

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

July, 2013

The Glorious Fourth! What better occasion to evaluate America then and now – from the mixed motives of the Founders to The Great Agnostic's enthusiasm, and on to today's disappointments. We doubt the motives of two "heroes", decry Muslim misogyny again, consider reason in Arizona, atheism in Oklahoma (*with a question for you*), wonder how we are to spend our time in this universe, promote Frankenfood, and solicit your opinion of a new award no one will want. – JR

**THE ENTHUSIASTS OF 1776:
A CENTENNIAL ORATION
Robert Green Ingersoll
July 4, 1876**

(Excerpted)

One hundred years ago, our fathers retired the gods from politics. The Declaration of Independence is the grandest, the bravest, and the profoundest political document that was ever signed by the representatives of a people. It is the embodiment of physical and moral courage and of political wisdom. ...

Such things had occasionally been said by some political enthusiast in the olden time, but, for the first time in the history of the world, the representatives of a nation, the representatives of a real, living, breathing, hoping people, declared that all men are created equal. With one blow, with one stroke of the pen, they struck down all the cruel, heartless barriers that aristocracy, that priest-craft, that king-craft had raised between man and man. They struck down with one immortal blow that infamous spirit of caste that makes a God almost a beast, and a beast almost a god. With one word, with one blow, they wiped away and utterly destroyed, all that had been done by centuries of war – centuries of hypocrisy – centuries of injustice.

What more did they do? They then declared that each man has a right to live. And what does that mean? It means that he has the right to make his living. It means that he has the right to breathe the air, to work the land, that he stands the equal of every other human being beneath the shining stars; entitled to the product of his labor – the labor of his hand and of his brain.

What more? That every man has the right to pursue his own happiness in his own way. Grand words than these have never been spoken by man.



And what more did these men say? They laid down the doctrine that governments were instituted among men for the purpose of preserving the rights of the people. The old idea was that people existed solely for the benefit of the state – that is to say, for kings and nobles. The old idea was that the people were the wards of king and priest – that their bodies belonged to one and their souls to the other.

And what more? That the people are the source of political power. That was not only a revelation, but it was a revolution. It changed the ideas of people with regard to the source of political power. For the first time it made human beings men. ...

Our fathers founded the first secular government that was ever founded in this world. Recollect that. The first secular government; the first government that said every church has exactly the same rights and no more; every religion has the same rights, and no more. In other words, our fathers were the first men who had the sense, had the genius, to know that no church should be allowed to have a sword; that it should be allowed only to exert its moral influence. ...

I thank every one of them from the bottom of my heart for signing that sublime declaration. I thank them for their courage – for their patriotism – for their wisdom – for the splendid confidence in themselves and in the human race. I thank them for what they were, and for what we are – for what they did, and for what we have received – for what they suffered, and for what we enjoy. ...

These grand men were enthusiasts; and the world has been raised only by enthusiasts. In every country there have been a few who have given a national aspiration to

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

John Rafferty, *President/Editor*; Robert A. Murtha, Jr., *Vice President*; Donna Marxer, *Treasurer*; Lee Loshak, *Secretary*; Remo Cosentino; Arthur Harris; Brian Lemaire; Elaine Lynn; Carl Marxer; Irv Millman; Carlos Mora; John Wagner; Mike Weiss
SHSNY, P.O. Box 7661, F.D.R. Station, New York, NY 10150-7661 / 212-308-2165 / www.shsny.org

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

Articles published in PIQUE are archived in www.shsny.org. They may be reprinted, in full or in part, in other newsletters.

SHSNY is an Affiliated Local Group of the Council for Secular Humanism,
and a Charter Chapter of the American Humanist Association.

the people. The enthusiasts of 1776 were the builders and framers of this great and splendid Government; and they were the men who saw, although others did not, the golden fringe of the mantle of glory that will finally cover this world. They knew, they felt, they believed that they would give a new constellation to the political heavens — that they would make the Americans a grand people — grand as the continent upon which they lived. ...

We want every American to make today, on this hundredth anniversary, a declaration of individual independence. Let each man enjoy his liberty to the utmost, enjoy all he can; but be sure it is not at the expense of another. The French Convention gave the best definition of liberty I have ever read: "The liberty of one citizen ceases only where the liberty of another citizen commences." I know of no better definition. I ask you today to make a declaration of individual independence. And if you are independent be just. Allow everybody else to make his declaration of individual independence. Allow your wife, allow your husband, allow your children to make theirs. Let everybody be absolutely free and independent, knowing only the sacred obligations of honesty and affection. Let us be independent of party, independent of everybody and everything except our own consciences and our own brains. Do not belong to any clique. Have clear title deeds in fee simple to yourselves, without any mortgages on the premises to anybody in the world.

It is a grand thing to be the owner of yourself. It is a grand thing to protect the rights of others. It is a sublime thing to be free and just. ...

We must progress. We are just at the commencement of invention. The steam engine — the telegraph — these are but the toys with which science has been amused. Wait; there will be grander things, there will be wider and higher culture — a grander standard of character, of literature and art. We have now half as many millions of people as we have years, and many of us will live until a hundred millions stand beneath the flag. We are getting more real solid sense. The schoolhouse is the finest building in the village. We are writing and reading more books; we are painting and buying more pictures; we are struggling more and more to get at the philosophy of life, of things — trying more and more to answer the questions of the eternal Sphinx. We are looking in every direction — investigating; in short, we are thinking and working. Besides all this, I believe the people are nearer honest than ever before. A few years ago we were willing to live upon the labor of four million slaves. Was that honest? At last, we have a national conscience. At last, we have carried out the Declaration of Independence. Our fathers wrote it — we have accomplished it. The black man was a slave — we made him a citizen. We found four million human beings in manacles, and now the hands of a race are held up in the free air without a chain. ...

I want you to go away with an eternal hatred in your breast of injustice, of aristocracy, of caste, of the idea that one man has more rights than another because he has better clothes, more land, more money, because he owns a railroad, or is famous and in high position. Remember that all men

have equal rights. Remember that the man who acts best his part — who loves his friends the best, is most willing to help others, truest to the discharge of obligation — who has the best heart, the most feeling, the deepest sympathies — and who freely gives to others the rights that he claims for himself is the best man. I am willing to swear to this. ...

