

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

February, 2013

Welcome to the universe. We fine tune it again (a six-year-old has a fix-it suggestion), and contemplate infinities of infinities. We cheer Left Coast humanism, argue the value of art, pose an ethical question to gobsmack Aristotle, get lost in lies on the internet, poke fun at The Five fatheads at Fox, nominate perhaps the worst Dumbth ever, and celebrate two more election results. But first, are we missing something? Are we absent when it counts most, or acting exactly as we should? – JR

IN A CRISIS, HUMANISTS SEEM ABSENT

Samuel G. Freedman

(Excerpted from The New York Times OpEd, 12/28/2012)

Since the Newtown massacre on December 14, the tableau of grief and mourning has provided a vivid lesson in the religious variety of America. An interfaith service featuring President Obama, held two days after Adam Lanza killed 20 children and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut, included clergy members from Bahai, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, and both mainline and evangelical Protestant congregations.

The funerals and burials over the past two weeks have taken place in Catholic, Congregational, Mormon and United Methodist houses of worship, among others. They have been held in Protestant megachurches and in a Jewish cemetery. A black Christian youth group traveled from Alabama to perform “Amazing Grace” at several of the services.

This illustration of religious belief in action, of faith expressed in extremis, an example at once so heart-rending and so affirming, has left behind one prickly question: Where were the humanists? At a time when the percentage of Americans without religious affiliation is growing rapidly, why did the “nones,” as they are colloquially known, seem so absent?

To raise these queries is not to play gotcha, or to be judgmental in a dire time. In fact, some leaders within the humanist movement—an umbrella term for those who call themselves atheists, agnostics, secularists and freethinkers, among other terms—are ruefully and self-critically saying the same thing themselves.

“It is a failure of community, and that’s where the answer for the future has to lie,” said Greg M. Epstein, 35, the humanist chaplain at Harvard and author of the book

Good Without God. “What religion has to offer to people at moments like this—more than theology, more than divine presence—is community. And we need to provide an alternative form of community if we’re going to matter to the increasing number of people who say they are not believers.” ...

In fairness, it should be pointed out that the families of each Newtown victim chose religious funerals. The interfaith service, by its very definition, precluded the involvement of leaders from non-faith organizations like the Ethical Culture Society or the American Humanist Association. At the most divisive, the former Republican presidential candidate Mike Huckabee asserted that violence like the Newtown shootings occurs because “we’ve systematically removed God from our schools”.

The net effect can be to leave humanists feeling frozen out and defensive. “We send out letters, we send out press releases, we’re on Meetup,” said Anne Klaeyen, 61, leader of the New York Society for Ethical Culture. “But we feel people don’t pick us up. We’re not proselytizers. But the religious landscape has changed so that we have to market ourselves.”

While tacitly excluded from religious coalitions, humanist groups did respond to the Newtown killings. The Ethical Culture Society chapter in Teaneck, N.J., helped organize a gun-control rally there. The Connecticut branch of the American Humanist Association contributed about \$370 to Newtown families from a winter solstice fund-raiser. The organization American Atheists reports on its Web site that it has collected more than \$11,000 in online donations toward funeral expenses in Newtown. A secular support group called Grief Beyond Belief operates on Facebook.

Still, when it comes to the pastoral version of “boots on the ground” — a continuing presence in communities, a

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commitment to tactile rather than virtual engagement with people who are hurting – the example of Newtown shows how humanists continue to lag.

That lag persists despite significant growth in the number of nonbelievers. A recent national study by the Pew Research Center found the share of “nones” had risen to about 20 percent of Americans from 15 percent in just five years. The humanist movement of the last decade has had eloquent public intellectuals in Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins and the late Christopher Hitchens.

Yet, in the view of internal critics like Mr. Epstein and Dr. Ray, humanism suffers in certain ways for its valorization of the individual. The inside joke is that creating a humanist group is like “herding cats.” ...

Mr. Epstein is currently involved in a three-year, \$2.5-million project to study, develop and spread the concept of nonreligious community. But he believes that better organizing must be accompanied by better messaging.

“A lot of humanist rhetoric of previous generations revolved around reason,” he said. “We’d say, ‘We’re people of reason rather than people of faith.’ But I’ve always been uncomfortable with that as the banner under which we march. We need to think of reason in the service of compassion – caring, being cared-about, a life of meaningful connection. Reason itself is the tool. When we see it as the end-product we miss the point.”

A HUMANIST RESPONDS

(The following is the letter I wrote The Times in response to Mr. Freedman’s OpEd piece. It did not run.)

Why can’t a woman be more like a man?” frustrated Professor Higgins complains in “My Fair Lady”. Seemingly equally daunted, Mr. Freedman asks why humanism can’t be more like a religion.

Because it’s *not* a religion, Mr. Freedman.

Humanism is an ethical philosophy based on reason and science, a way for modern humans to live meaningful and happy lives without superstition, religious dogma, or guilt.

Yes, the bereaved families of Newtown (some of whom I am statistically sure were secular) turned to churches, synagogues, and temples to bury their children. It is no surprise that in their overwhelming grief those parents took what comfort they could from the community and traditions that religions offer.

As the British philosopher Roger Scruton has said, “The consolation of imaginary things is not imaginary consolation.”

Where were the humanists?

Many of them sat in the funeral pews behind those parents. I did not know any of the stricken families, but I do know three freethinkers who did. They attended the services, they grieved, and they offered their friends the only true and meaningful comfort we humans can give each other: love.

John Rafferty

President, The Secular Humanist Society of New York

Naturally, I scanned The Times Letters columns for a week after sending the above. I was not surprised that my letter hadn’t run – but none? Then Susan’s Op-Ed piece appeared.

THE BLESSINGS OF ATHEISM

Susan Jacoby

(Reprinted from The New York Times 1/5/2013)

In a recent conversation with a fellow journalist, I voiced my exasperation at the endless talk about faith in God. As the only consolation for those devastated by the unfathomable murders in Newtown, Conn. Some of those grieving parents surely believe, as I do, that this is our one and only life. Atheists cannot find solace in the idea that dead children are now angels in heaven. “That only shows the limits of atheism,” my colleague replied. “It’s all about nonbelief and has nothing to offer when people are suffering.”

This widespread misapprehension that atheists believe in nothing positive is one of the main reasons secularly inclined Americans—roughly 20 percent of the population—do not wield public influence commensurate with their numbers. One major problem is the dearth of secular community institutions. But the most powerful force holding us back is our own reluctance to speak, particularly at moments of high national drama and emotion, with the combination of reason and passion needed to erase the image of the atheist as a bloodless intellectual robot.

