

# PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

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April, 2012

A war on religion in America? Baloney. A war on women? Yep, in Arizona and Texas, and in the diocese of New York no less than in Kabul. Herein, women on “our side” rally atheists, define godless morality, and tweet Einstein (almost). We revisit infectious *mohels*, hear from Dawkins, Tyson, Pat Robertson (*who?*), and Doonesbury. We welcome back our Dumbth Champion and, of course, take a side trip to April Foolishness. But first, let’s hear it for the grand old man of humanism. – JR

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## NEO-HUMANISM: HUMAN VALUES AND PLANETARY HUMANISM

Paul Kurtz

(From remarks made in Paris, France, 1/23/2012)

I am delighted to be here with you in Paris for this special meeting of UNESCO, organized by Valerii Kuvakin and the Russian Humanist Society. I am joined by my colleagues from the Institute for Science and Human Values, Norm Allen and Toni Van Pelt. As the name implies, we are concerned with this question of human values, and particularly their status in the contemporary world – what I have called the post-post-modern age.

What I think is rather unique about humanism today as a first principle is that “we are *citoyens du monde*”; that is, citizens of the world community, members of the human species over and beyond our gender, national, racial, or religious affiliations, which all too often have separated human beings in the past. We are planetary dwellers before we are Americans or Russians, Chinese or Africans, ancients or moderns. We are not confined by our planet or solar system, but are capable of exploring galactic space.

Our true identity is universal; we are not defined by the isms of the past, as Christian or Jew, Hindu or Muslim, nonbeliever or believer. Rather we are defined by our humanity, which is open-ended, and as such we share a common set of obligations to the planetary community of which we are each an integral part. Our humanity (human, not male or female *per se*) is our essential characteristic.

This entails the potentiality to actualize the highest potentialities of which we are capable for ourselves and our fellow and sister human beings, past, present and future, our preservation and fulfillment.

At this meeting we are investigating this question of the future of humanism. In the current discussion of the

“new atheism”, one point is often totally overlooked by most commentators: the positive dimensions of unbelief.

Conservative religious critics have deplored the denigration of religion as an assault on the moral order and social fabric. They ask, “What does secular humanism have to offer?” I respond with Neo-Humanism, a new term I have introduced to highlight secular humanism’s affirmative ethical principles and values. Indeed, the founding document of the Institute for Science and Human Values is the “Neo-Humanist Statement of Secular Values and Principles”, which we released in 2010. This document presents a forward-thinking blueprint for the application of humanistic values at the global level. It has been endorsed by over 100 leading scientists and intellectuals.

May I submit that the term Neo-Humanism best describes a new posture, which aims to be inclusive and respond to the critics of unbelief:

1. Neo-humanists are skeptical of traditional theism. They may be atheists, agnostics, or even dissenting members of a church or temple. They think the traditional concept of God is an illusion. They reject such writings as the Bible, the Qur’an, and the Book of Mormon as divine revelations. Their skepticism of the ancient creeds reflects the light of scientific or philosophical critiques of the arguments for God – or, more recently, the scientific examination of the sources of the “sacred texts”.

They also criticize the moral absolutes derived from these ancient texts, viewing them as the expressions of pre-modern civilizations – though they may believe that some of their moral principles deserve to be appreciated in order to understand their cultural heritages. Nevertheless, they consider traditional religion’s focus on salvation in the next life an abandonment of efforts to improve this life, here and now. They firmly defend the separation of religion and the state and consider freedom of conscience and the right of

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Individual membership \$40 per year; Family membership \$65; Subscription only \$30.

Articles published in PIQUE are archived in <http://www.shsny.org>. They may be reprinted, in full or in part, in other newsletters. The URL (<http://www.shsny.org>) should be referenced. SHSNY is an Affiliated Local Group of the Council for Secular Humanism, and a Charter Chapter of the American Humanist Association.

dissent vital. They deplore the view of the subservience of women to men, the repression of sexuality, the defense of theocracy, and the denial of democratic human rights.

2. Distinctively, neo-humanists look to science and reason as the most reliable guide to knowledge, and they wish to extend the methods of science to all areas of human endeavor. They believe that critical thinking and the methods of reflective intelligence should guide our behavior. Neo-humanists appreciate the arts as well as the sciences, and they draw upon the literature of human experience for inspiration. Neo-humanists, however, seek objective methods of corroborating truth claims, not poetic metaphor or intuition.

3. Neo-humanists are uniquely committed to a set of humanist values and principles, including the civic virtues of democracy and the toleration of diverse lifestyles. They cherish individual freedom and celebrate human creativity and fulfillment, happiness and well-being, the values of the open pluralistic society, the right of privacy, and the autonomy, dignity, and value of each person. Neo-humanists are no less concerned with social justice and the common good, environmentalism, and planetary ethics.

They insist that human beings are responsible for their own destinies and that they need to use intelligence and good will to solve problems. They attempt, wherever possible, to negotiate differences rationally and to work out compromises using science, reason, and humanist values.

Neo-humanism rejects theism and affirms the secular outlook. It is broad enough to encompass atheism, agnosticism, and humanist ethical values. It is a large enough mansion to include both nonreligious humanists and those who consider humanism to function religiously in so far as it celebrates human ideals and values. Neo-humanists do not believe in God, yet they wish to do good.

But if this moral outlook is to prevail, then Neo-humanists need to concentrate on improving the things of this world rather than simply combating the illusions of supernaturalism.

Accordingly, the central question is whether a new form of planetary humanism can be developed in which humans are at last liberated from the constraints of ancient fears and moral cowardice, but in which authentic human aspirations can be realized—if not for all time, at least for the foreseeable future.

## **SAY A PRAYER FOR EXOBIOLOGY STUDIES**

**Stanley Schmidt**

*(Excerpted from Mr. Schmidt's editorial in a recent issue of Analog, forwarded by Mike Tuchman)*

While watching a recent documentary on the prospects for extraterrestrial life, my wife Joyce (who is quite interested in the subject but also has a keen sense of irony) commented on how remarkable it is that exobiologists get paid to study a subject that they aren't even sure exists.

I agreed, but I also pointed out that it was nothing new: theologians have been doing it for millennia.

## **AMERICAN ATHEISTS MUST DEFINE THEMSELVES - Part 2**

**Susan Jacoby**

*(Excerpted from the washingtonpost.com/blogs/spirited-atheist, 12/28/2011. This is the second half of Ms. Jacoby's valedictory "Spirited Atheist" column in The Washington Post. Part 1 appeared in March PIQUE.)*

The belief that religious institutions have the right to feed at the government trough while rejecting any government rules is the glue of the lobbying alliance between the Catholic bishops and right-wing evangelical Protestant leaders – an odd coupling that has never before existed in American history. ...

