

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

October, 2013

Busy month ahead, with two don't-miss events upcoming (see the inserts) and new acronyms to consider: we cheer FEF PAC, welcome FFNY, and stir the GMO pot. We consider "under God", celebrate a couple of electoral defeats, promote the return of our study group, study the shortcomings of school privatization, laugh at "intelligent design" and Congressional clowns, ask the religious to just ask us about us, and ask one of our own to just shut up. But first, we tip our beret. — JR

ALLONS ENFANTS DE LA [secular] PATRIE ...

Jean Rafferty

The French Education Minister, Vincent Peillon, in September unveiled the controversial secularism charter to be displayed in a prominent position in every school in the nation to remind pupils and teachers of the country's secular, Republican principles.

"The Republic is secular. School is secular" announces the headline of the Secular School Charter, which M. Peillon says is designed to promote "absolute respect for freedom of conscience".

"The first article of our constitution states that the Republic is indivisible, democratic, social and secular. The school must teach these values, explain their meanings and their history. Because if we do not teach them, we should not be surprised if they are misunderstood or even ignored."

Putting his Euros where his mouth is, in April M. Peillon revealed plans for school pupils to debate "secular morality" for one hour every week. "Teaching and sharing the values of the Republic is a responsibility for each school," he said at the time.

Today, he rejects accusations that the charter is a veiled attack on Islam. "Absolutely not! Secularism is not against any religion. It provides a protected and neutral space in which to give everyone, regardless of religion, regardless of their social or geographical origin, the means to choose and build a life."

Following are the fifteen points of the *Charte de la Laïcité* [Secularism] *A L'École*. There is no Education Ministry official translation into English yet (the French have a hard time recognizing any other language), so the following condensation is the product of my own, um, spotty education in the glories of *la langue français*. For those who would like to (and can) read it all in its original, go to www.scribd.com/doc/166458236/charte-laicite.

France's Secular School Charter

1. France is an indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic.
 2. The secular French Republic is organized on the principle of the separation of religion and state.
 3. Secularism guarantees liberty of conscience for all. Each person is free to believe or not to believe.
 4. Secularism reconciles the liberty of the individual with the equality and fraternity of all.
 5. The Republic guarantees respect for the principles of everyone in every school.
 6. Secularism protects every student from any and all proselytizing and pressure.
 7. Secularism guarantees every student a shared and common culture.
 8. Secularism guarantees every student freedom of expression consistent with the good order of the school and respect for the values of others.
 9. Secularism rejects all violence and all discrimination, and guarantees equality between boys and girls.
 10. It is the duty of all school staff to transmit to their students the ideas and the values of secularism.
 11. All school personnel have a duty to maintain strict neutrality in political and religious matters.
 12. Studies are secular. No subject is *a priori* excluded from scientific and pedagogical inquiry.
 13. No one can exercise their religion in order to refuse to comply with the applicable school rules.
 14. The wearing of signs or dress by which pupils overtly manifest a religious affiliation is prohibited.
 15. In their studies and their activities, students themselves will further secularism in their schools.
- So, what do *you* think of the above, readers of PIQUE? Your opinions are solicited for these pages.
My own opinion? *Vive la France!*

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and a Charter Chapter of the American Humanist Association.

CAN'T WE LEARN SOMETHING FROM FRANCE?

Bill Maher

(Transcribed and excerpted from HBO's "Real Time with Bill Maher", 5/4/2007)

(Editor: This six-year-old diatribe occurred during the 2007 run-up to the 2008 presidential election – but is hardly dated.)

New Rule: Conservatives have to stop rolling their eyes every time they hear the word France. Like just calling something French is the ultimate argument winner. "Aw, you want a healthcare system that covers everybody and costs half as much? You mean like they have in France? What's there to say about a country that was too stupid to get on board with our wonderfully conceived and brilliantly executed war in Iraq?"

Earlier this year, the *Boston Globe* got hold of an internal campaign document from GOP contender Mitt Romney, and a recurring strategy was to tie Democrats to the hated French. It said, in the Machiavellian code of the election huckster, "Hillary equals France", and it envisioned bumper stickers that read, "First, not France".

Except for one thing: We're not first. America isn't ranked anywhere near first in anything except military might and snotty billionaires. The country that is ranked No. 1 in healthcare, for example, is France. The World Health Organization ranks America at 37 in the world – not two, or five – 37, in between Costa Rica and Slovenia, which are both years away from discovering dentistry.