The secular community is fearful of seeming to proselytize. When giving talks on college campuses, I used to avoid personal discussions of my atheism. But over the years, I have changed my mind because such diffidence contributes to the false image of the atheist as someone whose convictions are removed from ordinary experience. It is vital to show that there are indeed atheists in foxholes, and wherever else human beings suffer and die.

Now when students ask how I came to believe what I believe, I tell them that I trace my atheism to my first encounter, at age 7, with the scourge of polio. In 1952, a 9-year-old friend was stricken by the disease and clinging to life in an iron lung. After visiting him in the hospital, I asked my mother, “Why would God do that to a little boy?” She sighed in a way that telegraphed her lack of conviction and said: “I don’t know. The priest would say God must have his reasons, but I don’t know what they could be.”

Just two years later, in 1954, Jonas Salk’s vaccine began the process of eradicating polio, and my mother took the opportunity to suggest that God may have guided his research. I remember replying, “Well, God should have guided the doctors a long time ago so that Al wouldn’t be in an iron lung.” (He was to die only eight years later, by which time I was a committed atheist.)

The first time I told this story to a class, I was deeply gratified when one student confided that his religious doubts arose from the struggles of a severely disabled sibling, and that he had never been able to discuss the subject candidly with his fundamentalist parents. One of the most positive things any atheist can do is provide a willing ear for a

doubter — even if the doubter remains a religious believer.

It is primarily in the face of suffering, whether the tragedy is individual or collective, that I am forcefully reminded of what atheism has to offer. When I try to help a loved one losing his mind to Alzheimer's, when I see homeless people shivering in the wake of a deadly storm, when the news media bring me almost obscenely close to the raw grief of bereft parents, I do not have to ask, as all people of faith must, why an all-powerful, all-good God allows such things to happen.

It is a positive blessing, not a negation of belief, to be free of what is known as the theodicy problem. Human "free will" is Western monotheism's answer to the question of why God does not use his power to prevent the slaughter of innocents, and many people throughout history (some murdered as heretics) have not been able to let God off the hook in that fashion.

The atheist is free to concentrate on the fate of this world — whether that means visiting a friend in a hospital or advocating for tougher gun control laws — without trying to square things with an unseen overlord in the next. Atheists do not want to deny religious believers the comfort of their faith. We do want our fellow citizens to respect our deeply held conviction that the absence of an afterlife lends a greater, not a lesser, moral importance to our actions on earth.

Today's atheists would do well to emulate some of the great 19th-century American freethinkers, who insisted that reason and emotion were not opposed but complementary.

Robert Green Ingersoll, who died in 1899 and was one of the most famous orators of his generation, personified this combination of passion and rationality. Called "The Great Agnostic", Ingersoll insisted that there was no difference between atheism and agnosticism because it was impossible for anyone to "know" whether God existed or not. He used his secular pulpit to advocate for social causes like justice for African-Americans, women's rights, prison reform and the elimination of cruelty to animals.

He also frequently delivered secular eulogies at funerals and offered consolation that he clearly considered an important part of his mission. In 1882, at the graveside of a friend's child, he declared: "They who stand with breaking hearts around this little grave, need have no fear. The larger and the nobler faith in all that is, and is to be, tells us that death, even at its worst, is only perfect rest. ... The dead do not suffer."

Today's secularists must do more than mount defensive campaigns proclaiming that we can be "good without God." Atheists must stand up instead of calling themselves freethinkers, agnostics, secular humanists or "spiritual, but not religious". The last phrase, translated from the psychobabble, can mean just about anything — that the speaker is an atheist who fears social disapproval or a fence-sitter who wants the theoretical benefits of faith, including hope of eternal life, without the obligations of actually practicing a religion. Atheists may also be secular humanists and freethinkers—I answer to all three—but

avoidance of identification with atheism confines us to a closet that encourages us to fade or be pushed into the background when tragedy strikes.

We must speak up as atheists in order to take responsibility for whatever it is humans are responsible for — including violence in our streets and schools. We need to demonstrate that atheism is rooted in empathy as well as intellect. And although atheism is not a religion, we need community-based outreach programs so that our activists will be as recognizable to their neighbors as the clergy.

Finally, we need to show up at gravesides, as Ingersoll did, to offer whatever consolation we can.

In his speech at an interfaith prayer vigil in Newtown, President Obama observed that "the world's religions — so many of them represented here today — start with a simple question: Why are we here? What gives our life meaning?" He could easily have amended that to "the world's religions and secular philosophies". He could have said something like, "Whether you are religious or nonreligious, may you find solace in the knowledge that the suffering is ours, but that those we love suffer no more."

Somewhere in that audience, and in the larger national audience, there were mourners who would have been comforted by the acknowledgment that their lives have meaning even if they do not regard death as the door to another life, but "only perfect rest".

RELIGION IN THE NEWS

Art Harris

One reason that atheists and nones have such difficulty in reaching out to those who were victimized by the tragic shootings in Connecticut is that we do not offer the comfort of the myths of an afterlife claimed by religions. Though atheists tend to resist rituals, we celebrate weddings, births and other occasions and try to comfort those in distress.

We do not codify those actions, so adherents may feel free to do as they please at these events.

I do not know if non-believers can give the comfort or joy to those who need these rituals and can only hope that we can develop the inner strength to not need them.

I have just returned from the funeral of a friend that was conducted by several religious leaders who probably never met her. I know that she rarely, if ever, attended religious services, but she received full accolades from the Holies, and was interred in full ceremony; it all seemed to satisfy those left behind.

I do not begrudge the family my condolences; they were sincere, although muted by the chanting, praying and pageantry of the occasion. I can only hope that those left behind received closing and solace from the service.

Our belief is not a belief. Our principals are not a faith. ... We don't rely solely upon science and reason ... but we distrust anything that contradicts science and outrages reason. — Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great*

WHAT WE THE PEOPLE BELIEVE

Richard Cousineau

(Excerpted from The Secular Circular, Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara, CA, January, 2013)

(On December 25th, the Santa Barbara News-Press printed a guest editorial which asserted that “secular humanism and atheism” were the sources of many of the nation’s ills and that the USA was certain to continue its decline unless Christianity was restored to its leading role as the exemplar of our national values. The following letter to the SBNP Editor was not published.)