Nothing could be further from religious liberty as originally conceived by both the secularists and the people of liberal religion (mainly Baptists, liberal Congregationalists on the road to Unitarianism, and Quakers) who wrote the founding documents for this nation. All of these religious believers would have been horrified at the idea of accepting government money to underwrite their beliefs. That is why they joined with freethinkers like James Madison and Thomas Jefferson to pass the 1786 Virginia Act for Establishing Religious Freedom. The first state law to officially draw a line between government and religious institutions was written when religious conservatives in Virginia attempted to tax citizens for Christian teaching in public schools. This act would become the template for the federal Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

What religious liberty has traditionally meant in the United States is the right of all to believe and proselytize as they wish without government interference or favoritism. It also means the right of minority religions and of those who do not believe in any religion to be free from harassment by a state-favored religious majority.

Language distortion bolsters every aspect of religion as the default position. Twenty years ago, I could be reasonably sure, if I opened a fundraising appeal mentioning religious liberty on the envelope, that the notice came from a group like Americans United for Separation of Church and State or the ACLU. Now such appeals come from the likes of Focus on the Family and the Catholic hierarchy. They have no shame, and they want religious liberty only for themselves.

If secularists are to succeed in making any inroads on the default position of religion, they must reclaim the original definition of religious liberty, as exemplified by those who passed Virginia's 1786 law.

There is another related, equally important task for the secular movement today. We must reclaim the language of passion and emotion from the religious right, which loves to portray atheists as bloodless, "professorial" (the word always applied to Obama) devotees of abstract scientific principles that have nothing to do with real human lives.

This misguided but, again, ideologically useful portrait of atheists appeared frequently in the patronizing eulogies for Christopher Hitchens offered by religious believers

who had fallen under the spell of his voice and his prose. Ross Douthaut, writing in the *Times*, argued that “many Christian readers felt that in Hitchens’s case there had somehow been a terrible mix-up, and that a writer who loved the King James Bible ... surely belonged with them, rather than with the bloodless prophets of a world lit only by Science”.

This is the sort of mindless obeisance to received opinion propagated by the missionaries for religion as the default position. Confronted by an atheist who does not fit their stereotype, their conclusion is not that the stereotype is awry but that the atheist, deep down, must not really be a true atheist. Because everyone knows that atheists (never honest Christian folk) are bloodless elitists who substitute science with a capital “S” for God with a capital “G”.

One reason why believers couldn’t quite dismiss Hitchens was that he did write and speak with the language of passion and emotion, as Robert Green Ingersoll, “the Great Agnostic” did in the 19th century and Thomas Paine in the 18th. I believe that the most crucial task for secularists today is to lay claim to the heritage that unites passion and reason. ...

Let us talk about showing “the heavens more just” [as Lear says]. This is the essence of humanist secularism and humanist atheism and it must be offered not as a defensive response to the religiously correct but as a robust creed worthy of the world’s first secular government.

It is also time to revive the evocative and honorable word “freethinker,” with its insistence that Americans think for themselves instead of relying on default opinion. The combination of “free” and “thought” embodies every ideal that secularists hold out to a nation founded not on dreams of justice in heaven but on the best human hopes for a more just earth.

## CATHOLIC SHARIA

Mitchell S. Gilbert

*(Excerpted from “It’s Not Muslims Who Are Trying To Impose Their Religion On Everyone: It’s The Catholic Church”, on [addictinginfo.org](http://addictinginfo.org), 3/7/2012, forwarded by Gretchen Robinson.)*

Last Saturday, Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan, archbishop of New York and president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, told Catholics: “It is a freedom of religion battle. It is not about contraception. It is not about women’s health. We’re talking about an unwarranted, unprecedented, radical intrusion” into “a church’s ability to teach, serve and sanctify on its own.”

The more I engage, challenge and debate sensitive issues of the day with social conservatives, the more aware I become of how authoritarian governments and religious institutions obtain power and impose their will on others.

And make no mistake about it, religious conservatives in the United States are trying to impose their values and doctrine on the rest of us. No, they won’t try to achieve such objective by telling us that abortion, marriage equality and contraceptives are sinful and against the will of God;

that sanctimonious strategy would backfire on them. They are doing it in a much more sinister and deceptive way: they are suggesting that by not legislating and implementing their beliefs the rest of us are guilty of denying them “religious freedom”. After all, the best defense is a good offense and the best offense is to claim to be “the victim”.

In a commentary entitled, “Imposing ‘Sharia’: Roman Catholic”, (Huffington Post), Rabbi Arthur Waskow astutely observes that:

*“During the last few weeks, we have seen an outrageous attempt to impose sharia law on the U.S. government and the American public. NOT Muslim sharia; it is Roman Catholic ‘sharia’ about contraception that the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has been trying to impose on Americans of all faiths and beliefs who happen to work at a Catholic-sponsored hospital or university.”*

The irony of this effort to portray Catholicism as under attack is that it comes in the shadow of political and social conservative efforts to promote the myth that all American Muslims would ultimately like ‘Sharia’, Muslim law, to be the law of the land.

Are Catholic clergy still free to preach Church doctrine to their congregations?

Are Americans who subscribe to Roman Catholicism free to not have abortions; not practice birth control; not participate in same-sex marriages?

Why should a non-Catholic working in a Catholic school or hospital be denied his/her religious freedom and civil right to reproductive choice, contraceptives or same-sex marriage?

Considering that a majority of Catholics surveyed indicate that a) they practice birth control and, b) they support President Obama’s efforts to include contraceptives and abortion procedures in medical coverage provided to employees of the Church, could it be that what the Roman Catholic Church is really trying to do is use the U.S. Government to impose Church doctrine on Catholics who won’t follow it voluntarily? Or worse, is Rabbi Waskow right; is the Church trying to impose its doctrine on us?

## ARIZONA: ON THE FRONT LINES OF THE WAR ON WOMEN

### 1. Fire the Sluts for Using Contraception

*(Excerpted from [Huffingtonpost.com](http://Huffingtonpost.com), 3/15/12)*

Arizona legislators have advanced an unprecedented bill that would require women who wish to have their contraception covered by their health insurance plans to prove to their employers that they are taking it to treat medical conditions. The bill also makes it easier for Arizona employers who have objections to artificial contraception to fire an employee if she uses insurance-covered birth control to prevent pregnancy.