Yet an American politician could not survive if he or she uttered the simple, true statement, "France has a better healthcare system than us, and we should steal it." Because here, simply dismissing an idea as French passes for an argument. John Kerry? Can't vote for him – he looks French. Yeah, as opposed to the other guy, who just looked stupid.

I know, if God had wanted us to learn from the Enlightenment, he wouldn't have given us Sean Hannity.

And I'm not saying France is better than America. Because I assume you've already figured that out by now. I don't want to *be* French, I just want to take what's best from the French. Stealing, for your own self-interest – Republicans should love this idea.

Taking what's best from the French: You know who else did that? The Founding Fathers. Hate to sink your toy boat, Fox News, but the Founding Fathers, the ones you say you revere, were children of the French Enlightenment, and fans of it, and they turned it into a musical called the Constitution of the United States. And they did a helluva job, so good it has been said that it was written by geniuses so it could be run by idiots. But the current administration is putting that to the test. The Founding Fathers were erudite, well-read, European-thinking aristocrats – they would have had nothing in common with, and no use for, an ill-read xenophobic bumpkin like George W. Bush.

The American ideas of individuality, religious tolerance and freedom of speech came directly out of the French Enlightenment – but, shhh, don't tell Alabama. Voltaire wrote "men are born equal" before Jefferson was wise enough to steal it.

Countries are like people – they tend to get smarter as they get older. Noted military genius Donald Rumsfeld famously dismissed France as part of "Old Europe", but the French are ... what's the word I'm looking for? Oh yeah, "mature". We think they're rude and snobby, but maybe that's because they're talking to us.

For example, France just had an election, and people over there approach an election differently. They vote. Eighty-five percent turned out. ... Maybe the high turnout has something to do with the fact that French candidates are never asked where they stand on evolution, prayer in school, abortion, stem cell research or gay marriage. And if the candidate knows about a character in a book other than Jesus, it's not a drawback. There is no Pierre Six-pack who can be fooled by childish wedge issues. And the electorate doesn't vote for the guy they want to have a croissant with. Nor do they care about the candidate's private lives: In the current race, Ségolène Royal has four kids but never bothered to get married. And she's a socialist. In America, if a Democrat even thinks you're calling him a liberal he immediately grabs an orange vest and a rifle and heads into the woods to kill something.

The conservative candidate is married, but he and his wife live apart and lead separate lives. They aren't asked about it in the media, and the people are OK with it, for the same reason the people are OK with nude beaches: because they're not a nation of 6-year-olds who scream and giggle if they see pee-pee parts. They have weird ideas about privacy. They think it should be private. In France, everyone has a mistress. Even mistresses have mistresses. To not have a lady on the side says to the voters, "I'm no good at multitasking."

France has its faults – the country has high unemployment, a nasty immigrant problem and all that ridiculous accordion music. But its healthcare is the best, it's not dependent on Mideast oil, it has the lowest poverty rate and the lowest income-inequality rate among industrialized nations, and it's the greenest, with the lowest carbon dumping and the lowest electricity bill.

France has 20,000 miles of railroads that work. We have the trolley at the mall that takes you from Pottery Barn to the Gap. It has bullet trains. We have bullets. France has public intellectuals. We have Doctor Phil. And France invented sex during the day, the *ménage à trois*, and lingerie.

And the French are not fat. Can't we just admit we could learn *something* from them?

OBEY AND BE SAVED. FROM WHAT?

George H. Smith

(Forwarded by Gretchen Robinson)

In exchange for obedience, Christianity promises salvation in an afterlife, but in order to elicit obedience through this promise, Christianity must convince men that they need salvation, that there is something to be "saved" from.

Christianity has nothing to offer a happy man living in a natural, intelligible universe. If Christianity is to gain

a motivational foothold, it must declare war on earthly pleasure and happiness, and this, historically, has been its precise course of action. In the eyes of Christianity, man is sinful and helpless in the face of God, and is potential fuel for the flames of hell. Just as Christianity must destroy reason before it can introduce faith, so it must destroy happiness before it can introduce salvation.

Let's start a debate:

LABELS FOR GMO FOODS ARE A BAD IDEA

The Editors of *Scientific American*

(Reprinted from ScientificAmerican.com 9/11/2013)

This past June, Connecticut and Maine became the first states to pass bills requiring labels on all foods made from genetically modified organisms (GMOs). In November 2012 California voters rejected the similar Proposition 37 by a narrow majority of 51.4 percent. "All we want is a simple label/For the food that's on our table," chanted marchers before the elections. The issue, however, is in no way simple.

