.gov, and the Senate at www.senate.gov. You can write directly to any elected official—federal, state, or local—at www.congress.org.

www.factcheck.org—a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania—has as its motto “Holding Politicians Accountable.” An eyeball survey of the articles posted supports their claim to non-partisanship.

Are you a news junkie? www.newseum.org is the site of the “Interactive Museum of News,” and offers you the front pages of over 300 newspapers every day, with links to the papers themselves, of course.

For fun, try www.apatheticagnostic.com, the home page of The Universal Church Triumphant of the Apathetic Agnostic, motto “We don’t know, and we don’t care.” In their own words, “This site deals with the doctrine of Apathetic Agnosticism in a combination of total seriousness and sophomoric humor.”

FISH STORY

In the vast ocean, two prawns—one named Justin and the other Christian—were forever in fear of being eaten by sharks. Finally Justin said to Christian, “I’m fed up with being a prawn, I wish I was a shark.”

A great cod suddenly appeared and said, “Your wish is granted,” and instantly Justin turned into a shark. Horrified, Christian immediately swam away, afraid of being eaten by his old mate.

Time passed, and life as a shark was lonely; all Justin’s old mates swam for their lives whenever he came close. Then, while swimming alone one day he saw the mysterious cod again and he begged to be changed back. The cod waved a fin and ... it happened! A miracle! With tears of joy in his little prawn eyes, and eager to put things

right with his old friends, Justin swam back to Christian's home and banged joyously on the door.

"Christian," he shouted, "it's me, Justin, your old friend! Come out!"

Christian replied, "No way man, you'll eat me. You're a shark now, the enemy, and I won't be tricked into being your dinner."

"No, I'm not a shark anymore," Justin shouted back. "That was the old me. I've changed ... I've found Cod! I'm a prawn again, Christian."

SHSNY ELECTION — THIRD NOTICE

The election for our Board of Directors will take place this month. Ballots will be mailed to all dues-paid members March 15, and returned ballots are due April 15. The new 3-year Board term will begin May 1. Current Board members Conrad Claborne, Arthur Harris, Donna Marxer, and John Rafferty will stand for re-election, as will two new candidates, whose statements follow.

Jane Bertoni

I'm a humanist and a secularist, always have been, and I want to help promote and spread those philosophies, which are needed more than ever in America's current climate of insidious anti-intellectualism and retreat from rationalism. I've lived in New York since the late 50's, worked in social services, then became a teacher of English as a Second Language until I retired.

I'm a mother of three and a grandmother of five; I have a stake in—and care deeply about—the next generation of Americans and the future of my country. We are in danger of losing our most basic freedoms to the new Puritans who are running our government and perverting our media. Those of us who care, those of us who want a better America and a better world, must do what we can to help freedom, rationality and secular humanism to grow, starting right here at SHSNY.

Remo Cosentino

I am alarmed by the doubtful morality of Bush & Co. eagerly exporting "democracy" to the rest of the world, while subverting democracy at home, shilling "faith based initiatives" while restricting our right of free speech, especially when we dare criticize his war. To sit back and do nothing while the political climate in our country deteriorates toward a new autocratic theocracy is unacceptable.

The "founding fathers"—more eulogized than understood—were products of the Enlightenment, a new conception of the nature of man, supported by a belief in reason and free will — humanism. Humanists have an obligation to fight bigotry and religious fundamentalism, and reaffirm what patriots from the founding fathers to the "band of brothers" fought to deed us: natural reason and natural rights, political equality, tolerance, civil liberties, and the dignity of man.

SHSNY BOOK CLUB SPRING SCHEDULE

EcoHumanism

Sunday evening, April 10, 6:00 p.m.

Edited by Robert B. Tapp, Dean of the Humanist Institute—who will attend our meeting—this collection of essays has been called “vital to the agenda for a future of life on planet Earth.”

From the *EcoHumanism* book jacket: “Contributors to this important new work, all humanists in the naturalistic tradition, show that the humanist worldview has much to offer environmentalism. Since humanists are committed to working for a global community in which all can flourish, their concern about ecological degradation rivals that of the environmentalists. ... Humanists do not hesitate to use the best scientific information and technology to reclaim the natural world and other species while ensuring the welfare of all human beings.”

We’ll meet at 6:00 p.m., Sunday, April 10, at Donna Marxer and John Rafferty’s apartment, 141 East 56 Street (10F) between Lexington and Third. Please call 212-371-8733 or e-mail john@rafferty.net if you plan to come.

The End Of Faith, by Sam Harris

Thursday evening, May 12, 7:00 p.m.

Sam Harris’s new *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*, is “an important book, on a topic that should not be shielded from the crucible of human reason” (Natalie Angier, *The New York Times Book Review*) ... “it will strike a chord with anyone who has ever pondered the irrationality of religious faith and its cruel, murderous consequences” (*The Economist*). “Harris writes with such verve that even skeptical readers will find it hard to put down” (*San Francisco Chronicle*). “A must read for all rational people” (Alan Dershowitz).

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Q: How many Bush Administration officials does it take to screw in a light bulb?

A: None. There is nothing wrong with the light bulb; its conditions are improving every day. Any reports of its lack of incandescence are delusional spin from the liberal news media. That light bulb has served honorably, and anything you say undermines its lighting effect.

Why do you hate freedom?

Political language ... is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind. — *George Orwell*

AND FINALLY, THE END-OF-TIMES GOOD NEWS

Once the Rapture has occurred and the saved are off the planet, the Democrats will regain both the House and the Senate. — From *America (The Book) - A Citizen’s Guide to Democracy Inaction*.