To the Editor, Santa Barbara News Press:

Andy, that ship has left the port ... some fifty years ago. You missed it. Sorry, it ain’t coming back for you. We the People of the USA have accepted the ethics and morals of secular humanism because they are more reasonable, believable, tolerant, forward-looking, democratic, welcoming, non-discriminating, religiously neutral, and generally much more humane than any ancient belief system. A major shift to these values has taken place gradually since the 1960s, especially by the youth of this country and Europe and, alas, you were nodding off.

No longer does the morality of We the People depend upon religious “heritage” and privilege. We have moved on to a life stance based upon individual moral behavior, tolerance and openness, intelligent choice, and personal responsibility; the system that secular humanism encourages and supports. As we grow in knowledge of nature and science we have put away the tribal myths and the tales and superstitions of childhood to face our human condition with courage and with joy, not guilt. We have begun to amend the words of our ancestors’ writings to reflect the needs of today’s conditions: an existential morality.

As proud humanists we glory, not in the workings of a silent and unknowable god story, but rather in the advances of the human mind in the fields of science, medicine, communications, and the betterment of the lives of more and more people throughout the world. These advances were not brought about by the beliefs of supernatural forces or the mindless acceptance of ancient and irrelevant myths, but in belief in the power of We the People.

Sincerely yours, Richard Cousineau

CALVIN FIXES THE UNIVERSE

Bill Watterson

(Transcribed from the 1/2/2013 edition of the comic strip “Calvin and Hobbes”, about six-year-old Calvin and his stuffed-toy – but real to Calvin – tiger, Hobbes.)

Calvin: You know what the problem is with the universe?

Hobbes: Um ...

Calvin: There’s no toll-free customer service hotline for complaints. That’s why things don’t get fixed. If the universe had any decent management, we’d get a full refund if we weren’t completely satisfied.

Hobbes: But the place is free.

Calvin: See, that’s another thing. They should have a cover charge and keep out the riffraff.

WHY THE “FINE-TUNED UNIVERSE” IS NO JUSTIFICATION FOR GOD’S EXISTENCE - Part 2

Greta Christina

(Part 1 of this essay ran in January PIQUE.)

“But the Universe is so perfectly fine-tuned for life. What are the chances that this happened by accident? Doesn’t it seem like the Universe had to have been created this way on purpose?”

How perfectly fine-tuned for life is the Universe, really? Life on Earth has only been around for about 3.7 billion years. Human life has only been around for 200,000 of those years (more or less, depending on how you define “human”). And since the temperature of the Sun is rising, in about a billion years the surface of the Earth will be too hot for liquid water to exist – and thus too hot for life to exist. The universe, on the other hand, is about 14 billion years old. (Post Big Bang, at any rate.)

Therefore, the current lifespan of humanity is a mere one-seven-thousandth of the current lifespan of the Universe. And after Earth and all of humanity has boiled away into space forever, the Universe will keep going – for billions and billions of years. How, exactly, does that qualify as the Universe being fine-tuned for life?

To use Adams’ puddle analogy [*Ed: In Part 1 of this essay, Ms. Christina used Douglas Adams’ conceit of a puddle that thinks the hole it’s in was “designed” just for the puddle, and is oblivious to its own slow evaporation*]: The sun is rising. The air is heating up. The puddle isn’t getting smaller yet, but it’s destined to. And yet, many droplets in the puddle are still frantically hanging on to the notion that everything’s going to be alright ... because this world was supposedly built to have us in it.

And that doesn’t even take into account the mind-boggling vastness of space – the mind-boggling majority of which is not hospitable to life in the slightest. The overwhelming majority of the universe consists of unimaginably huge vastnesses of impossibly cold empty space ... punctuated at rare intervals by comets, asteroids, meteors (some of which might hit us, by the way, also negating the “perfectly designed for human life” concept), cold rocks, blazing hot furnaces of incandescent gas, and the occasional black hole. The overwhelming majority of the universe is, to put it mildly, not fine-tuned for life.

In other words: In the enormous vastness of space and time, one rock orbiting one star developed conditions that allowed the unusual bio-chemical process of intelligent life to come into being for a few hundred thousand years—a billion years at the absolute outset—before being boiled into space forever. Somehow, I’m having a hard time seeing that as fine-tuning.

Recently, I asked the question: If biological life was intentionally designed by a perfect, all-powerful God ... why did he do such a piss-poor job of it? Why does the “design” of life include so much clumsiness, half-assedness, inefficiency, “fixed that for you” jury-rigs, pointless superfluties, glaring omissions, laughable failures and

appalling, mind-numbing brutality?

Today, I'm asking a similar question: If the universe was "fine-tuned" for life by a perfect, all-powerful God, why did he do such a piss-poor job of it? Why was the 93-billion-light-years-across universe created 13.73 billion years ago, just so the fragile process of human life in one tiny solar system could blink into existence for a few hundred thousand years, a billion years at the absolute most, and then blink out again? Why could an asteroid or a solar flare or any number of other astronomical incidents wipe out that life at any time?

If the universe was "fine-tuned" for life to come into being, why is the ridiculously overwhelming majority of it created to be so inhospitable to life? (Even if there's life on other planets, which is hypothetically possible, the point still remains: Why is the portion of the Universe that's hospitable to life so absurdly minuscule?)

Atheists are often accused by religious believers of being arrogant. But it's hard to look at the fine-tuning argument and see any validity to that at all. Believers are the ones who are arguing that the Universe was created just so humanity could come into existence, and that the immeasurable vastness of stars and galaxies far beyond our reach and even beyond our knowledge was still, somehow, put there for us. Maybe so we could see all the pretty blinky lights in the sky. Atheists are the ones who accept that the universe was not made for us. Atheists are the ones who accept that we are a lucky roll of the dice; an unusual biochemical process that's happening on one planet orbiting one star that happens, for a brief period, to have conditions that allow for it.

Yes, the existence of humanity is unlikely. But so is my personal existence, and the existence of the Messier 87 galaxy, and the roll of a die in the sequence 3241154645. That doesn't mean these things were designed to happen. We are a puddle that evolved to fit in a convenient hole. There is no reason to think the hole was created for us. And there is every reason to think that it was not. If "The existence of life in the universe just seems too unlikely" is the only argument you can make for why the universe was designed by God, you're going to have to find a better argument.