We have been tinkering with our food's DNA since the dawn of agriculture. By selectively breeding plants and animals with the most desirable traits, our predecessors transformed organisms' genomes, turning a scraggly grass into plump-kerneled corn, for example. For the past 20 years Americans have been eating plants in which scientists have used modern tools to insert a gene here or tweak a gene there, helping the crops tolerate drought and resist herbicides. Around 70 percent of processed foods in the U.S. contain genetically modified ingredients.

Instead of providing people with useful information, mandatory GMO labels would only intensify the misconception that so-called Frankenfoods endanger people's health. The American Association for the Advancement of Science, the World Health Organization and the exceptionally vigilant European Union agree that GMOs are just as safe as other foods. Compared with conventional breeding techniques—which swap giant chunks of DNA between one plant and another—genetic engineering is far more precise and, in most cases, is less likely to produce an unexpected result. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has tested all the GMOs on the market to determine whether they are toxic or allergenic. They are not. (The GMO-fearing can seek out "100 Percent Organic" products, indicating that a food contains no genetically modified ingredients, among other requirements.)

Many people argue for GMO labels in the name of increased consumer choice. On the contrary, such labels have limited people's options. In 1997, a time of growing opposition to GMOs in Europe, the E.U. began to require them. By 1999, to avoid labels that might drive customers away, most major European retailers had removed genetically modified ingredients from products bearing their brand. Major food producers such as Nestlé followed suit. Today it is virtually impossible to find GMOs in European supermarkets.

Americans who oppose genetically modified foods would celebrate a similar exclusion. Everyone else would pay a price. Because conventional crops often require more water and pesticides than GMOs do, the former are usually more expensive. Consequently, we would all have to pay a premium on non-GMO foods—and for a questionable return. Private research firm Northbridge Environmental Management Consultants estimated that Prop 37 would have raised an average California family's yearly food bill by as much as \$400. The measure would also have required farmers, manufacturers and retailers to keep a whole new set of detailed records and to prepare for lawsuits challenging the "naturalness" of their products.

Antagonism toward GMO foods also strengthens the stigma against a technology that has delivered enormous benefits to people in developing countries and promises far more. Recently published data from a seven-year study of Indian farmers show that those growing a genetically modified crop increased their yield per acre by 24 percent and boosted profits by 50 percent. These farmers were able to buy more food—and food of greater nutritional value—for their families.

To curb vitamin A deficiency—which blinds as many as 500,000 children worldwide every year and kills half of them—researchers have engineered Golden Rice, which produces beta-carotene, a precursor of vitamin A. Approximately three quarters of a cup of Golden Rice provides the recommended daily amount of vitamin A; several tests have concluded that the product is safe. Yet Greenpeace and other anti-GMO organizations have used misinformation and hysteria to delay the introduction of Golden Rice to the Philippines, India and China.

More such products are in the works, but only with public support and funding will they make their way to people's plates. An international team of researchers has engineered a variety of cassava—a staple food for 600 million people—with 30 times the usual amount of beta-carotene and four times as much iron, as well as higher levels of protein and zinc. Another group of scientists has created corn with 169-fold the typical amount of beta-carotene, six times as much vitamin C and double the folate.

At press time, GMO-label legislation is pending in at least 20 states. Such debates are about so much more than slapping ostensibly simple labels on our food to satisfy a segment of American consumers. Ultimately, we are deciding whether we will continue to develop an immensely beneficial technology or shun it based on unfounded fears.

Comment: What do you think? Your opinions are solicited. – JR

THINK ABOUT THE FACTS THAT TV IS THE "MAIN SOURCE" OF NEWS FOR 66% OF AMERICANS, AND

3 MILLION OF THEM WATCH CNN EVERY DAY

An actual question asked of scientist Bill Nye on February 10 by CNN news anchor Deborah Feyerick:

"Is the approaching asteroid a result of global warming?"

“UNDER GOD” IS UNDER FIRE IN MASSACHUSETTS

Mary Elizabeth Williams

(Reprinted from “Atheists Challenge the Pledge of Allegiance” on salon.com, 9/6/2013)

Just in time for back to school: In Massachusetts this week, a venerable classroom tradition is facing a high court challenge. The state’s Supreme Judicial Court is currently weighing an atheist couple’s argument that the words “under God” be struck from the Pledge of Allegiance, because they claim the phrase is exclusionary to atheist children like theirs.