Our country is founded upon the dignity of labor — upon the equality of man. Ours is the first real Republic in the history of the world. Beneath our flag the people are free. We have retired the gods from politics. We have found that man is the only source of political power, and that the governed should govern. We have disfranchised the aristocrats of the air and have given one country to mankind.

(*Ed: Read — and enjoy — the entire speech by Googling "Ingersoll Centennial Oration".*)

FURTHER THOUGHTS FOR THIS JULY 4: AN HONEST 3-1/2 MINUTES OF TV

Alan Sorkin

(*Transcribed from the 2012 first episode of Alan Sorkin's HBO series, "The Newsroom".*)

(*Editor: I'm very glad I had the huge good fortune to be born a citizen of the United States of America. But being a patriot does not necessitate being a chest-thumping jingo, or turning a blind eye to our faults, especially the current ones. — JR*)

THE SCENE:

In the first scene of the first episode of HBO's "The Newsroom", TV anchorman Will McAvoy, played by Jeff Daniels, sits on a panel in front of an audience of college students. A pretty young girl asks the panel to explain "why America is the greatest country in the world". One (liberal) panelist suggests "diversity, and equality of opportunity", another (conservative) proclaims, "freedom, and freedom". The moderator urges McAvoy to answer.

McAvoy (whom we later learn is fed up with his job of covering high-rated tabloid-junk news) fidgets, then erupts.

THE REALITY RANT

It's not the greatest country in the world, Professor, and that's my answer.

(*Stunned silence, followed by McAvoy references to previous remarks by the other panelists, then ...*)

With a straight face, you're going to tell students that America is so star-spangled awesome that we're the only ones in the world who have freedom? *Canada* has freedom. *Japan* has freedom. The UK, France, Italy, Germany, Spain ... *Australia* ... *Belgium* has freedom. So, 227 sovereign states in the world, 180 of them have freedom.

And yeah, you, sorority girl, just in case you should accidentally wander into a voting booth one day, there's some things you should know. One of them is that there is absolutely no evidence to support the statement that we are the greatest country in the world.

We're 7th in literacy, 27th in math, 22nd in science, 49th in life expectancy, 178th in infant mortality, 3rd in median household income, number 4 in labor force and number 4 in exports. We lead the world in only three categories: number of incarcerated citizens per capita, number of adults who

believe angels are real, and defense spending, where we spend more than the next 26 countries combined, 25 of whom are allies.

Now none of this is the fault of a 20-year-old college student, but you are, nonetheless, a member of the, worst, period, generation, period, ever, period. So when you ask what makes us the greatest country in the world, I don't know what the fuck you're talking about. Yosemite?

(Some boos from audience, but mostly embarrassed silence.)

It sure used to be. We stood up for what was right. We fought for moral reasons. We passed laws and struck down laws for moral reasons. We waged wars on poverty, not on poor people. We sacrificed, we cared about our neighbors, we put our money where our mouths were, and we never beat our chests. We built great big things, made ungodly technological advances, explored the universe, cured disease, and we cultivated the world's greatest artists *and* the world's greatest economy.

We reached for the stars. Acted like men. We aspired to intelligence, we didn't belittle it, it didn't make us feel inferior. We didn't identify ourselves by who we voted for in the last election.

And we didn't scare so easily.

We were able to be all these things, and do all these things, because we were informed – by great men, men who were revered. The first step in solving any problem is recognizing there is one.

America is not the greatest country in the world anymore.

(Turns to moderator) Enough?

Edit: see it all at <http://safeshare.tv/w/UAGOcLSuLX>. The second season of The Newsroom begins July 15 on HBO.

THE (GODLESS) FOUNDING FATHERS ON THE "ABRACADBRA" OF CHRISTIANITY

Gordon Wood

(Excerpted from Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815.)

Cultivated gentlemen like Thomas Jefferson may have relied on the arts and sciences to help them interpret and reform the world, but that was not the case with most average Americans. Nearly all common and middling people in the early Republic still made sense of the world through religion. Devastating fires, destructive earthquakes, and bad harvests were acts of God and often considered punishments for a sinful people. As they had in the mid-eighteenth century, people still fell on their knees when struck by the grace of God. People prayed openly and often. They took religion seriously, talked about it, and habitually resorted to it in order to examine the state of their souls. Despite growing doubts of revelation and the spread of rationalism in the early Republic, most Americans remained deeply religious. As American society became more democratic in the early nineteenth century, middling people rose to dominance and brought their religiosity with them. The Second Great

Awakening, as the movement was later called, was a massive outpouring of evangelical religious enthusiasm, perhaps a more massive expression of Protestant Christianity than at any time since the seventeenth century or even the Reformation. By the early decades of the nineteenth century American society appeared to be much more religious than it had been in the final decades of the eighteenth century.

The American Revolution broke many of the intimate ties that had traditionally linked religion and government, especially with the Anglican Church, and turned religion into a voluntary affair, a matter of individual free choice. But contrary to the experience of eighteenth-century Europeans, whose rationalism tended to erode their allegiance to religion, religion in America did not decline with the spread of enlightenment and liberty. Indeed, as Tocqueville was soon to observe, religion in America gained in authority precisely because of its separation from governmental power.

At the time of the revolution few could have predicted such an outcome. Occurring as it did in an enlightened and liberal age, the Revolution seemed to have little place for religion. Although some of the Founders, such as Samuel Adams, John Jay, Patrick Henry, Elias Boudinot, and Roger Sherman, were fairly devout Christians, most leading Founders were not deeply or passionately religious, and few of them led much of a spiritual life. As enlightened gentlemen addressing each other in learned societies, many of the leading gentry abhorred "that gloomy superstition disseminated by ignorant illiberal preachers" and looked forward to the day when "the phantom of darkness will be dispelled by the rays of science, and the bright charms of rising civilization".

Most of them, at best, only passively believed in organized Christianity and, at worst, privately scorned and mocked it. Although few of them were outright deists, that is, believers in a clockmaker God who had nothing to do with revelation and simply allowed the world to run in accord with natural forces, most, like South Carolina historian David Ramsay, did tend to describe the Christian church as "the best temple of reason". ... The Founders viewed religious enthusiasm as a kind of madness, the conceit "of a warmed or overweening brain". In all of his writings Washington rarely mentioned Christ, and, in fact, he scrupulously avoided testifying to a belief in the Christian gospel. Many of the Revolutionary leaders were proto-Unitarians, denying miracles and the divinity of Jesus. Even puritanical John Adams thought that the argument for Christ's divinity was an "awful blasphemy" in this new enlightened age.