HOW LIFE WAS CREATED WITHOUT A CREATOR

Peter M. Hoffman

(Reported by Walter Balcerak)

How was life created from lifeless matter without an intelligent designer? That is the question physics professor Peter M. Hoffman seeks to answer in a book titled *Life's Ratchet*. He spells out his answer in the subtitle: *How Molecular Machines Extract Order from Chaos*.

Since I am not a scientist, and the ideas in the book are complex, the explanation that follows is in Hoffman's own words. I've rearranged the order and, for simplicity's sake, omitted quotation marks. To wit:

The force that drives life at the scale of atoms and molecules is not a mysterious supernatural force, but it is a

surprising one nevertheless. The force that drives life is chaos, filtered through the structures of highly sophisticated molecular machines that have evolved over billions of years. Deep down, life is a random dance of molecules, yet at the scale of humans, order prevails.

As we enter the microscopic world of life's molecules, we find that chaos, randomness, chance, and noise are our allies. Without the shaking and rattling of atoms, life's molecules would be frozen in place, unable to move. Yet, if there were only chaos, there would be no direction, no purpose, to all of this shaking. To make the molecular storm a useful force for life, it needs to be harnessed and tamed by physical laws and sophisticated structures—it must be tamed by molecular machines.

It [is] now clear that all forces or energies active in life [are] also present in inanimate matter. But this does not explain purpose. The person who rescued mechanism from the bugbear of purpose was Charles Robert Darwin. By removing the last vestige of purpose, Darwin's theory of evolution made God unnecessary for explaining the natural world. This, of course, was not the first time God had been made unnecessary. Physics had already banned God from the heavens.

But physics and evolution made strange bedfellows. Physics of the nineteenth century was based on natural laws. It was based on necessity. By contrast, evolution needed variation and novelty—chance—to function. How could the two be reconciled?

Early in the twentieth century, the study of atoms and light led to another theory that explicitly included concepts of chance and probability: quantum mechanics. The iron-clad model of necessity, classical physics, was now replaced by a fundamentally statistical picture of nature—a picture in which we could never state with certainty where a particle would go or how much energy it had. All we could calculate were probabilities. Applying statistics to the chaos of atoms and molecules, [researchers] found that, averaged over time and space, the randomness of atomic motion gives way to regularity.

The potential for life was already written into the book of our universe as soon as physical law met the violent motions of elementary particles. For me, this insight makes the story of life a beautiful, even spiritual story.

HAVE THEY TRIED PRAYING FOR DEATH?

(Reprinted from *ThisIsTrue.com*, 1/12/2013)

The Anderson (Ind.) Christian School has been tied up in a bankruptcy case with the Lindberg Road Church of Christ, but they don't want to take it to court: they've asked for mediation. The church tried to finance expansion and remodeling of the school by taking out \$2.5 million in life insurance policies on 11 of its elderly members. "It was a great plan except for one thing", said the church's attorney, David Kleiman. "It didn't work. There was no market for the life insurance policies and the insureds continued to live." - Well, duh: *John 11:26**

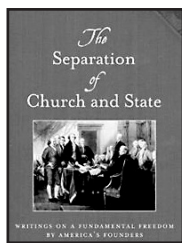
*"Whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

SHSNY CALENDAR: FEBRUARY - APRIL 2013

SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURSDAY, FEB 7, 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 SEPARATION OF
CHURCH AND STATE:
Writings on a
Fundamental Freedom by
America's Founders
Forrest Church, Ed.

This concise primer gets past the rhetoric that surrounds the never-ending debate about the founders' intentions, placing their vivid writings on religious liberty in historical perspective. Among other questions it considers: to what degree was "separation" the result of anti-Catholic sentiment?



With running commentary by Forrest Church, this collection informs anyone curious about the original blueprint for our country and its government. — *Paperback*
Join us even if you haven't finished reading.

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

PLANNING AHEAD

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: 4th Wednesday
 at Stone Creek Lounge.
Humanism 101: Last Monday
 at the Community Church of NY
 More info: www.shsny.org,
at.humanism.meetup.com/515,
 and 212-308-2165

SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURS, MARCH 7, 6:30 pm
 at Community Church of NY
 28 East 35 Street (Park-Mad)
ANSWERS FOR ARISTOTLE:
How Science and Philosophy
Can Lead Us to a
More Meaningful Life
Massimo Pigliucci

How should we live? SHSNY's Hown philosopher-in-residence argues that the combination of science and philosophy first pioneered by Aristotle offers us the best possible tool for understanding the world and ourselves.

Answers for Aristotle addresses such essential issues as how to tell right from wrong, the nature of love and friendship, and whether we can ever really know ourselves — while finding the path to the best possible life. — *Kindle available.*

SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURS, APRIL 4, 6:30 pm
 at Community Church of NY
 28 East 35 Street (Park-Mad)
THE SIGNAL & THE NOISE:
Why So Many Predictions
Fail — And Some Don't
Nate Silver

Nate Silver predicted the 2008 election within a hair's breadth, and became a national sensation as a blogger — all by the time he was 30 — then called the 2012 election correctly in all 50 states. *The New York Times* now publishes *FiveThirtyEight.com*, where Silver is one of America's most influential political forecasters. Most predictions fail, he says, because most of us have a poor understanding of probability and uncertainty, and mistake more confident predictions for more accurate ones.

BRUNCH!

New Restaurant!
SUNDAY, FEB 24, 12 NOON
 We'll gather for our
MONTHLY CASUAL BRUNCH
Brabant Belgian Brasserie
 316 East 53 Street

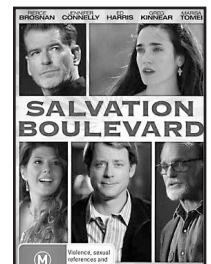
We'll meet at Noon just east of 2nd Avenue at our *new brunch venue* for outstanding Belgian fare, from salads to shrimp rolls, Grand Fromage Onion Soup, waffles and burgers, pots of lots of mussels, \$6 to \$18, plus a prix-fixe brunch (10 choices, plus 5 omelettes, including a drink) for \$17.

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 is welcome.

Bring friends!

MONDAY, FEB 11, 7:00 pm
SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
 140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)
"SALVATION BOULEVARD"

Combining wicked satire with Can engrossing murder mystery, this 2011 black comedy follows charismatic pastor Dan Day (Pierce Brosnan), whose megachurch — not to mention his real estate developments — is endangered when he becomes entangled in an unsavory incident being investigated by a hapless parishioner (Greg Kinnear), one of Pastor Dan's born-again followers who really wishes he were still following the Grateful Dead.