Under current law, health plans in Arizona that cover other prescription medications must also cover contraception. House Bill 2625, which the state House of Representatives

passed earlier this month and the Senate Judiciary Committee endorsed on Monday, repeals that law and allows any employer to refuse to cover contraception that will be used “for contraceptive, abortifacient, abortion or sterilization purposes”. If a woman wants the cost of her contraception covered, she has to “submit a claim” to her employer providing evidence of a medical condition, such as endometriosis or polycystic ovarian syndrome, that can be treated with birth control.

Moreover, according to the American Civil Liberties Union, the law would give Arizona employers the green light to fire a woman upon finding out that she took birth control for the purpose of preventing pregnancy.

The sponsor of the bill told the committee that it is intended to protect the First Amendment right to religious liberty. “I believe we live in America”, said Majority Whip Debbie Lesko (R-Glendale), who sponsored the bill.

“We don’t live in the Soviet Union. So, government should not be telling the organizations or mom-and-pop employers to do something against their moral beliefs.”

## **2. Lie to Them About Their Pregnancies**

*(Excerpted from “AZ Senate Passes Bill Allowing Doctors To Not Inform Women Of Prenatal Issues To Prevent Abortions,” by Stephen D. Foster, Jr., Alternet, 3/7/12)*

It’s called a “wrongful birth” bill and it’s all about preventing women from having an abortion, even if it kills them. The Arizona Senate passed a bill this week that gives doctors a free pass to not inform pregnant women of prenatal problems because such information could lead to an abortion.

In other words, doctors can intentionally keep critical health information from pregnant women and can’t be sued for it. According to the *Arizona Capitol Times*, “the bill’s sponsor is Republican Nancy Barto of Phoenix. She says allowing the medical malpractice lawsuits endorses the idea that if a child is born with a disability, someone is to blame”. So Republicans are banning lawsuits against doctors who keep information from pregnant women so as to prevent them from choosing to have an abortion.

This bill is actually more disturbing than the Republicans seem to realize. Giving doctors such a free pass risks the lives of both the expectant mother and the fetus she carries. Prenatal care isn’t just for discovering birth defects and disabilities. It is also for discovering life threatening issues such as an ectopic pregnancy which often requires an abortion to save the life of the mother. With rare exceptions, ectopic pregnancies are not viable anyway, but Republicans are allowing anti-abortion doctors to keep life threatening information from pregnant women all because they are obsessed with stopping any and all abortions.

Women may not know they have a life threatening condition until they die on the emergency room table. And the doctor couldn’t be sued. ...

The Arizona Senate is only putting more lives in jeopardy. They might as well call this the “Let Women Die” bill.

Even though they grow weary and wear themselves out with child-bearing, it does not matter; let them go on bearing children until they die. That is what they are there for. – *Martin Luther, Works 12:94*

## **“DOONESBURY” AND THE TEXAS TRANSVAGINAL EXAM FUNNIES**

The Doonesbury comic strip is carried in 1400 newspapers across the country, including the *New York Daily News*. A number of those papers (not including the *News*) chose not to run the March 12-17 sequence, or to run it on their OpEd pages rather than the Comics section (mustn’t infect “Garfield”). Why? Author/cartoonist Gary Trudeau’s biting satire of the new transvaginal examination law that right-wing Texas legislators have made mandatory for any woman seeking an abortion in that benighted state.

If you don’t read Doonesbury in print or free online (*Why not?*), here’s the week’s plotline.

**Monday:** A young woman arrives for her pre-termination sonogram, is told to take a seat in the Shaming Room, that a middle-aged male Texas state legislator will be right with her.

**Tuesday:** The politician asks her if this is her first visit to the center, she replies No, that she’s been using the contraceptive services for some time. He says, “I see. Do your parents know you’re a slut?”

**Wednesday:** A doctor reads a state-approved script about the exam process to her. Why a script, she asks? “Because”, he continues to read, “your doctor cannot be trusted to do so.”

**Thursday:** In the stirrups, she is telling a nurse that she doesn’t want a transvaginal exam. Doctor says, “Sorry miss, you’re first trimester. The male Republicans who run Texas require that all abortion seekers be examined with a 10-inch Shaming Wand.”

She asks “Will it hurt?” Nurse says, “Well, it’s not comfortable, honey. But Texas feels you should have thought of that.” Doctor says, “By the authority invested in me by the GOP base, I thee rape.”

**Friday:** Doctor is explaining that the Texas GOP requires her to have an intimate encounter with her fetus. He begins describing it to her. Last panel, he says, “Shall I describe its hopes and dreams?” She replies, “If it wants to be the next Rick Perry, I’ve made up my mind.”

**Saturday:** Back in the reception area, she asks where she goes now for the actual abortion. Receptionist tells her there’s a 24-hour waiting period: “The Republican Party is hoping you get caught in a shame spiral and change your mind.” She says, “A final indignity.” Receptionist replies, “Not quite. Here’s your bill.”

Why extremists always focus on women remains a mystery to me. But they all seem to. It doesn’t matter what country they’re in or what religion they claim. They all want to control women. – *Hilary Clinton*

## ANOTHER DEATH BY MOHEL

Dennis Middlebrooks

[Ed: Mr. Middlebrooks is a former President of SHSNY]

As per the March 3 *New York Daily News*, a two-week-old Orthodox Jewish boy died in a Brooklyn hospital last September after contracting herpes during the religious circumcision ritual known as a *bris*. The cause of death was “disseminated herpes simplex virus Type 1, complicating ritual circumcision with oral suction”.

That “oral suction” is a centuries-old ultra-Orthodox ritual known as *metzitzah b’peh*, a barbaric practice in which the circumciser (known as a *mohel*) removes blood from the circumcision wound with his mouth – a practice city health officials criticize as posing “inherent risks” for infants.

The *Daily News* article noted that in 2005 another baby boy died in Rockland County in a similar way. In 2004, three infants circumcised by Rabbi Yitzchok Fischer were determined to have contracted herpes through this method. One died.

It is not clear who broke the new story of the Brooklyn infant who died. Not surprisingly, New York City officials have declined to comment. Given the bloc-voting power of the Orthodox community, the city probably would have been delighted had this sad incident never come to the public’s attention.

And *atheists* are held in the lowest regard by the American people?

**Reprinted from October, 2005 PIQUE:**

### MAYOR BLOOMBERG SUCKS UP TO NEW YORK’S RELIGIOUS RIGHT

John Rafferty

Since February, *mohel* Yitzchok Fischer, who is also an Orthodox rabbi, has been under court order not to perform *metzitzah b’peh* – the practice of sucking blood to clean the circumcision wound after the foreskin is removed from the penis of baby boys – while the city’s health department investigates whether he spread Type-1 herpes to at least three infants (he almost certainly did) – one of whom died.