Jefferson's hatred for the clergy and organized religion knew no bounds. He believed that members of the "priestcraft" were always in alliance with despots against liberty. "To this effect", he said—privately, of course, not publicly—"they have perverted the purest religion ever preached to man, into mystery and jargon unintelligible to all mankind and therefore the safer engine for their purposes." The Trinity was nothing but "Abracadabra" and

“hocus-pocus ... so incomprehensible to the human mind that no candid man can say he has any idea of it”. Ridicule, he said, was the only weapon to be used against it.

THE (ELITIST) FOUNDING FATHERS ON THE “EXCESSES OF DEMOCRACY”

Gordon Wood

(Excerpted from *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815*.)

The deficiencies of the [Articles of] Confederation themselves cannot account for the unprecedented nature of the Constitution created in 1787. By establishing a strong national government that operated directly on individuals, the Constitution went far beyond what the weaknesses of the Articles demanded. Granting Congress the authority to raise revenue, to regulate trade, to pay off its debts, and to deal effectively in international affairs did not require the total scrapping of the Articles and the creation of an extraordinarily powerful and distant national government, the likes of which were virtually inconceivable a decade earlier. To James Madison, the putative father of the Constitution, the document of 1787 became the solution for the “multiplicity”, “mutability”, and “injustice” of state legislation over the previous decade, what were often referred to as the “excesses of democracy”. It was the popular behavior of the state legislatures in the decade following the Declaration of Independence that lay behind the elite’s sense of crisis.

The abuses of the state legislatures, said Madison, were “so frequent and so flagrant as to alarm the most steadfast friends of Republicanism”; and these abuses, he told Jefferson in the fall of 1787, “contributed more to that uneasiness which produced the Convention, and prepared the public mind for a general reform than those which accrued to our national character and interest from the inadequacy of the Confederation to its immediate objects”.

The Revolution had greatly democratized the state legislatures, both by increasing the number of their members and by broadening their electorates. Many ordinary men of more humble and rural origins and less education than had sat in the colonial assemblies had been elected as representatives. ...

By the 1780s it was obvious to many, including Madison, that “a spirit of locality” was destroying “the aggregate interests of the community”. Everywhere the gentry leaders complained of popular legislative practices that today are taken for granted – logrolling, horse-trading, and pork-barreling that benefited special and local interest groups. Each representative, grumbled Ezra Stiles, president of Yale College, was concerned only with the particular interests of his electors. Whenever a bill was read in the legislature, “every one instantly thinks how it will affect his constituents”. Instead of electing men to office “for their abilities, integrity and patriotism”, the people, said Stiles, were much more likely to vote for someone “from some mean, interested, or capricious motive”. ...

Many leaders had come to realize that the Revolution had unleashed social and political forces that they had not anticipated and that the “excesses of democracy” threatened the very essence of their republican revolution. The behavior of the state legislatures, in the despairing words of Madison, had called “into question the fundamental principle of republican Government, that the majority who rule in such governments are the safest Guardians both of Public Good and private rights”. This was the issue that made the 1780s so critical to large numbers of American leaders. ... By 1787 many of the Revolutionary leaders had retreated from the republican idealism of 1775-1776. People were not going to be selfless and keep their private interests out of the public arena after all. ...

The Federal Constitution of 1787 was designed in part to solve the problems created by the presence in the state legislatures of these [middle class] men. In addition to correcting the deficiencies of the Articles of Confederation, the Constitution was intended to restrain the excesses of democracy and protect minority rights from overbearing majorities in the state legislatures.

THE CONSTITUTION IS AN EXPERIMENT

Louis Menand

(Excerpted from “How the Deal Went Down”, a review of *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time*, by *Ira Katznelson*, in *The New Yorker*, 3/4/2013)

The Constitution “is an experiment, as all life is an experiment”, [Oliver Wendell] Holmes wrote in a famous dissent. That is what Lincoln said in the Gettysburg Address: democracy is an experiment the goal of which is to keep the experiment going. The purpose of democracy is to enable people to live democratically. That’s it. Democracy is not a means to something else; there is no higher good that we’re trying as a society to attain. When we compromise with democracy in order to achieve some other purpose, even when the purpose is to defend democracy, then we are in danger of losing it.

A MOMENT OF SILENCE REASON IN ARIZONA

(Excerpted from *salon.com/2013/05/22*)

When Tempe, Ariz., state Rep. Juan Mendez was asked on May 21 to deliver the opening prayer for the afternoon’s session of the state’s House of Representatives, he delivered something different.

“Most prayers in this room begin with a request to bow your heads”, the Democratic official said. “I would like to ask that you not bow your heads. I would like to ask that you take a moment to look around the room at all of the men and women here, in this moment, sharing together this extraordinary experience of being alive and of dedicating ourselves to working toward improving the lives of the people in our state.”

He went on to say, “This is a room in which there are many challenging debates, many moments of tension, of ideological division, of frustration. But this is also a room

where, as my secular humanist tradition stresses, by the very fact of being human, we have much more in common than we have differences."

It was a call to love and empathy that stands right up there next to any prayer in the book, and one that offered bonus inclusion and humanity. Afterward, he said, "I hope today marks the beginning of a new era in which Arizona's non-believers can feel as welcome and valued here as believers."

And if the conservative state of Arizona can make it happen, there's hope yet for the other 49, people.

Update 1: Predictably, of course "Christians" went ape. The next day Republican Rep. Steve Smith said Mendez's prayer wasn't a prayer at all. So he asked other AZ House members to join him in a second daily prayer in "repentance", and about half the 60-member body did so. Take that, secular humanists – our prayer cancels your non-prayer!

Update 2: A couple of days later Mr. Mendez announced, at a press conference organized by the Secular Coalition for America, that he is, indeed, an atheist.

AN EMBARRASSING MOMENT IN OKLAHOMA ...

John Rafferty

The day after a tornado leveled the town of Moore in May, CNN's Wolf Blitzer interviewed survivor Rebecca Vitsmun, a young mother with her 18-month-old in her arms. Quick-witted, she had fled the town minutes before the storm reduced her home to matchsticks.

Probably making some assumptions because he was in red-state, Bible-belt Oklahoma, Blitzer used the word "blessed" three times in a single sentence asking how she felt, then really stepped in it, with, "You've really got to thank the Lord, right?"