The all-star cast also includes Jennifer Connelly, Marisa Tomei, Ed Harris, and Ciarán Hinds
SHSNY Movie Night is FREE.

SHSNY CALENDAR: FEBRUARY - MARCH 2013

**GREAT LECTURES ON DVD
WED, FEBRUARY 27, 7:00 pm
"HUMAN EVOLUTION AND
THE NATURE OF SCIENCE"**

Dr. Tim D. White

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

Tim White is a leading authority on human evolution and an accomplished paleoanthropologist. In this fascinating lecture from the "Bones, Stones, and Genes: The Origin of Modern Humans" series, he explores the fossil evidence that gives shape to our family tree, from more recent branches to the deeper trunk near our common ancestor with the chimpanzee, and describes the discovery of *Ardipithecus ramidus*, the oldest known fossil hominid.



Great Lectures Night is FREE

**HUMANISM 101
MONDAY, FEB 25, 6:30-8:30
Community Church of New York
28 East 35 Street (red door)
Meeting/Discussion #3**

*Humanist Ethics, Values, Morals
Suggested Reading:*

Online: Fred Edwords: *The Human Basis of Law and Ethics*

Online: *Affirmations of Humanism Book(s)*

Paul Kurtz (Ed.): *The Humanist Alternative* (Scan and select three or four essays that most interest you) and/or

Gerald Larue: *The Way of Positive Humanism*

Note: Don't be put off by the reading list - you can do the online reading in an hour or so, and choose just one of the books. And, if you haven't done the reading, you may still audit the discussion - all are welcome!

**SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2:30-5:30 pm
OUR 5TH ANNUAL DARWIN DAY AND
SHSNY 25TH ANNIVERSARY BANQUET
at Our Place: Cuisines of China
242 East 79th Street (2nd - 3rd Aves)**

Come gather at our private luncheon party in this Zagat-rated Chinese restaurant to celebrate the 204th birthday of Charles Darwin (February 12, 1809) and the 25th Anniversary of the birth (January 14, 1988) of SHSNY.

Highlights of the afternoon:

10-COURSE CHINESE BANQUET

... including Seafood Treasure Soup; a very Special Appetizer; Peking Duck with New Year Bao; Steamed Fish Filet; Crispy Palace Prawns; Eggplant Family Style; Chicken Thighs & Drumsticks in Chef's Brown Sauce; Mushrooms Yi Men; Hunan Style Pork with Leeks; Fresh Fruit

PRESENTATION OF THE SHSNY 2012 DUMBTH AWARD

Who will win the horse's-ass award? Banquet attendees will get a chance to vote a second time for the idiot of their choice.

SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKER:

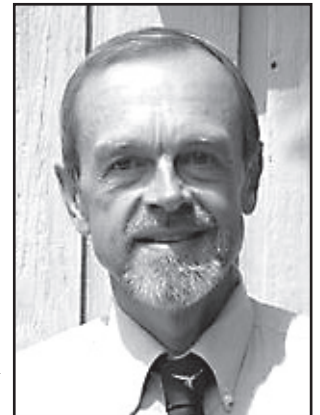
PHILIP KITCHER, Ph.D

John Dewey Professor of Philosophy, Columbia University
on

"ETHICS AFTER DARWIN"

Professor Kitcher is the past president of the American Philosophical Association and currently teaches Literature Humanities at Columbia, i.e.: courses on Dewey; Science and Religion; Darwin; and on Joyce and on *Finnegans Wake*.

He is the author of *The Ethical Project; Science in a Democratic Society; Joyce's Kaleidoscope: An Invitation to "Finnegans Wake";* and *Living with Darwin*, and is currently at work on a new collection, *Preludes to Pragmatism*, as well as on the talk he will give us February 16.



\$50 per person. (Cash bar, wine and beer only.)

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THE LIFE OF PI, AND OTHER INFINITIES

Natalie Angier

(Reprinted from The New York Times, 1/1/13)

On this day [New Year's Day] that fetishizes finitude, that reminds us how rapidly our own earthly time share is shrinking, allow me to offer the modest comfort of infinities.

Yes, infinities, plural. The popular notion of infinity may be of a monolithic totality, the ultimate, unbounded big tent that goes on forever and subsumes everything in its path — time, the cosmos, your complete collection of old *Playbills*. Yet in the ever-evolving view of scientists, philosophers and other scholars, there really is no single, implacable entity called infinity.

Instead, there are infinities, multiplicities of the limit-free that come in a vast variety of shapes, sizes, purposes and charms. Some are tailored for mathematics, some for cosmology, others for theology; some are of such recent vintage their fontanels still feel soft. There are flat infinities, hunchback infinities, bubbling infinities, hyperboloid infinities. There are infinitely large sets of one kind of number, and even bigger, infinitely large sets of another kind of number.

There are the infinities of the everyday, as exemplified by the figure of pi, with its endless post-decimal tail of nonrepeating digits, and how about if we just round it off to 3.14159 and then serve pie on March 14 at 1:59 p.m.?

Another stalwart of infinity shows up in the mathematics that gave us modernity: calculus.

"All the key concepts of calculus build on infinite processes of one form or another that take limits out to infinity," said Steven Strogatz, author of the recent book *The Joy of x: A Guided Tour of Math, From One to Infinity*, and a professor of applied mathematics at Cornell. In calculus, he added, "infinity is your friend".

Yet worthy friends can come in prickly packages, and mathematicians have learned to handle infinity with care.

"Mathematicians find the concept of infinity so useful, but it can be quite subtle and quite dangerous," said Ian Stewart, a mathematics researcher at the University of Warwick in England and the author of *Visions of Infinity*, the latest of many books. "If you treat infinity like a normal number, you can come up with all sorts of nonsense, like saying, infinity plus one is equal to infinity, and now we subtract infinity from each side and suddenly naught equals one. You can't be freewheeling in your use of infinity."

Then again, a very different sort of infinity may well be freewheeling you. Based on recent studies of the cosmic microwave afterglow of the Big Bang, with which our known universe began 13.7 billion years ago, many cosmologists now believe that this observable universe is just a tiny, if relentlessly expanding, patch of space-time embedded in a greater universal fabric that is, in a profound sense, infinite. It may be an infinitely large monoverse, or it may be an infinite bubble bath of infinitely budding and inflating multiverses, but infinite it is, and the implications of that infinity are appropriately huge.