In other news ... wait, why are school children still saying the Pledge of Allegiance anyway?

The anonymous couple’s attorney, David Niose, contends that “This case presents an unpopular and wrongly vilified minority facing discrimination” by a state “promoting and propagating the idea that good patriots are God believers.” Though it’s mandatory for teachers to lead students in the Pledge each day, it’s voluntary for students to say it. Last year, Middlesex Superior Court Judge Jane Haggerty ruled that the “under God” clause “does not convert the exercise into a prayer” and does not violate children’s rights. OK, but who wants to be the one 7-year-old to sit out something the authority figure just invited the whole class to do?

The idea that God is an intrinsic and necessary part of the Pledge is silly. The original Pledge of Allegiance didn’t even include the phrase “under God”. It was added in the 1950s. But why is the Pledge itself still mandatory in so many places? Leading the Pledge is also mandatory in New York, but the rule is loosely enforced. Neither of my children’s pinko, godless public schools do it – my 9-year-old asked me this morning what the Pledge even is. (Their Girl Scout troop also unceremoniously struck the phrase “to serve God” from its Promise and the earth did not explode.) And my elder daughter, who recalls it vaguely from her old kindergarten, explained, “You say you’ll be loyal to the flag. Not your country. The flag. I don’t get it.” Maybe it’s blasé attitudes like theirs that pushed a Brooklyn parent two years ago to demand her local public school start enforcing it.

Growing up in Catholic schools, my weekday classroom routine consisted of facing the front of the room, hand over heart, and reciting the Pledge. I then turned around to the crucifix on the back wall and recited the Our Father. I was a patriotic Christian kid then and I’m a patriotic Christian adult now and I have never stopped finding the practice strange and pointless and time-wasting.

Rote recitation, day in and day out, is ultimately meaningless. Ask any second-grader if she knows the meaning of “indivisible”. Ask a random adult, while you’re at it. The question shouldn’t be whether the phrase “under God” belongs in the Pledge; it should be whether the Pledge itself belongs. Does it really speak to or reassure the numerous non-believer kids out there, or the immigrant or dual citizenship kids? Does it teach any of them anything about loyalty or duty?

I am trying every day to raise my children to practice their faith and to respect their country. But love and loyalty don’t spring from standing up and dully parroting a creed because the state says the teacher has to get up and do it. We have a massively broken public education system in our country. And the Pledge is a remnant of so much that’s wrong – drilling, repetition and standardization, when what is desperately called for is inquiry, skepticism and diversity.

MARY ELIZABETH WILLIAMS AND I AGREE: GET RID OF THE WHOLE DAMN PLEDGE

John Rafferty

Not many theists get 62 lines worth of space in PIQUE, but Ms. Williams, above, a believer, makes a compelling argument, not really for the elimination of the spurious, 1950s “under God” addition to the Pledge of Allegiance (“Take *that*, you godless Soviets!”), but for dumping the whole damn thing. And I agree.

First, considering the pledge as a whole—with or without a deity—is there another representative democracy in the world that requires its schoolchildren to swear their loyalty every morning? Why are we imitating North Korea?

Then, let’s consider that “under God” phrase that we all loathe and would have gone. The court challenge in Massachusetts is serious and “we” might even win. But as we cheer on the excellent David Niose, let’s remember the dictum about being very careful what you wish for.

I read an anecdote somewhere online recently about an excellent common-sense argument against “under God”. When challenged by a believer with, “Why are you so offended by a simple phrase?” an atheist (was it Niose?) countered with, “Would you *not* be offended if the phrase was “*not* under God”?”

“Oh.”

That kind of rational argument may prevail in Massachusetts – there is no more liberal state in the Union – but what if it does? What if “under God” is, in fact, stricken from the Pledge?

I think if I were a Religious Right super-patriot father of school-age children, I would instruct them to exercise their First Amendment right to bawl out those two words at the top of their lungs every morning right between “one nation ...” and “... indivisible”.

And then what, we say they *can’t* say “under God”?

So little by little, one cowed classroom and homeroom teacher at a time, “under God” might very well come back—not by Congressional mandate, but by the will of a determined plurality of the people—stronger than ever.

Be careful what you wish for.