"Actually", the pretty young mom said, smiling radiantly, "I'm an atheist."

Blitzer The Clueless gaped, blinked, and then opined that that was alright.

Update: When atheists and other non-theists around the country began asking the American Humanist Association how they could help Ms. Vitsmun, AHA Executive Director set up the Humanist Charities' Rebecca Vitsmun Fund. Google that to help.

... AND A TEACHING MOMENT IN NEW YORK

Flash Light says, "I'm glad Rebecca Vitsmun spoke up for her beliefs, but I thought she let Wolf off too easily when, seeing that he was flummoxed, she added, 'I don't blame anybody for thanking the Lord.' I guess she wanted to avoid being a strident atheist in the face of all that suffering around her.

"But this could be the basis for one of your essay requests: How would you have answered Wolf? How can you strike a balance between educating, while avoiding hectoring? Here's my attempt:

No I don't thank your God, but neither do I blame Him for all those killed, for all the destruction and suffering caused by this storm, do you? The ancients imagined Zeus on a mountain top, hurling down lightning bolts. Today science can explain storms, so we no longer have to imagine gods cause them. We no longer

have to blame gods for the bad things that happen, and we certainly don't have to thank them when we make a good decision. I'm just thankful I didn't waste time praying, and so was able to get out in time.

I like Flash's idea, although I agree with his own self-criticism that maybe the above is "a bit too hectoring". So, fellow and sororal humanists, rationalists, and skeptics:

What do you say when someone assumes you're a believer?

Send your short-form responses—serious, snide, and funny are okay, nasty is not—to editor@shsny.org.

PROFILES IN PIGGERY REP. STEPHEN FINCHER

John Rafferty

(Based on a report on Daily Kos, 5/20/2013.)

Meet Republican Congressman Stephen Fincher of Tennessee, who, along with his fellow Tea Partiers in the House, wants to impose cuts so deep in the federal food stamps program as to almost eliminate it, and he has Biblical authority on his side.

When challenged during House debate with the facts that 47 percent of all food stamp recipients are children, another 8 percent are 60 years of age or older, and 41 percent are the "working poor" — people who live in a house-hold with some income from work — Fincher quoted 2 Thessalonians 3:10, thundering:

"The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat."

Of course this should come as no surprise. After all, he ran for Congress on a platform of cutting "wasteful government spending".

What should be a surprise, but of course isn't, is that Rep. Fincher is very selective about what's wasteful and what's not. You see, as of June, 2010, he had received \$3.2 million in federal crop subsidies, and his father and brother had raked in another \$6.7 million.

So, by now Rep. Fincher's family has siphoned more than \$10 million dollars from the federal treasury. The average American family on food stamp assistance receives \$287 a month — and he wants to cut that.

I think Rep Fincher deserves a pig mask, don't you? Shall we send him one? Along with another couple of New Testament quotes:

Do not neglect to do good and share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. – Hebrews 13:16

And ...

Do you suppose, O man – you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself – that you will escape the judgment of God? – Romans 2:3

So, send the pig mask? Write editor@shsny.org.



SHSNY CALENDAR: JULY - SEPTEMBER 2013

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURSDAY, JULY 11, 6:30 pm
in the front room of
**THE COMMUNITY CHURCH
OF NEW YORK**

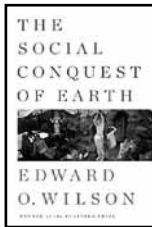
28 East 35 St. (Park-Mad)
(3 doors West of the church - red door)

We'll discuss

**THE SOCIAL CONQUEST
OF EARTH**

Edward O. Wilson

Where did we come from? What are we? Where are we going? One of our greatest living scientists directly addresses these three fundamental questions of religion, philosophy, and science while "overturning the theory that evolution naturally encourages creatures to put family first".



Wilson draws on his remarkable knowledge of biology and social behavior to reimagine evolutionary history, showing that group selection, not kin selection, is the driving force of human evolution.

– *Paperback and Kindle available.*

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 Brabant Belgian 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

THURSDAY, AUG 1, 6:30 pm
at Community Church of NY
28 East 35 Street (Park-Mad)

**RELIGION IN
AMERICAN POLITICS:**

**A Short History
Frank Lambert**

The delegates to the 1787 Constitutional Convention blocked the establishment of Christianity as a national religion. But they could not keep religion out of American politics. From 1800, when Federalist clergymen charged that deist Thomas Jefferson was unfit to lead a "Christian nation", to today, when some Democrats want to embrace the Religious Left to compete with the Republicans and the Religious Right, Lambert tells the fascinating story of the uneasy relations between religion and politics in America. – *Paperback and Kindle*

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURSDAY, SEPT 5, 6:30 pm
at Community Church of NY
28 East 35 Street (Park-Mad)

**THE SHIA REVIVAL:
How Conflicts Within Islam
Will Shape the Future
By Vali Nasr**

Profiled on the front page of *The Wall Street Journal*, Iranian-born scholar Vali Nasr has become one of America's leading commentators on current events in the Middle East. In this "smart, clear and timely" book (*Washington Post*), Nasr brilliantly dissects the political and theological antagonisms within Islam. He provides a unique and objective understanding of the 1,400-year bitter struggle between Shias and Sunnis, and sheds crucial light on its modern-day consequences. – *Paperback*

**BRUNCH & CONVERSATION
SUNDAY, JULY 21, 12 NOON
and**

**SUNDAY, AUG 18, 12 NOON
MONTHLY CASUAL BRUNCH
Brabant Belgian Brasserie
316 East 53 Street**

We'll meet at Noon just east of 2nd Avenue for outstanding Belgian fare, including a prix-fixe brunch for \$17.

July Discussion: Is America "the greatest country"? (See page 2, "Further Thoughts ...").

August Discussion: To be determined by the July participants.

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, JULY 8, 7:00 pm
SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT**

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

THE PERFECT FAMILY

When an uptight mom (Kathleen Turner - "I don't have to think, I'm a Catholic.") is nominated for her church's Catholic Woman of the Year award, she pushes aside inconvenient truths, including an alcoholic husband, a gay daughter and a philandering son, in favor of a "perfect" family.

and

**MONDAY, AUG. 12, 7:00 pm
THE TWELVE CHAIRS**

A wildly funny, early Mel Brooks comedy of an ex-noble, a crooked priest, and an ordinary thief on the make for hidden jewels in newly-Communist 1920 Russia. Dom DeLuise, Ron Moody, Frank Langella.