"If you take a finite physical system and a finite set of states, and you have an infinite universe in which to sample them, to randomly explore all the possibilities, you will get duplicates," said Anthony Aguirre, an associate professor of physics who studies theoretical cosmology at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Not just rough copies, either. "If the universe is big enough, you can go all the way," Dr. Aguirre said. "If I ask, will there be a planet like Earth with a person in Santa Cruz sitting at this colored desk, with every atom, every wave function exactly the same, if the universe is infinite the answer has to be yes."

In short, your doppelgängers may be out there, and many variants, too, some with much better hair who can play Bach like Glenn Gould. A far less savory thought: There could be a configuration, Dr. Aguirre said, "where the Nazis won the war".

Given infinity's potential for troublemaking, it's small wonder the ancient Greeks abhorred the very notion of it.

"They viewed it with suspicion and hostility," said A. W. Moore, professor of philosophy at Oxford and author of *The Infinite*. The Greeks wildly favored tidy rational numbers that, by definition, can be defined as a ratio, or fraction — the way 0.75 equals $\frac{3}{4}$ and you're done with it — over patternless infinitums like the square root of 2.

On Pythagoras' Table of Opposites, "the finite" was listed along with masculinity and other good things in life, while "the infinite" topped the column of bad traits like femininity. "They saw it as a cosmic fight," Dr. Moore said, "with the finite constantly having to subjugate the infinite." Aristotle helped put an end to the rampant infiniphobia by drawing a distinction between what he called "actual" infinity, something that would exist all at once, at a given moment — which he declared an impossibility — and "potential" infinity, which would unfold over time and which he deemed perfectly intelligible. As a result, Dr. Moore said, "Aristotle believed in finite space and infinite time", and his ideas held sway for the next 2,000 years.

Newton and Leibniz began monkeying with notions of infinity when they invented calculus, which solves tricky problems of planetary motions and accelerating bodies by essentially breaking down curved orbits and changing velocities into infinite series of tiny straight lines and tiny uniform motions. "It turns out to be an incredibly powerful tool if you think of the world as being infinitely divisible", Dr. Strogatz said.

In the late 19th century, the great German mathematician Georg Cantor took on infinity not as a means to an end, but as a subject worthy of rigorous study in itself. He demonstrated that there are many kinds of infinite sets, and some infinities are bigger than others. Hard as it may be to swallow, the set of all the possible decimal numbers between 1 and 2, being unlistable, turns out to be a bigger infinity than the set of all whole numbers from 1 to forever, which in principle can be listed.

In fact, many of Cantor's contemporaries didn't swallow, dismissing him as "a scientific charlatan",

“laughable”, and “wrong”. Cantor died depressed and impoverished, but today his set theory is a flourishing branch of mathematics relevant to the study of large, chaotic systems like the weather, the economy, and human stupidity.

With his majestic theory of relativity, Einstein knitted together time and space, quashing old Aristotelian distinctions between actual and potential infinity and ushering in the contemporary era of infinity seeking. Another advance came in the 1980s, when Alan Guth introduced the idea of cosmic inflation, a kind of vacuum energy that vastly expanded the size of the universe soon after its fiery birth.

New theories suggest that such inflation may not have been a one-shot event, but rather part of a runaway process called eternal inflation, an infinite ballooning and bubbling outward of this and possibly other universes.

Relativity and inflation theory, said Dr. Aguirre, “allow us to conceptualize things that would have seemed impossible before”. Time can be twisted, he said, “so from one point of view the universe is a finite thing that is growing into something infinite if you wait forever, but from another point of view it’s always infinite”.

Or maybe the universe is like Jorge Luis Borges’s fastidiously imagined Library of Babel, composed of interminable numbers of hexagonal galleries with polished surfaces that “feign and promise infinity”.

Or like the multiverse as envisioned in Tibetan Buddhism, “a vast system of 1059 universes, that together are called a Buddha Field”, said Jonathan C. Gold, who studies Buddhist philosophy at Princeton.

The finite is nested within the infinite, and somewhere across the glittering, howling universal sample space of Buddha Field or Babel, your doppelgänger is hard at the keyboard, playing a Bach toccata.

NO, YOU DON’T GOTTA HAVE ART

Milt Verstandig

There are several reasons why we should challenge Donna Marxer’s arguments for increasing government support of the arts (“You Gotta Have Art”, PIQUE, January).

First, it’s unconstitutional. The only support the Federal government is permitted to give to the arts under our Constitution pertains to setting up copyright and patent laws to protect intellectual property.

Second, he who pays the piper calls the tune. Government support leads to increased government control. These subsidies tend to serve the interests of the state. Art challenging the state is either not supported or is actively discouraged.

Before making the argument that government support of the arts redounds to the glory of the culture, just think of the effects that generous government support of the arts had on German and Russian culture during the Nazi and Soviet times respectively.

Supporting the opera, ballet, and symphony is really

subsidizing the overwhelmingly upper income classes that attend these events. It’s an example of average-income taxpayers being compelled to support wealthier people, a repugnant idea.

There is no evidence whatsoever that government support for the arts improves the economy. Please remember that every dime governments give to the arts is first extracted from us via taxes, leaving us with less to spend. The money would have been used for things we need and want, including support for important charitable endeavors like hospitals, poverty alleviation, education, eradication of diseases worldwide, and many other worthwhile causes.

Lastly, in a democracy like ours, if we give government an increased role in deciding which charities to support, they should support those that most people favor. We get a good idea of which ones people support by looking at current recipients of private charity. Turns out that the biggest recipients of private donations in our country are religious institutions, which receive a third of all donations. So a democratically arranged system of charitable giving would be more likely to use taxpayer money to contribute to religious institutions. Think it can’t be done? Think Bush’s faith-based initiative program (since renamed under President Obama).

A truly benevolent society allows people to spend their money on the charities of their choice. This prevents us from being forced to contribute to causes that we may not like, such as religious institutions. Just as the separation of church and state allows us to determine whether and what religious affiliation to select, so a system that keeps arts funding separate from government allows a wide variety of charitable causes to be supported without imposing political control on the process. That’s why I think we should reject calls for increased government support for the arts.

Donna Marxer responds:

Many very short plea for government support for the arts did not involve the addition of enormous amounts of tax money from the public. It was rather a wish that “attention be paid”. When Mitt Romney made his absurd claim that “billions of dollars could be saved” by shutting down the NEA and the NEH (and PBS), I cringed because nobody called him on it.