But, as *The New York Times* reported August 26, “the city’s intervention has angered many Orthodox leaders ...” and Health Commissioner Thomas R. Frieden, being (probably) unintentionally funny, said, “This is a very delicate area, so to speak.”

There is nothing funny, however, about the way politicians in New York and New Jersey have caved in to the Orthodox leaders who tell tens of thousands of their followers exactly how and for whom to vote.

“Pressure from Orthodox leaders on the issue”, the *Times* reported, “led Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and health officials to meet with them on August 11. The mayor’s comments on his radio program the next day seemed meant to soothe all parties and not upset a group that can be a formidable voting bloc: ‘We’re going to do a study, and make sure that everybody is safe and at the same time, it is

not the government’s business to tell people how to practice their religion.’

“The health department, after the meeting, reiterated that it did not intend to ban or regulate oral suction. But Dr. Frieden has said that the city is taking this approach partly because any broad rule would be virtually unenforceable. ... [and that] the department regarded herpes transmission via oral suction as ‘somewhat inevitable to occur as long as this practice continues, if at a very low rate.’”

Yeah, it’s only one kid dead so far, and, what the hell, we’ll do a study.

Outside the city, the *Times* continued, “the state health department retracted a request it had made to Rabbi Fischer to stop the practice. And in New Jersey, where Rabbi Fischer has done some of his 12,000 circumcisions, the health authorities have been silent.”

And how did those Orthodox leaders Bloomberg met with respond to his (forgive me) sucking up?

“The Orthodox Jewish community will continue the practice that has been practiced for over 5,000 years,” said Rabbi David Niederman of the United Jewish Organization in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, after the meeting with the mayor. “We do not change. And we will not change.”

**Update:** And seven years later, the kids are still dying.

### SUCK-UPS NOTWITHSTANDING, WHY WE LIVE IN NEW YORK #71

The Missouri Hall of Fame has no place for native sons and daughters T.S. Eliot, Maya Angelou, Chuck Berry, or Yogi Berra. Nor even Jean Harlow or Langston Hughes. Ditto Jesse James and Calamity Jane.

But the man in sole charge of admissions to the Kansas City shrine, one Steven Tilley (no relation to *The New Yorker’s* Eustace, we think), Republican Speaker of the Missouri House, is enshrining – No, really, *him?* – Rush Limbaugh.

Howls of protest from women and other human beings? Of course. But, says the unflappable and apparently terminally clueless Mr. Tilley, “By any measurement he’s a famous Missourian, and in my part of the state we’re proud of him.”

### A BLOG WORTH YOUR TIME

John Rafferty

I have promoted bigthink.com in these pages before, but I think a specific feature of that estimable site is worth humanists’ notice. It is “Daylight Atheism”, which ...

... *advocates secular humanism as a positive, uplifting and joyous worldview that deserves a larger following and wider recognition in the marketplace of ideas. Original posts and essays explore atheism and humanism, science, politics, philosophy, and the ever-present threat of fundamentalist religious darkness.*

Sound good? It is, and it’s all reachable at bigthink.com /blogs/daylight-atheism. Subscribe to bigthink (*free!*) and you’ll receive it automatically a couple of times a week.

## SHSNY CALENDAR: APRIL - MAY 2012

### SHSNY DAY OF REASON CELEBRATION BRUNCH SUNDAY, APRIL 29, at 12 Noon, at PETE'S TAVERN, 129 East 18 Street (at Irving Place) Let's eat, drink, and discuss ...

**A Day of Reason in New York, 2013, Proclamation**  
Let's get the City Council to make it official! How?

**Secular Humanism on New York Cable-TV**  
What should a weekly SHSNY show be/do/look like?

**Let's make an SHSNY Viral Video**  
Starring *you* ... and let's start today!

Proclaim and celebrate the National Day of Reason (not prayer) at historic Pete's Tavern, enjoy a sumptuous (and reasonable) brunch, and contribute your ideas to three exciting new SHSNY projects.

#### **Brunch is \$25**

for your choice of 11 entrees, one drink (Bloody Mary, Mimosa, etc.), coffee or tea, including all taxes and tips.

#### **PRE-PAYMENT IS STRONGLY ADVISED!**

The room only holds 50, and this event will be a sellout!

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SHSNY, PO Box 7661, FDR Station, New York, NY 10150-7661.

Questions? Call 212-308-2165, and leave a call-back number.

#### **END-OF-LIFE LIBERTY:**

***Advances & Gains in Freedom***  
**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 4, 7 p.m.**  
**NY Society for Ethical Culture**  
**2 West 64 St (Ceremonial Hall)**

**B**arbara Coombs Lee, President of Compassion & Choices, will review current rights of people at the end of life, how those rights are expanding, and what everyone needs to know about their right to a peaceful and dignified death on their own terms.

Admission is free. Reception after.

#### **PLANNING AHEAD**

The *usual* schedule of regular SHSNY monthly events is:  
**Book Club: First Thursday**  
at the Community Church of NY.  
**Movie Night: Second Monday**  
at Stone Creek Lounge.  
**Brunch: Third Sunday**  
at BXL East Bistro.  
**Great Lectures: Fourth Tuesday**  
at Stone Creek Lounge.  
*More info:* [www.shsny.org](http://www.shsny.org) and  
at [humanism.meetup.com/515](http://humanism.meetup.com/515);  
[reasonablenewyork.org/](http://reasonablenewyork.org/)  
and 212-308-2165

**MONDAY, APRIL 9, 7:00 p.m.**  
**SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT**  
**Stone Creek Bar & Lounge**  
**140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)**  
**"CRIMES AND MISDEMEANORS"**

**M**aybe the best Woody Allen (okay, maybe "Annie Hall"), this 1989 film weaves together two so-different stories – "playing heavy drama against often uproarious comedy" – and ties them together beautifully at the end. Martin Landau, a respected professional, is caught in a web of adultery, murder, and guilt ("the eye of God"). Allen himself plays an unhappy documentarian wooing Mia Farrow while making a film about an insufferably self-centered TV producer (Alan Alda). With Angelica Huston, Sam Waterston, Jerry Orbach, and Daryl Hannah.

Yes, hilarious, *and* thought-provoking, so the after-film conversation should be great!