SHSNY Movie Night is FREE.

(But put something on the bar beside your elbow.)

SHSNY CALENDAR: JULY - SEPTEMBER 2013

GREAT LECTURES ON DVD

WED, JULY 24, 7:00 pm
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)

CONSCIOUSNESS:

*Confessions of a Romantic
Reductionist*

Dr. Christof Koch

What links conscious experience of pain, joy, color, and smell to bioelectrical activity in the brain? How can anything physical give rise to nonphysical, subjective conscious states? Dr. Koch recounts not only the birth of the modern science of consciousness but also the subterranean motivation for his quest – his instinctual (if “romantic”) belief that life is meaningful.

Koch gives us stories from the front lines of modern research into the neurobiology of consciousness as well as his own reflections on a variety of topics, including how neurons respond to Homer Simpson, the physics and biology of free will, dogs, sentient machines and “Der Ring des Nibelungen”.

and

WED, AUG. 21, 7:00 pm
The World Until Yesterday
Jared Diamond

We take for granted the features of our modern society, from air travel and telecommunications to literacy and obesity. Yet for nearly all of its six million years of existence, human society had none of these things.

We can glimpse much of our former lifestyle in those largely traditional societies like those of the New Guinea Highlanders, which remind us that it was only yesterday – in evolutionary time – when everything changed and that we moderns still possess bodies and social practices often better adapted to traditional than to modern conditions.

HUMANISM 101

MONDAY, JULY 29, 6:30-8:30
Community Church of New York

Meeting/Discussion #8
The Rise of the Nones

Readings Online

Frans de Waal: *Has Militant Atheism Become a Religion?* (Excerpted from *The Bonobo and the Atheist*)
http://www.salon.com/2013/03/25/militant_atheism_has_become_a_religion/
Tom Flynn: *Why I Don't Believe in the New Atheism*
http://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php?section=library&page=flynn_30_3

Book(s)

David Niose: *Non-Believer Nation: The Rise of Secular Americans*
and/or

Barry Lynn: *Piety and Politics: The Right-Wing Assault on Religious Freedom*

Note: You can do the online reading for each Meeting 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!

HUMANISM 101 WILL CONTINUE IN 2013-2014

Our study group (not a gabfest or bull session – some reading required) will start a second “semester” in October.

The syllabus and (most of) the readings for the schedule of meetings will be posted at shsny.org – and on a new Humanism 101 Meetup – by August 1.

The only requirements for attending are a thirst for knowledge of humanism and a willingness to read, study, and discuss.

Interested? Questions? Ask discussion leader John Rafferty at editor@shsny.org

Book Launch & Wine Social

WED, July 31, 7- 10:00 pm
Cellar 58, 58 2nd Ave (btw 3-4)

The Philosophy of Pseudoscience

by Massimo Pigliucci

Hosted by Reasonable New York

OTHER RNY EVENTS

NY Society for Ethical Culture:
July 10, 17, 24, 31, 6:30-8:00: *Drumming Circle*. Members \$5, or \$10.
July 10 & 24, August 7 & 21, 2:30-4:30: *The Death Cafe*, conversations about death, What are your plans?
CFI-NYC. Mon., July 8, 10 pm.
Google's Lounge (Upstairs at the Living Room), 154 Ludlow St.
“Skeptics on the Mic Karaoke”.

New York Philosophy. Wed, July 24, 6-10 pm, Chelsea Manor, 138 West 25 St.: Cocktails & Conversation: “*The Mind, Intelligence, and Reason*”. RSVP: nyphilosophy.com
Drinking With Atheists: Every Friday, fun and conversation. Details: www.meetup.com/RichiesList/

PLUS

Agnostic A.A.: Nine weekly AA-endorsed meetings. Schedules: agnosticAA NYC.org/meetings.html
Manhattan History Buffs: Every 3d Tues, 6:30, dinner/talk at Lili's (Chinese) rest, 83-84th/3rd. July 16: “*Vice Presidents, starting with John Adams*”. Info: 212-802-7427
Atheism History Week – With SHSNY's John Rafferty, 5:30 p.m. Wednesdays, MNN Ch. 57 and RNN Ch. 84 in Manhattan, and live streaming at www.mnn.org.
Equal Time for Freethought: Sundays 6:30 p.m., WBAI-NY 99.5FM

LIKE SHSNY ON FACEBOOK

www.facebook.com/pages/The-Secular-Humanist-Society-of-New-York/168704396485734

AND MEET US ON MEETUP

www.meetup.com/shsny-org/

IS BRADLEY MANNING A HERO? HOW ABOUT EDWARD SNOWDEN?

John Rafferty

One is a lowly Army PFC who has spent nearly three years in jail awaiting trial for – contrary to his oath – leaking “hundreds of thousands of classified files, documents, and videos”, some of which expose war crimes committed by U.S. personnel.

One is a lowly techie at a government contracting firm who – contrary to his oath – “exposed the data mining procedures of the National Security Agency”.

As I wrote to Ron and Ellen Duncan, who forwarded me the following Truthout article that doesn't just support Manning (who has “Humanist” imprinted on his dogtags), but seems to be nominating him for sainthood, I'm ambivalent. I applaud his expose of the war crimes – no one has a patriotic or military “duty” to stand by while crimes are being committed (in fact, according to the Universal Code of Military Justice, the exact opposite). If Manning had stopped there, I would be wholly on his side. But many of those files contained information, the government claims, which could have led to the exposure of agents working for the U.S., could even lead to their deaths. (In fact, journalist Joe Klein has said on MSNBC's “Hardball with Chris Matthews” that he personally knows of several people who are now hiding in fear of their lives.) In a civilian court Manning's reckless actions would be called criminal negligence – and what the hell was he trying to say or prove by that? I don't rule out the possibility that the government is lying or exaggerating – how could I possibly? – but I don't see it as a black-and-white issue.

As to Snowden, I don't agree with David Brooks' over-the-top condemnation of this young man (see following, page 9) who has not, in fact, leaked any terribly important government secrets – the information, it seems, wasn't all that secret – but I think Brooks makes some interesting observations about the phenomenon of the 21st century loner with little or no connection to society, but with the power of all of society's information at his keyboard.