Support for the arts is unconstitutional, Mr. Verstandig? Sure, just as government support for canal and road building and for land-grant colleges was once called “unconstitutional”. Perhaps the Constitution is like the Bible; you can make it mean whatever you wish.

Mr. V. is correct about state control. The late Jesse Helms (a fundamentalist Christian) was responsible for getting the NEA to drop grants to individual visual artists because he was offended by naughty photographs, and Rudy Giuliani tried to close the Brooklyn Museum. But America is not Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union, and our arts support was never designed to control anyone.

Yes, the grants killed by bluenoses—and by short-sighted cost-cutters today—were and are deeply missed.

But frankly, Mr. V., most visual artists support themselves with day jobs since grant money is so hard to come by.

As a former director of two arts-service not-for-profits who has written successful government grants, I am well aware that the small amounts of money that these grants provide serve mainly to give the applicants *credibility*. If your organization can get a government grant (which by no means covers the huge costs of running an opera or symphony), it means you have passed a tough test, and the door is open to private foundation and personal support.

You believe these arts organizations are for the wealthy. In the sense that the wealthy are their principal support, you are correct. But the wealthy are not their primary beneficiaries; it is the public at large. In the case of PBS, for instance, publicly-funded art is often the only exposure to art that the disadvantaged get.

As for education, I merely wish to see the arts *returned* to the curricula. If we can pay for guards and guns in the schools—which has been seriously suggested—can we not pay for the restoration of art and music? They may even reduce violence, as well as providing learning.

And there is *plenty* of evidence that the arts contribute to the economy. Nationally, the amount is tiny, only just over one percent. But in cities like Los Angeles and New York, the picture changes; before the recession, the arts were the second largest industry (after finance) in our city.

As a humanist, it seems to me that we should support aesthetics, the less-measurable but no less real and valuable part of our philosophy.

ANOTHER FUN- AND FACT-FILLED AFTERNOON ON FOX NEWS

(Excerpted from "Fox 'News' Claims that Algebra Classes Are a Conspiracy of Liberal Indoctrination", 1/11/2013 on AlterNet.org)

Sometimes, you just can't make this stuff up. There's actually a video clip of the Fox News dolts sitting around expressing dismay at 6th graders learning algebra. Fox News host Eric Bolling on January 9 on the show "The Five" accused some schools of "pushing the liberal agenda" for teaching an algebra lesson about "the distributive property".

"But even worse is the way some textbooks are pushing the liberal agenda," Bolling explained, pointing to an algebra worksheet that Scholastic says gives students "insight into the distributive property as it applies to multiplication".

"Distribute the wealth!" Bolling exclaimed, reading the worksheet. "Distribute the wealth with the lovely rich girl [a cartoon on the sheet] with a big ole bag of money, handing some money out."

Co-host Kimberly Guilfoyle explained that the algebra worksheet had put her on "high alert" for the liberal agenda in her 6-year-old son's curriculum. Dana Perrino agreed.

Wait. These clowns don't understand the distributive property in elementary arithmetic, and they confuse it with some kind of Communist plot? And there's more.

"Everybody has anecdotal evidence of this", co-host Greg Gutfeld agreed. "I think the only way leftism can survive is through indoctrination because its number one adversary is reality. So you got to get them young and it's perfect for kids. Paul Krugman's logic is child's play: Share your stuff. A lot of this comes from the teachers. They get their news from The Huffington Post and their antiperspirant from a health food store. This is the way they live."

Comment: Why not a Dumbth nomination? Because we don't give the award to groups, or Congress and Fox News would be tied for the laurels every year. But for sheer nuttiness, nothing quite matches Gutfeld's foam-at-the-mouth rant that equates Nobel Prize-winner Krugman's economics with health-food-store antiperspirants. Really, the writer on Alternet is right: you can't make this stuff up. - JR

OUR FIRST (AND MAYBE WORST-EVER) 2013 DUMBTH-AWARD CANDIDATE

"I think Martin Luther King, Jr. would agree with me if he were alive today that if African Americans had been given the right to keep and bear arms from day one of the country's founding, perhaps slavery might not have been a chapter in our history."

So said Larry Ward, the either delusional or hate-inspired chairman of the January 19 Gun Appreciation Day rally against President Obama's "post-Sandy Hook assault on gun rights", timed for the same weekend as the President's inauguration and the holiday honoring the gun-assassinated civil rights leader. *(Update: it flopped.)*



Let's parse Mr. Ward's logic: If African Americans, all of whom came to this country as slaves, and who by definition as slaves owned nothing—and were in fact themselves owned—had been allowed by their owners to own guns, they wouldn't have been slaves. I can see it now ...

"Here you go, Jupiter", Colonel Beauregard says to 'his' field hand, "a loaded musket just for you. Now get back to work or I'll whip your hide again. And by the way, I'm selling your wife and child down the river."

"Wait, wait, whoa there. Don't you know better than to point a loaded musket at someone, you dumb ..."

Is Mr. Ward simply delusional about slavery and American history, too muddle-headed to understand his own illogic? Or is he deliberately mendacious, mocking both Obama and MLK with his assertion that his rally "actually honors the legacy of Dr. King"?

Either way, dumb, dumber, dumbth.

HOW MANY ATHEISTS DOES IT TAKE TO SCREW IN A LIGHT BULB?

Two: one to do it, and one to video it to prove it wasn't an Act of God.

On the other hand, it takes three Christians, but they are really One.

BELIEVE THIS ABOUT THE INTERNET: IT AIN'T NECESSARILY SO

WEDNESDAY, JAN 2, 2013 12:25 PM EST

Saudi religious leader calls for gang rape of Syrian women. The cleric specified that the "intercourse marriages" last only a few hours "in order to give each fighter a turn".

BY ALTERNET STAFF, ALTERNET

A prominent Saudi cleric has issued a fatwa (a religious ordinance) that calls for the gang rape of Syrian women. Expressing frustration that the "warriors of Islam" fighting in Syria may be getting weary for the lack of sexual pleasure, the religious leader issued a decree that promotes hours-long "intercourse marriages".

The cleric, Muhammed al-Arifi, who is a leading jihadist religious figure, made it clear that his edict called for the gang rape of Syrian women and girls. He specified that the "intercourse marriages" last only a few hours "in order to give each fighter a turn". As to who is an eligible bride, the cleric approves any girls or women over the age of 14 who are widowed or divorced. Yes, you read that right. Any girls over the age of 14.