*SHSNY Movie Night is FREE.*

Check out the menu and prices at [www.stonecreeknyc.com](http://www.stonecreeknyc.com)

**SUNDAY, APRIL 15, 12 NOON**  
**OUR MONTHLY**  
**CASUAL SUNDAY BRUNCH**  
**GET-TOGETHER**

**at BXL East, 210 East 51 St.**

**W**e'll meet just east of 3rd Ave for outstanding Belgian fare, with dishes ranging from \$7 to \$16, and prix-fixe Sunday Brunch (including a drink) for \$18. Check it out at [bxlcafe.pregraphic.com/](http://bxlcafe.pregraphic.com/)

Everyone interested in getting together with 15-20 or more like-minded humanists and rationalists for good grub (huge selection of beers!) and lively talk in a charming East-side setting is welcome.

*Bring friends!*

## SHSNY CALENDAR: APRIL - MAY 2012

**SHSNY BOOK CLUB**  
**THURSDAY, APRIL 5, 6:30 pm**  
**in the front room of**  
**THE COMMUNITY CHURCH**  
**OF NEW YORK**

**28 East 35 St. (Park-Mad)**  
(3 doors West of the church - red door)

**We'll discuss**  
**THE BETTER ANGELS**  
**OF OUR NATURE:**  
**Why Violence has Declined**  
**Part 3 (Sections 8-10)**  
**by Steven Pinker**

Our final meeting devoted to this exploration of the essence of human nature, mixing psychology and history to provide a remarkable picture of an increasingly nonviolent world. The key, Pinker explains, is to understand our intrinsic motives – the inner demons that incline us toward violence and the better angels that steer us away – and how changing circumstances have allowed our better angels to prevail, exploding fatalist myths about humankind's inherent violence and the curse of modernity.

Join the discussion and see if you agree. – *Kindle edition available.*

**SHSNY BOOK CLUB**  
**THURSDAY, MAY 3, 6:30 p.m.**  
**at Community Church of NY**  
**CAIN**

**by Jose Saramago**

In this, his last novel, José Saramago daringly reimagines the characters and narratives of the Old Testament in a "cheeky modernist update to a timeworn biblical tale" that runs from the Garden of Eden, when God realizes he has forgotten to give Adam and Eve the gift of speech, to the moment when Noah's Ark lands on the dry peak of Ararat. Doomed to forever

wander, the murderer Cain struggles with the idea of faith in the face of an equally flawed God.

By turns philosophical and hilarious, *Cain* shows off the scope of Saramago's talent and makes a fitting coda for a superlative writing life. "Cain's vagabond journey builds to a stunning climax that, like the book itself, is a fitting capstone to a remarkable career."

– *Paper and Kindle editions.*

**SHSNY BOOK CLUB**  
**THURSDAY, JUNE 7, 6:30 p.m.**  
**at Community Church of NY**  
**Book selection**  
**to be announced.**

**GREAT LECTURES ON DVD**  
**TUESDAY, APRIL 24, 7 p.m.**  
**STEVEN PINKER**  
**"THE BLANK SLATE:**  
**The Modern Denial**  
**of Human Nature"**

**Stone Creek Bar & Lounge**  
**140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)**

Yes, says Steven Pinker, there is a "human nature". He makes the case for evolutionary psychology, the view that human beings have a hard-wired nature that evolved over time. Drawing on decades of research in the "sciences of human nature", Pinker, a chaired professor of psychology at MIT, attacks the notion that an infant's mind is a blank slate, arguing instead that human beings have an inherited universal structure shaped by the demands made upon the species for survival, albeit with plenty of room for cultural and individual variation.

*Coming soon: The "God Delusion" Debate, with Professors Richard Dawkins and John Lennox*  
**Great Lectures Night is FREE.**

**OTHER REASONABLE**  
**NEW YORK EVENTS**

Check them out at their websites or [www.reasonablenewyork.org](http://www.reasonablenewyork.org)  
**NY Society for Ethical Culture:**  
Fri., April 6, 7 pm - Ethics in Film: "The Invention of Lying". Popcorn and beer, 6:30. \$5.

Fri., April 20, 7 pm - Ethics and the Theater: Daniel Margulies Collected Stories. Wine/cheese, 6:30. \$5.

Sat., April 21, 7 pm - Earth Day Concert, with Walkabout Clearwater Chorus and Red Molly. \$25, proceeds shared with three environmental groups.

**Dinner & Philosophy Now:** Mon, April 16, 7 pm, Bamiyan, 358 Third (at 26 St): "Introduction to Philosophy". \$2 entry fee, plus dinner.

**Drinking With Atheists:** Every Friday, like-minded friends meet for fun and conversation. Details at: [www.meetup.com/RichiesList/](http://www.meetup.com/RichiesList/)

**PLUS**

**Agnostic A.A.:** Nine weekly AA-endorsed meetings in Manhattan, Brooklyn, The Bronx. Schedules: [agnosticAA.nyc.org/meetings.html](http://agnosticAA.nyc.org/meetings.html)

**Manhattan History Buffs:** Every 3d Tues, 6:30, dinner and talk at Lili's (Chinese) restaurant, Third Ave., 83-84th. Info: 212-802-7427.

April 17: *Boss Tweed.*

**Atheism History Week** – With SHSNY's John Rafferty, 5:30 p.m. on Wednesdays, on MNN Channel 67 and RNN Channel 110 in Manhattan, and via live streaming at [www.mnn.org](http://www.mnn.org).

**Religion on the Line:** Sundays, 6-9:00 a.m. WMCA, 770AM

**Equal Time for Freethought:** Sundays 6:30 p.m., WBAI-NY 99.5FM

**Religion & Ethics Newsweekly:**

Sundays, 6:30 p.m., Channel 13  
**Socrates Cafe:** Tuesdays, 6:30 p.m., NY Society for Ethical Culture

# PEEK

Newsletter of the Sexual Humorist Society of New York

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April 1, 2012

In keeping with an ancient tradition (2007), on this date we put aside weightier considerations (church/state, war/peace, mayo/Miracle Whip) to unearth a new take on history, note the dissolution of a long-time on-air partnership, stuff and sauté a saint, and suggest the truly impossible. – JR

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## **SUMERIANS CONFUSED AS GOD CREATES WORLD**

*(Excerpted from theonion.com, 12/15/09)*

**M**embers of the earth's earliest known civilization, the Sumerians, looked on in shock and confusion some 6,000 years ago as God, the Lord Almighty, created Heaven and Earth.

According to recently excavated clay tablets inscribed with cuneiform script, thousands of Sumerians—the first humans to establish systems of writing, agriculture, and government—were working on their sophisticated irrigation systems when the Father of All Creation reached down from the ether and blew the divine spirit of life into their thriving civilization.