Are either (or both) Manning or Snowden heroes? I'm not sure. What do *you* think? What is the humanist issue here? The pages of PIQUE are open to your opinions – at editor@shsny.org.

“THE DUTY TO REPORT.”

U.S. v. BRADLEY MANNING

(Excerpted from Truthout, forwarded by Ellen Duncan.)

The court-martial of Bradley Manning, the most significant whistleblower case since Daniel Ellsberg leaked the Pentagon Papers, has begun. Although Manning pled guilty earlier this year to ten offenses that will garner him 20 years in custody, military prosecutors insist on pursuing charges of aiding the enemy and violation of the Espionage Act, carrying life in prison. The Obama administration, which has prosecuted more whistleblowers under the Espionage Act than all prior presidencies

combined, seeks to send a strong message to would-be whistleblowers to keep their mouths shut.

Manning is charged with crimes for sending hundreds of thousands of classified files, documents and videos, including the “Collateral Murder” video, the “Iraq War Logs”, the “Afghan War Logs”, and State Department cables to Wikileaks. Many of the things he transmitted contain evidence of war crimes.

The “Collateral Murder” video depicts a U.S. Apache attack helicopter killing 12 civilians and wounding two children on the ground in Baghdad in 2007. The helicopter then fired on and killed the people trying to rescue the wounded. Finally, a U.S. tank drove over one of the bodies, cutting the man in half. These acts constitute three separate war crimes.

Manning fulfilled his legal duty to report war crimes. He complied with his legal duty to obey lawful orders but also his legal duty to disobey unlawful orders. ...

[Summary of relevant Army Field Manual sections and Geneva Convention articles follows here.]

Enshrined in the U.S. Army Subject Schedule No. 27-1 is “the obligation to report all violations of the law of war”. At his guilty plea hearing, Manning explained that he had gone to his chain of command and asked them to investigate the “Collateral Murder” video and other “war porn”, but his superiors refused. “I was disturbed by the response to injured children”, Manning stated. He was also bothered by the soldiers depicted in the video who “seemed to not value human life by referring to [their targets] as ‘dead bastards’”.

The Uniform Code of Military Justice sets forth the duty of a service member to obey lawful orders. But that duty includes the concomitant duty to disobey unlawful orders. An order not to reveal classified information that contains evidence of war crimes would be an unlawful order. Manning had a legal duty to reveal the commission of war crimes.

To prove Manning violated the Espionage Act, prosecutors must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that he had “reason to believe” the files could be used to harm the United States or aid a foreign power. When he pled guilty, Manning stated, “I believed if the public, particularly the American public, could see this, it could spark a debate on the military and our foreign policy in general as it applied to Iraq and Afghanistan.” He added, “It might cause society to reconsider the need to engage in counterterrorism while ignoring the situation of the people we engaged with every day.” These are hardly the words of a man who thought his actions could harm the United States or help a foreign power. To the contrary. Manning will be permitted to introduce evidence about his belief that certain documents would not cause harm to national security if publicly released. It was after Wikileaks published evidence of the commission of war crimes against the Iraqi people that Iraq refused to grant criminal and civil immunity to U.S. troops if their stay in Iraq was prolonged, causing Obama to withdraw them from Iraq. This saved myriad American and Iraqi lives.

Manning was 22 years old when he courageously committed the acts for which he stands criminally accused. For the first 11 months of his confinement, he was held in solitary confinement and subjected to humiliating forced nudity during inspection. In fact, Juan Mendez, UN special rapporteur on torture, characterized the treatment of Manning as cruel, inhuman and degrading. He said, "I conclude that the 11 months under conditions of solitary confinement (regardless of the name given to his regime by the prison authorities) constitutes, at a minimum, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment in violation of article 16 of the Convention against Torture. If the effects in regards to pain and suffering inflicted on Manning were more severe, they could constitute torture." Mendez could not conclusively say Manning's treatment amounted to torture because he was denied permission to visit Manning under acceptable circumstances. Mendez also concluded that, "Imposing seriously punitive conditions of detention on someone who has not been found guilty of any crime is a violation of his right to physical and psychological integrity as well as of his presumption of innocence."

Obama himself has also violated Manning's presumption of innocence, saying two years ago that Manning "broke the law". But although the Constitution requires the President to enforce the laws, Obama refuses to allow the officials and lawyers from the Bush administration who sanctioned and carried out a regime of torture – which constitutes a war crime under Geneva – to be held legally accountable. Apparently if Bradley Manning had committed war crimes, instead of exposing them, he would be a free man, instead of facing life in prison for his heroic deeds.

THE SOLITARY LEAKER. U.S. v. EDWARD SNOWDEN David Brooks

(Reprinted from The New York Times, 6/10/2013)

From what we know so far, Edward Snowden appears to be the ultimate unmediated man. Though obviously terrifically bright, he could not successfully work his way through the institution of high school. Then he failed to navigate his way through community college.

According to *The Washington Post*, he has not been a regular presence around his mother's house for years. When a neighbor in Hawaii tried to introduce himself, Snowden cut him off and made it clear he wanted no neighborly relationships. He went to work for Booz Allen Hamilton and the C.I.A., but he has separated himself from them, too.

Though thoughtful, morally engaged and deeply committed to his beliefs, he appears to be a product of one of the more unfortunate trends of the age: the atomization of society, the loosening of social bonds, the apparently growing share of young men in their 20s who are living technological existences in the fuzzy land between their childhood institutions and adult family commitments.

If you live a life unshaped by the mediating institutions of civil society, perhaps it makes sense to see the world a

certain way: Life is not embedded in a series of gently gradated authoritative structures: family, neighborhood, religious group, state, nation and world. Instead, it's just the solitary naked individual and the gigantic and menacing state.

This lens makes you more likely to share the distinct strands of libertarianism that are blossoming in this fragmenting age: the deep suspicion of authority, the strong belief that hierarchies and organizations are suspect, the fervent devotion to transparency, the assumption that individual preference should be supreme. You're more likely to donate to the Ron Paul for president campaign, as Snowden did.

It's logical, given this background and mind-set, that Snowden would sacrifice his career to expose data mining procedures of the National Security Agency. Even if he has not been able to point to any specific abuses, he was bound to be horrified by the confidentiality endemic to military and intelligence activities. And, of course, he's right that the procedures he's unveiled could lend themselves to abuse in the future.