Wow, I thought, what a piece for PIQUE: fundamentalist Muslim misogyny run amok again. I saved it (a lot longer than the opening paragraphs reprinted above) to my "Next Issue" file and tore the quickie "News In Brief" article out of the *Times* the next morning.

But also that next morning came this:

Exhibit A in *How an Islamophobic Meme Can Spread Like Wildfire Across the Internet*. The apparently fabricated story of a Saudi cleric issuing a fatwa condoning gang rapes in Syria is an object lesson in the pitfalls of breakneck online journalism. January 3, 2013 ALTERNET

Editor's note: On January 2, AlterNet was one of several outlets that published what turned out to be an article based on a false report. We would like to apologize to our readers for the error.

Bogus. Nevertheless, as the AlterNet article continued, by evening a simple Google search of the words, "Saudi Sheikh", "Syrian" and "women" brought up some *five million* references and at least three pages of links to articles spreading the news.

So, where did this claptrap come from? AlterNet admitted picking it up from the anti-Islamic Clarion Fund site. Other penitents admitted using the Iranian regime-backed Press TV as their primary source. "Given that the Syrian conflict is turning into a de facto proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran", any outrage attributed to a Saudi cleric by an Iranian source should have set off alarm bells.

But for hours the lie spread unchecked in the "cloud" of information, and will never really go away. It'll become another urban myth clung to by the credulous, and will pop

up on your computer or tablet or smartphone screen again and again and again, forever.

The lesson? One that, in this era of instant news in a never ending 24/7 cycle, we have to relearn and reaffirm every day: Whatever it is, it ain't necessarily so.

AN ETHICAL QUESTION ARISTOTLE NEVER HAD TO CONSIDER

From The New York Times in January:

Kansas Sperm Donor Is Ordered to Pay Support

A man who answered an online advertisement to donate sperm to a lesbian couple is fighting the state's efforts to force him to pay child support for the girl conceived through artificial insemination. A Department of Children and Families spokeswoman ... said that the agency would not be pursuing payment if the state had not provided more than \$6,000 in benefits for the child after the Topeka couple split. She said the state tries to establish a child's paternity when benefits are involved. Court records show that the sperm donor, William Marotta, 46, signed an agreement in 2009 in which he gave up parental rights to Angela Bauer and Jennifer Schreiner and that absolved him of financial responsibility. The state says that because he did not work through a clinic or doctor, as state law requires, he can be held responsible for about \$6,000 in public assistance that the biological mother received and for future child support.

Okay, humanists, rationalists, and philosophy buffs — what is the ethical question here? The complexities of the Kansas legal and child-welfare systems aside, is Mr. Marotta *ethically* bound to pay child support? What if the child's biological mother deserts or dies or is incapacitated? Does the state of Kansas have a right (or a duty to the taxpayers?) to demand his support? Does he have *any* obligations?

Questions that Aristotle (or any pre-21st century philosopher) would probably never have conceived (double-entendre intended), let alone considered — but you can.

Your opinions — for these pages — are solicited. — JR

READERS RESPOND TO JANUARY PIQUE

To the Editor: Thanks for the packed-full-of-fun new PIQUE, and especially the lead essay, which, like your Wade rebuttal, should have been in boldface print in *The Times*. — Phil Appleman

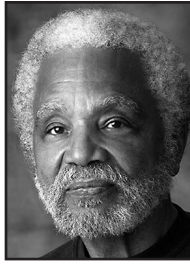
To the Editor: January PIQUE, as usual, is very rewarding. I keep wondering if some month it will be disappointing -- after all, one doesn't expect to draw a full house every time the cards are dealt. But every month it's the same old thing — lively, amusing, enlightening. — Peter Rogatz

To the Editor: Great opening piece on the gun issue. Urge readers to read the Second Amendment and they'll see how the gun zealots have distorted it in order to hide behind it. We'll see if Obama can understand just how he can make it a "legacy" issue if he stands up and does the right thing.

Well done! — Stan Friedland

**TWO MORE HAPPY RESULTS OF
LAST NOVEMBER'S ELECTION**

Long-time readers of PIQUE may remember Ernie Chambers as the Nebraska State Senator who sued God in 2007, seeking a permanent injunction ordering God to “cease certain harmful activities [you know, floods and volcanic eruptions, etc.] and the making of terroristic threats ... of grave harm to innumerable persons, including constituents of Plaintiff who Plaintiff has the duty to represent.”



Chambers Won

A long-time civil rights activist and opponent of the death penalty, he filed his suit—which drew national attention—to bring attention to the dozens, even hundreds of frivolous lawsuits that crowded the Nebraska courts every year.

Ernie (everyone calls him that) was the first black legislator elected in his state, and served nine terms until a 2000 term-limits law—one he believes was aimed at him— forced him out in 2008. But the law allowed him to return after sitting out a cycle, and last November he easily defeated the woman who had taken his seat when he left.



Hannity Lost

Rock-ribbed reactionary and supremely self-satisfied Fox News talk-show host Sean Hannity—who repeatedly predicted before November 7 that Barack Obama would lose in a landslide—lost half his audience in the weeks following the election, according to Nielsen ratings numbers, the worst loss by far of any on-air commentator measured.

Adding delicious insult to insufficient injury, according to the *Daily News* TV Editor, two of Hannity’s rivals on MSNBC, Ed Schultz and Rachel Maddow, held onto most of their audiences, while at CNN, far less politically polarizing host Anderson Cooper lost almost none of his viewers postelection.

It got even worse for Hannity in the “money demo” of viewers 25-54, who are prized by advertisers. With this group, Hannity held onto less than half his pre-election audience. And through the early part of December, Maddow actually beat Hannity in the coveted group.

Comment: To quote “My Fair Lady’s” Professor Higgins one more time, “How delightful”.

If we’ve been bamboozled long enough, we tend to reject any evidence of the bamboozle. We’re no longer interested in finding out the truth. The bamboozle has captured us; it is simply too painful to acknowledge. — *Carl Sagan*

In politics, absurdity is not a handicap. — *Napoleon Bonaparte*

Don't miss out!
SHSNY Darwin Day & 25th Anniversary
Celebration Luncheon
Saturday, February 16
2:30 - 5:30 pm at
Our Place: Cuisines of China
242 East 79 Street
with
Phillip Kitcher
John Dewey Professor of
Philosophy, Columbia Univ.
Details: Page 7

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