“I do not understand”, reads a line of pictographs depicting a Sumerian who appears to be scratching his head. “A booming voice is saying, ‘Let there be light’, but there is already light. It is saying, ‘Let the earth bring forth grass’, but I am already standing on grass. Everything is here already”, the pictograph continues. “We do not need more stars.”

“The Sumerian people must have found God’s making of heaven and earth to be an annoyance”, said Professor Paul Helund of Cornell. “His loud voice interrupted their ancient prayer rituals for an entire week.”

According to the cuneiform tablets, Sumerians found God’s most puzzling act to be the creation from dust of the first two human beings. “These two people made in his image do not know how to communicate, lack skills in both mathematics and farming, and have the intellectual capacity of infants”, one Sumerian philosopher wrote. “They must be the creation of a complete idiot.”

## **SATAN DESERTS LIMBAUGH**

*(Excerpted from Borowitzreport.com)*

**E**mbattled radio host Rush Limbaugh suffered another major desertion today as he lost the support of one of his long-time sponsors, Satan.

“Due to remarks of his that we consider unacceptable, we are terminating our relationship with Rush Limbaugh,” Satan said in a tersely worded statement.

Advertisers continued abandoning Mr. Limbaugh’s program, including companies that had sponsored it for years, like the online dating site NaziMingle.com™.

## **CHRISTIANS WORLDWIDE CELEBRATE THE MARTYRDOM OF SAINT PANCAKE**

*(Reprinted from Daily Mash (UK), 2/12/2012)*

**C**hurch services will be held on every continent this week as Christians worldwide remember the martyrdom of St. Pancake of Antioch, who was stuffed full of hot cheese, fried and repeatedly thrown into the air around 530 AD.

Pancake grew up in rural Turkey, and acquired a reputation for good works. But it is the manner of his martyrdom for which he is best remembered, and today his death agonies will be re-enacted by millions worldwide.

Religious commentator Stephen Malley said: “He was beaten and battered, then stuffed with a quantity of cheese, although some historians insist it was spinach and ham.

“Either way, St. Pancake was subsequently fried, on both sides, then repeatedly tossed into the air, in a cruel mockery of his belief that he might one day ascend to heaven or, as Pancake described it in his text *De Recipus*, “the righteously-made shall adhere to the celestial ceiling”.

Pancake was also good with brown sugar.

## **AMERICANS ENCOURAGED TO TRY THINKING FOR 2 SECONDS**

*(Elaborated from theonion.com, 5/27/11)*

**A** study published Thursday by psychologists at the University of North Carolina concluded that all American problems—from stuck jacket zippers to the national debt—could be solved if citizens just stopped, took a deep breath, and thought for two seconds before they acted.

“We found that in 93 percent of cases, a positive outcome could have been achieved if Americans simply splashed a little water on their faces prior to dealing with an unfair boss, being out of clean spoons, or voting for an unhinged politician”, the study’s lead author said.

“Our data indicate that when U.S. citizens don’t take a second to compose themselves, they typically charge in like maniacs and hurt either themselves or several million Iraqi civilians.”

She said a good rule of thumb for Americans is to think of a plan, stop, and then do the complete opposite.

*Here ends PEEK. Return to the real world ... and April Fool!*



## GOOD MINUS GOD – Part 1

Louise M. Antony

(Reprinted from *The Stone in The New York Times Opinionator* blog, “a forum for contemporary philosophers on issues both timely and timeless”, 12/18/2011)

I was heartened to learn recently that atheists are no longer the most reviled group in the United States: according to the political scientists Robert Putnam and David Campbell, we’ve been overtaken by the Tea Party. But even as I was high-fiving my fellow apostates (“*We’re number two! We’re number two!*”), I was wondering anew: why do so many people dislike atheists?

I gather that many people believe that atheism implies nihilism – that rejecting God means rejecting morality. A person who denies God, they reason, must be, if not actively evil, at least indifferent to considerations of right and wrong. After all, doesn’t the dictionary list “wicked” as a synonym for “godless”? And isn’t it true, as Dostoevsky said, that “if God is dead, everything is permitted”?

Well, actually – no, it’s not. (And for the record, Dostoevsky never said it was.) Atheism does not entail that anything goes.

Admittedly, some atheists are nihilists. (Unfortunately, they’re the ones who get the most press.) But such atheists’ repudiation of morality stems more from an antecedent cynicism about ethics than from any philosophical view about the divine. According to these nihilistic atheists, “morality” is just part of a fairy tale we tell each other in order to keep our innate, bestial selfishness (mostly) under control. Belief in objective “oughts” and “ought nots”, they say, must fall away once we realize that there is no universal enforcer to dish out rewards and punishments in the afterlife. We’re left with pure self-interest, more or less enlightened.

This is a Hobbesian view: in the state of nature “the notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice have no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law: where no law, no injustice.” But no atheist has to agree with this account of morality, and lots of us do not. We “moralistic atheists” do not see right and wrong as artifacts of a divine protection racket. Rather, we find moral value to be immanent in the natural world, arising from the vulnerabilities of sentient beings and from the capacities of rational beings to recognize and to respond to those vulnerabilities and capacities in others.

This view of the basis of morality is hardly incompatible with religious belief. Indeed, anyone who believes that God made human beings in His image believes something like this – that there is a moral dimension of things, and that it is in our ability to apprehend it that we resemble the divine. Accordingly, many theists, like many atheists, believe that moral value is inherent in morally valuable things. Things don’t become morally valuable because God prefers them; God prefers them because they are morally valuable. At least this is what I was taught as a girl, growing up Catholic: that we could see that God was good because of the things He commands us to do. If helping the poor

were not a good thing on its own, it wouldn’t be much to God’s credit that He makes charity a duty.

It may surprise some people to learn that theists ever take this position, but it shouldn’t. This position is not only consistent with belief in God, it is, I contend, a more pious position than its opposite. It is only if morality is independent of God that we can make moral sense out of religious worship. It is only if morality is independent of God that any person can have a moral basis for adhering to God’s commands.

Let me explain why. First let’s take a cold hard look at the consequences of pinning morality to the existence of God. Consider the following moral judgments – judgments that seem to me to be obviously true:

It is wrong to drive people from their homes or to kill them because you want their land.

It is wrong to enslave people.

It is wrong to torture prisoners of war.

Anyone who witnesses genocide, or enslavement, or torture, is morally required to try to stop it.

To say that morality depends on the existence of God is to say that none of these specific moral judgments is true unless God exists. That seems to me to be a remarkable claim. If God turned out not to exist – then slavery would be OK? There’d be nothing wrong with torture? The pain of another human being would mean nothing?