But Big Brother is not the only danger facing the country. Another is the rising tide of distrust, the corrosive spread of cynicism, the fraying of the social fabric and the rise of people who are so individualistic in their outlook that they have no real understanding of how to knit others together and look after the common good.

This is not a danger Snowden is addressing. In fact, he is making everything worse.

For society to function well, there have to be basic levels of trust and cooperation, a respect for institutions and deference to common procedures. By deciding to unilaterally leak secret N.S.A. documents, Snowden has betrayed all of these things.

He betrayed honesty and integrity, the foundation of all cooperative activity. He made explicit and implicit oaths to respect the secrecy of the information with which he was entrusted. He betrayed his oaths.

He betrayed his friends. Anybody who worked with him will be suspect. Young people in positions like that will no longer be trusted with responsibility for fear that they will turn into another Snowden.

He betrayed his employers. Booz Allen and the C.I.A. took a high-school dropout and offered him positions with lavish salaries. He is violating the honor codes of all those who enabled him to rise.

He betrayed the cause of open government. Every time there is a leak like this, the powers that be close the circle of trust a little tighter. They limit debate a little more.

He betrayed the privacy of us all. If federal security agencies can't do vast data sweeps, they will inevitably revert to the older, more intrusive eavesdropping methods.

He betrayed the Constitution. The founders did not create the United States so that some solitary 29-year-old could make unilateral decisions about what should be exposed. Snowden self-indulgently short-circuited the democratic structures of accountability, putting his own

preferences above everything else.

Snowden faced a moral dilemma. On the one hand, he had information about a program he thought was truly menacing. On the other hand, he had made certain commitments as a public *servant*, as a member of an organization, and a nation. Sometimes leakers have to leak. The information they possess is so grave that it demands they violate their oaths.

But before they do, you hope they will interrogate themselves closely and force themselves to confront various barriers of resistance. Is the information so grave that it's worth betraying an oath, circumventing the established decision-making procedures, unilaterally exposing secrets that can never be reclassified?

Judging by his comments reported in the news media so far, Snowden was obsessed with the danger of data mining but completely oblivious to his betrayals and toward the damage he has done to social arrangements and the invisible bonds that hold them together.

PANDERING TO MUSLIM MYSOGENY IN THE U.K. AND AROUND THE WORLD

Anne Marie Waters

(Excerpted from National Secular Society (UK) Newslines 5/21/2013)

This morning I read that Mohammad Issai Issaka, accused of riot, assaulting police, and resisting arrest during the infamous Sydney, Australia, riots of 2012, refused to stand up in court, claiming it was against his religion. He would not stand because the magistrate was a woman.

In the end, according to the report, a ludicrous "compromise" was reached "whereby Issaka would walk into the courtroom after the magistrate and leave before her, so he didn't have to technically stand up for her".

I am almost lost for words. A woman works to achieve the position of magistrate - but is humiliated and degraded because some misogynist little twerp refuses to acknowledge her authority.

So, a "compromise", not contempt of court, as it should have been, and a tacit approval of his "beliefs" - and a lesson to all women; no matter who you are or what you achieve, you're still just a woman and if a man doesn't want to recognize your authority, that is his prerogative and it will be respected.

In Italy, a 5-star hotel in Venice also reached a "compromise" when a Muslim employee refused to take orders from the female boss. Instead of being fired, as he should have been, the hotel hired a man to take orders from the female boss and relay them to the employee. The woman's dignity went out the window.

In Spain, female parking meter enforcement officers were withdrawn from an area in Palma de Mallorca following harassment from members of a local mosque who insisted that only men should work there. The women were moved on and replaced with an exclusively male team.

Sharia law is thriving in Britain - and elsewhere - even though it treats women as property (property with beating rights afforded to owners). Female genital mutilation goes on with such impunity in the U.K. that people are even coming here from other European countries to have it performed under the nose of our authorities; knowing full well it will go unpunished because it is their "culture".

The lesson? When there is a clash between the rights and dignity of women and religious or cultural sensitivities, women lose - every single time.

It is time to wake up. It will only get worse if we don't.

BURYING OUR HEADS IN THE SAND HERE

Dennis Middlebrooks

(Ed: Commenting - under yet another assumed name - on President Obama's speech in May on the "war on terror" after an attack in London, indefatigable Letter-to-the-Editor writer Dennis got this into The New York Post of May 30.)

There is a simple explanation for the failure of our political leadership, along with much of the media, to acknowledge what Muslims really believe about jihad.

This head-in-the-sand denial is the direct result of the sacred-cow treatment of religion throughout our society.

In a nation that exalts faith as one of the highest virtues, and that increasingly looks askance on rationalism, secularism and skepticism, it should come as no surprise that there is great reluctance to cast aspersions on any religion, including Islam.

After all, the American people have a greater distrust of atheists than most other groups, even though atheists, to my knowledge, have not flown planes into skyscrapers, bombed marathons, engaged in honor killings, or beheaded people in broad daylight.

READERS RESPOND TO PIQUE

To the Editor: June was a rich issue; maybe too rich. I find Luhrmann ["The Benefits of Church" and "Is That Voice in Your Head God?"] uninteresting, and to have two articles by him strained my patience. Am I the only one who is not interested in how the religious negotiate their lives and the nature of the voices they hear? They should be "talking" to psychiatrists, not to God, or Luhrmann. - *Remo Cosentino*

To the Editor: I have to disagree with John Rafferty's analysis of Pat Robertson's advice to "Carrie" in April PIQUE ["Wash, Rinse, Tumble-Dry, Pray"]. Since Robertson admitted creationism didn't stand up to science, I've been viewing him in a new light. I listened to him speak to the creationist caller, and it didn't sound as if evolution were a sudden revelation to him; rather it sounded like he'd known this all along, but was only now admitting it. He revealed that he came out of the evolutionary closet because he realized he was losing younger followers who weren't falling for creationism.

I expect anyone reading PIQUE doesn't believe Carrie's clothes had a demon problem; rather it appears Carrie had a psychological problem which was causing her to fear demons. I suspect that Robertson knew that all along, too. John probably would have told Carrie her fears were groundless, but a psychologist told me that would be the wrong approach; the patient would just look for another therapist. The psychologist said she has to first reassure patients she totally believes their fears are real (avoiding whether she believes the object of their fears is real), and then help them to overcome those fears. This is exactly what Robertson does.