Think now about our personal relations – how we love our parents, our children, our life partners, our friends. To say that the moral worth of these individuals depends on the existence of God is to say that these people are, in themselves, worth nothing – that the concern we feel for their well-being has no more ethical significance than the concern some people feel for their boats or their cars. It is to say that the historical connections we value, the traits of character and personality that we love – all count for nothing in themselves. Other people warrant our concern only because they are valued by someone else – in this case, God. (Imagine telling a child: “You are not inherently lovable. I love you only because I love your father, and it is my duty to love anything he loves.”)

What could make anyone think such things? Ironically, I think the answer is: the same picture of morality that lies behind atheistic nihilism. It’s the view that the only kind of “obligation” there could possibly be is the kind that is disciplined by promise of reward or threat of punishment.

Such a view cannot find or comprehend any value inherent in the nature of things, value that could warrant particular attitudes and behavior on the part of anyone who can apprehend it. For someone who thinks that another being’s pain is not in itself a reason to give aid, or that the welfare of a loved one is not on its own enough to justify sacrifice, it is only the Divine Sovereign that stands between us and—as Hobbes put it—the war of “all against all”.

This will seem a harsh judgment on the many theists who subscribe to what is called Divine Command Theory (DCT) – the view that what is morally good is constituted by what God commands. Defenders of DCT will say that

their theory explains a variety of things about morality that non-theistic accounts of moral value cannot, and that it should be preferred for that reason. For example, they will say that atheists cannot explain the objectivity of morality – how there could be moral truths that are independent of any human being’s attitudes, will or knowledge, and how moral truths could hold universally. It is true that DCT would explain these things. If God exists, then He exists independently of human beings and their attitudes, and so His commands do, too. If we didn’t invent God, then we didn’t invent His commands, and hence didn’t invent morality. We can be ignorant of God’s will, and hence mistaken about what is morally good. Because God is omnipresent, His commands apply to all people at all times and in all places.

That’s all fine. It would follow from DCT that moral facts are objective. The problem is that it wouldn’t follow that they are moral. Commands issued by a tyrant would have all the same features. For DCT to explain morality, it must also explain what makes God good.

The problem I’m pointing to is an ancient one, discussed by Plato. In his dialogue *Euthyphro*, the eponymous character tries to explain his conception of piety to Socrates: “the pious acts”, Euthyphro says, are “those which are loved by the gods”. But Socrates finds this definition ambiguous, and asks Euthyphro: “Are the pious acts pious because they are loved by the gods, or are the pious acts loved by the gods because they are pious?”

(Part 2 of Prof. Anthony’s essay will appear in May PIQUE.)

### THE MOST ASTOUNDING FACT ABOUT THE UNIVERSE

Neil deGrasse Tyson

The most astounding fact about the universe is the knowledge that the atoms that comprise life on Earth, the atoms that make up the human body, are traceable to the crucibles that cooked light elements into heavy elements in their cores under extreme pressures and temperatures. These stars, the high-mass ones among them, went unstable in their later years. They collapsed and then exploded, scattering their enriched guts across the galaxy, guts made of carbon, oxygen, nitrogen – and all the fundamental ingredients of life itself.

These ingredients become part of gas clouds that condense, collapse, form the next generation of solar systems, stars with orbiting planets. And those planets now have the ingredients for life itself.

So when I look up at the night sky, and I know that, yes, we are *part* of this universe, we are *in* this universe. But perhaps more important than both of those facts, the universe is in *us*.

When I reflect on that fact, I look up—many people feel small, because they’re small and the universe is big—but I feel big, because my atoms came from those stars. There’s a level of connectivity. That’s what you really want in life – you want to feel connected, you want to feel rele-

vant, want to feel like you’re a participant in the goings on of activities and events around you.

That’s precisely what we are, just by being alive.

### THE MOST PREDICTABLE THING ABOUT CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALISTS

John Rafferty

Miley Cyrus (for those readers over the age of 11) is a 19-year-old pop singer/actress who became teen-age famous as Disney’s “Hannah Montana”. Recently she outraged Christian fundamentalists by tweeting to her fans a photo of theoretical physicist Lawrence Krauss, along with the word “beautiful”. On the photo is a Krauss quote that reads,

*“You are all stardust. You couldn’t be here if stars hadn’t exploded, because the elements (carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, all things that matter for evolution) weren’t created at the beginning of time. They were created in stars. So forget Jesus. Stars died so you can live.”*

“Forget Jesus”? This ~~teen-age girl~~ godless witch is a threat to Christendom!

Reacting to the all-too-predictable death threats and ginned-up lunacy from the fundies, Miley further wrote, *“How can people take the love out of science and bring hate into religion so easily? It makes me sad to think the world is this way. Like Einstein says, ‘Science without religion is lame. Religion without science is blind.’”*

Okay, Miley, nice to have you on our side, but let’s get working on those “lame” Einstein quotes.

### FUNDAMENTALISTS & EVANGELICALS: RE-RE-DEFINED

John Arents

Re: “Evangelicals and Fundamentalists” (PIQUE, March), the unnamed author’s attempt at clarity introduces more confusion. The 1910 “Five Points” definition is of historical interest, but hardly anyone today would consider it authoritative or refer to it in deciding whether to call someone a “fundamentalist”. Now a fundamentalist is any extreme traditionalist Protestant. The word is also used informally for extremists from entirely different traditions, e.g., Jews (Haredim) and Muslims in the Middle East.

An “evangelical” is a devout, conservative Protestant whose beliefs are centered on the Bible, especially the New Testament, which is given as literal an interpretation as possible. It does not imply an attempt to make converts; the evangelical’s religious commitment may not even be known to his/her less intimate friends and associates. Jehovah’s Witnesses are certainly included, but probably not Mormons, whose inspired Scripture includes more than the traditional Christian canon. The Five Points provide a good, if over-detailed, definition.

Today, “evangelism” is a term applied to zealous pros-

elytism, often as a full-time occupation. An evangelist may or may not be an ordained minister. (If a minister confines himself to preaching, conducting ceremonies, etc., in his own church, he is not an evangelist.) The doctrines propagated by an evangelist are normally evangelical, but the word is used facetiously or sarcastically for quite different traditions.

There used to be a lot of evangelists for Communism, but now they have moved over to the ashheap of history, and Lubavitcher Hasidim are evangelists who try to bring assimilated Jews back to "true" Judaism.

### **OUR FIRST 2012 DUMBTH CANDIDATE: RETURNING CHAMPION NEWT GINGRICH!**

**W**hat a competitor! He no sooner won the 2011 SHSNY Dumbth Award than he immediately put himself out front in the race (the only one he's likely to win this year) for the 2012 horse's-ass statuette.