I also suspect he knew that "all Hell breaking loose" – when a girl bought a ring prayed over by a witch – was just a coincidence, and he related the story because he knew it would have the psychological impact of reinforcing Carrie's hope that he understood her fears, and convincing her she had come to the right man for advice.

Then he advised her to "rebuke any spirits that happened to attach to those clothes". The likely result: Carrie prayed; nothing particularly terrible happened regarding the clothes, and she concluded her prayers were a success, that Robertson had given her good advice, and thus her psychological fear of demons in the clothes was "cured" by his advice.

Note that he didn't preface his advice with words like, "You must rebuke any spirits." Rather, he said, "It ain't going to hurt anything to rebuke any spirits", suggesting that he knew perfectly well there was no actual need for her to do it, only a psychological need.

In short, I suspect SHSNY has been had. I believe Robertson obtained his Dumbth Awards under false pretenses. Far from exhibiting dumbth, he is a consummate huckster who is skilled in manipulating his followers and keeping the contributions flowing in. I suggest we revoke his Lifetime Dumbth Achievement Award, and nominate him for A Lifetime Huckster Award instead. – *Flash Light*
John Rafferty responds: "Been had"? Harumph.

THE RELIGION OF STUPIDITY

Chic Schissell

In a democracy the people make the decisions. But if the people are stupid, their decisions will be stupid. And considering the pressure and magnitude of problems facing the world, we'll not make it successfully into the future unless collective wisdom replaces community folly.

Chief among the offending stupidities is ignorance of the protocols of science. It seems that very few Americans understand how to properly enlist and interpret science to come to wise conclusions. This defect leads to activist roles that may be well-intentioned but are seriously anti-social in effect. Examples include movements devoted to anti-fluoridation, organic foods, anti-vaccines, varieties of alternative medicine, and quackery in general. And, of course, all other forms of religion. (I say other forms of religion because belief in this kind of activism is not based on evidence.)

A nauseating example of media folly was displayed in successive *New York Times* articles May 26 and 27 that strongly implied that there is something seriously wrong with genetically modified foods. One article, called "Breeding the Nutrition Out of Food", claimed that today's food is nutritionally inferior to ancient foods. As an example the article mentioned that the ancestor of today's corn is a plant called teosinte, virtually inedible. But, the article implies, teosinte must be healthier for us than today's corn because "it has ten times more protein than the corn we eat today".

But so does wood.

Another stupid implication from the article is that the caveman's diet must have been more nutritious because they didn't die from degenerative diseases as we do. Of course they didn't. They didn't live long enough to get heart disease or cancer or other degenerative diseases.

As for the assertion that ancient foods were more nutritious, today's crops provide all the nutrition required for good health.

The second article strongly implied without evidence that genetically modified foods were unsafe, and told of efforts to make non-modified foods more available. Both articles emphatically suggested that because people have the right to know what is in their food, modified foods must be so labeled. This brings up another related issue: rights, responsibilities, and the common good.

Surely people have rights, but they also have responsibilities. Food labeling is useful only if people understand what the labels mean. A food label that simply scares a scientifically-ignorant person is akin to crying "fire" in a crowded theater; essentially it tells a panic-inducing lie. And it does considerable harm; it harms the consumer who has to pay higher prices, it harms the retailer who must investigate and find another product source, it harms the farmer who must, expensively, redo his farming.

Before looking for a label, the consumer must know the facts. "Gene-altering" may sound scary to the ignorant, but really isn't. We've been genetically modifying crops since the beginnings of agriculture, some 8,000 years ago. Everything we eat has at some time undergone genetic altering. G.M.O. methods not only increase yields and make food less expensive to produce and to buy, but they also reduce the need for water, fertilizer, and pesticides. And there is absolutely no evidence that modified crops are harmful; the evidence emphasizes benefits, not harm.

Lately we have learned how to accelerate the process of genetic modification, with salutary results called the "green revolution". During the last century there were reports of recurrent famines in the world during which millions starved to death. We no longer hear of these famines because of the "green revolution", the use of genetically modified crops that doubled agricultural yields. I wonder if the anti-G.M.O. activists regret this.

I hope to live to see a citizenry better versed in science, and better able to make wise decisions. A safe future depends on it.

WHY ARE WE HERE?

Dorion Sagan

(Excerpted from "Why are We Here: Evolution's Dirty Secrets", on salon.com, 6/2/2013)

Why are we here? Might this all just be a big fluke? Even if evolution is, as Arthur Koestler said, like an "epic recited by a stutterer", what is the plot? It seemed like God had a good idea, but then He got sidetracked. Where is He going with this thing?

I believe the writer Kurt Vonnegut touched on the heart of this question. Before a full house of mostly women at Smith College ... he told about his own days. They often started, he said, despite protests from his wife, who thought he could use his time more wisely, in taking a leisurely walk to the post office to mail a single letter. At the post office he bought a single stamp from the pretty teller. They smiled and he slid her the envelope. Nothing would ever happen, he admitted. But still, that was not his point.

What was it?

"I tell you, we are here on Earth to fart around, and don't let anybody tell you different."

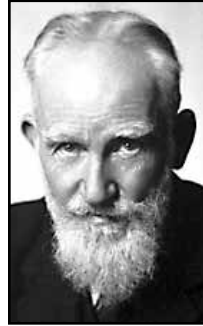
"We are here," writes the paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould, "because one odd group of fishes had a peculiar fin anatomy that could transform into legs for terrestrial creatures; because comets struck the earth and wiped out dinosaurs, thereby giving mammals a chance not otherwise available".

Vonnegut's son, the physician Mark Vonnegut, takes a more ethical slant, emphasizing our emotional and physical interconnectedness. "We are here to help each other get through this thing."

The poet W. H. Auden is only superficially similar: "We were put here on earth to help others. I'm not sure what others were put here for."

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

26 July 1856 – 2 November, 1950



This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being a force of nature instead of a feverish selfish clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.

I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it what I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no "brief candle" to me. It is sort of a splendid torch which I have hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it over to future generations.

**NO PIQUE IN AUGUST!
The entire editorial staff
worldwide is on vacation.**

**Heroes? Or misfits?
Page 8**

**What do you say when
someone assumes
you're a believer?
Page 5**

**Celebrating The 4th in 1876
Page 1**

Secular Humanist
Society of New York
FDR Station
PO Box 7661
New York, NY
10150-7661