Speaking at the Conservative Political Action Committee (CPAC) convention in February, Newt, the self-proclaimed "big ideas" visionary, unveiled a logic-defying plan to track and find undocumented workers wherever they're hiding in America.

"Between UPS and FedEx", he said, "we track 24 million packages a day while they're moving and we allow you to find out where they [the packages] are for free. That's the world that works. Now here's the world that fails: The federal government today cannot find 11 million illegal immigrants even if they're sitting still.

"Now I have a simple proposal: We send a package to everyone who's here illegally and when it's delivered, we pull it up in a computer, we know where they are."

Brilliant! We send a package to their address, and that way we find out their address! How could it not work?

### **SENATOR INHOFE (R-PETROLEUM) HAS PROOF POSITIVE GLOBAL WARMING IS A HOAX**

*(Excerpted from AlterNet.com 3/10/12)*

**I**n a radio interview with Voice of Christian Youth America, Sen. James Inhofe (R-OK) argued that his belief that global warming is a hoax is biblically inspired. Promoting his book, *The Greatest Hoax: How the Global Warming Conspiracy Threatens Your Future*, Inhofe told interviewer Vic Eliason that only God can change the climate, and the idea that manmade pollution could affect the seasons is "arrogance".

"Well actually the Genesis 8:22 that I use in there is that 'as long as the earth remains there will be springtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, day and night'. My point is, God's still up there. The arrogance of people to think that we, human beings, would be able to change what He is doing in the climate is to me outrageous."

In the interview, Inhofe did not mention he has received \$1,352,523 in campaign contributions from the oil and gas industry, including \$90,950 from Koch Industries.

### **AFTER TEN YEARS AND TENS OF BILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN AFGHANISTAN**

**John Rafferty**

*(Based on and excerpted from The Guardian (UK) 3/6/12)*

**A**fghanistan's President Hamid Karzai has endorsed a "code of conduct" issued by the Ulema Council of clerics that allows husbands to beat wives for Sharia "violations", and "discourages" women from traveling without a male guardian or mingling with strange men in places such as schools, markets and offices.

The move by Karzai is seen as part of his outreach to the Taliban who, if they could, would ban education for girls, and force the head-to-toe burqa on all women.

How do the new "guidelines" square with the new American-inspired constitution that guarantees equality? Not a problem, says Karzai. "The clerics' council of Afghanistan did not put any limitations on women. It is the sharia law of all Muslims and all Afghans."

What the hell are we doing there? *Out! Now!*

### **HOW TO RECRUIT MORE ATHEISTS**

**Art Harris**

**I** have been reading for years that the Mormons secretly baptize the dead from other religions, for example, Einstein, Anne Frank, Mitt Romney's rationalist father-in-law. One way to counter this is to list posthumously and de-baptize or convert dead Mormons by simply announcing that they have renounced Mormonism and are now Athiest Non-believers. Can anyone prove they haven't?

We welcome Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and all the others who we insist renounced Mormonism after they died. And they can send the gold tablets they don't need any longer to my address.

### **THE SKY DID NOT FALL!**

#### **PAT ROBERTSON SAYS "LEGALIZE POT"**

**"I** really believe we should treat marijuana the way we treat beverage alcohol. I've never used marijuana and I don't intend to, but it's just one of those things that I think: this war on drugs just hasn't succeeded."

SHSNY's Lifetime-Dumbth-Award Winner Robertson made the announcement in February on his "700 Club" program on the Christian Broadcasting Network, adding that "tough on crime" laws are counter-productive, turning even one-time users into imprisoned felons.

"I believe in working with the hearts of people, and not locking them up", he said.

Good on you, Pat. Now, about gays and feminists ...

### **POEM**

**Charlotte Marzani**

They say our life on earth  
Is a blip of a blip of a blip.  
And though, from our birth,  
There's more heartache than mirth,  
It's a helluva one-way trip.

**DAWKINS ANSWERS THE SAME DAMN  
ATHEIST-MORALITY QUESTION FOR THE  
UMPTIENH TIME, BEAUTIFULLY**

**Richard Dawkins**

*Muslim Questioner:* "Considering that atheism cannot have any sense of absolute morality, would it not then be irrational ... for an atheist to decide between right and wrong?"

*Dawkins:* Absolute morality. The absolute morality that a religious person might profess would include what, stoning people for adultery? Death for apostasy? Punishment for breaking the Sabbath? These are all things that are religiously-based absolute morality. I don't think I want absolute morality. I think I want morality that is thought out, reasoned, argued, discussed, and ... (*applause interrupts*) ... almost based on intelligent design. (*laughter*).

Can we not design our society [to have] the sort of morality, the sort of society we want to live in? If you actually look at the morality that is accepted among modern people, among 21st century people—we don't believe in slavery anymore, we believe in the equality of women, we believe in being gentle, we believe in being kind to animals—these are all things that are entirely recent. They have very little basis in Biblical or Koranic scripture. They are things that have developed through historical time, through the consensus of reasoning, sober discussion, argument, legal theory, political and moral philosophy. They do not come from religion.

To the extent that you can find the "good bits" in religious literature, you have to chase them. You search your

way through the Bible or Koran and you find the occasional verse that is an acceptable profession of a morality, and you say, "Look at that! *That's* religion!" And you leave out all the horrible bits. And you say, "Oh, well, we don't believe *that* anymore, we've grown out of it."

Well, *of course* we've grown out of it. We've grown out of it because of secular moral philosophy and rational discussion.

**A COSMOLOGICAL "NEVER MIND"**

**John Rafferty**

**R**emember those faster-than-the-speed-of-light neutrinos at CERN last fall (PIQUE, November, 2011) that seemed to set the whole scientific community—actually, the whole universe—on its ear?

I know, I know, so much to deal with since then—Whitney Houston, the Giants and the Super Bowl, Rick Perry's "Oops" and Rick Santorum's throw-up, Season 3 of "Glee"—that overturning  $E=mc^2$  just seems *so* 2011.

Well, not to worry, the Special Theory of Relativity is alive and well after all.

It seems, as reported on the deep-inside pages of the nation's papers and way down the scroll lines of online news sites in February, that somebody at Italy's Gran Sasso National Laboratory didn't plug in something properly.

"This connector [the one that did the measuring] was not perfectly plugged," said Gran Sasso director Lucia Votano, "okay?"

Really? "Okay"? You can't make these things up.

Page 5  
It's back!  
Herpes-by-Mohel:

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War on Women  
and the right-wing  
"Christian Sharia"

Page 1  
Neo-Humanism  
UNESCO to  
Paul Kurtz introduces