Arguing with Christians is like playing chess with pigeons. No matter how good you are at chess, the pigeon will shit on the board, knock over the pieces, and strut around victoriously. — Anon, forwarded by Jane Everhart.

HUMANISM 102 DEBUTS OCTOBER 28

John Rafferty

Humanism 101 was a huge success, so by popular demand (really!) we're extending our study group to Humanism 102, and our first monthly meeting/discussion will be held Monday, October 28 at the Community Church of New York (CCNY) - see Page 7 for time-and-place details.

And you don't have to have attended Humanism 101 to participate in Humanism 102. Everyone is welcome!

The purpose of Humanism 102 is to offer a humanist education for the membership and friends of SHSNY, for our friends at CCNY, and for the larger NYC freethought community. It is open to all who are interested in studying humanist history, philosophy, ethics, ideas, and ideals.

The program is a course of study, led (not lectured) by me—based on the three-year course I recently completed at the Humanist Institute—in what I hope will be stimulating Socratic dialog based on readings done by you.

Each meeting focuses on short online materials easily read in an hour or so and, except for October, on one book-length assigned text. As we proceed, of course, you may suggest additional reading.

While each session is open (and free) to anyone, discussions will be limited to those who have read the materials assigned. If you haven't done the reading, you are welcome to audit the evening - and then, I hope, do the reading for next month.

The reading list for some of the sessions is still in works, but here's what we have so far, starting with a let's-all-get-on-the-same-page intro (or recap) of the basics:

Meeting #1 - Oct 28: A Basic Review

Online:

At www.americanhumanist.org/Humanism
Fred Edwords: *The Saga of Freethought and its Pioneers*
Fred Edwords: *What is Humanism?*
Fred Edwords: *The Humanist Philosophy in Perspective*
Fred Edwords: *The Human Basis of Law and Ethics*

Google:

Paul Kurtz: *The Affirmations of Humanism*
IHEU *Minimum Statement on Humanism*

No book.

Meeting #2 - Nov 25: Why Is There Anything?

Book: Lawrence Krauss: *A Universe from Nothing*

Online: Robert Lawrence Kuhn: *Levels of Nothing* from skeptics@skeptic.com

December - No meeting - holidays conflict.

Meeting #3 - Jan 27: The 'Sin' of Scientism

Online: Steven Pinker: *Science is Not Your Enemy*, at newrepublic.com, posted by JDR

Online: Leon Wieseltier: *Crimes Against Humanities*, from TNR, 9/3/2013, posted by JDR

Much more to come — stay tuned!

SEND IN THE CLOWNS

John Rafferty

(Based on, and with excerpts from "Visiting Republicans Laud Egypt's Force", by David D. Kirkpatrick, in The New York Times, 9/8/2013, and an unsigned front-page news story in The Des Moines Register, 9/9/2013.)

Two months after the military ousted Egypt's first elected president—and while that regime was stepping up a bloody crackdown on not only the former president's supporters, but also on liberals and independent journalists—a delegation of House Republicans visited Cairo to tell the new government to keep up the good work.



(l-r) Moe, Curly, Larry

"We are here as members of Congress to say, 'We are with you, and we encourage you'", Representative Michele Bachmann of Minnesota said in a news conference that was variously described as "surreal", "bizarre", "reckless", and "a flying circus" in the U.S. media. And that was broadcast over a pro-government satellite network and eagerly reported on Sunday by Egyptian state news media.

Amplifying on the new government's portrayal of its crackdown as a battle against terrorism, Mrs. Bachmann wrongly implied a link between the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the Muslim Brotherhood.

"We remember who caused 9/11. We remember who it was that killed 3,000 brave Americans." In fact, the Muslim Brotherhood publicly condemned the September 11 terrorist attacks, which were, in fact, carried out by Al Qaeda. The Brotherhood has explicitly opposed the theology and tactics of violent Islamist groups like Al Qaeda for decades, and Al Qaeda scorns the Brotherhood for its commitment to nonviolence, elections, and gradual change.

But facts have never interested Rep. Bachmann or her fellow clowns, the birthers and science- and reason-deniers Louis Gohmert of Texas and Steve King of Iowa.

While Rep. King simply blustered that "the American people stand with [the Egyptian people], and we stand against the Muslim Brotherhood", and vowed to fight President Obama's threat to cut off military aid to the increasingly fascist new Egyptian regime, Louie Gohmert, as usual, took the public pronouncement booby prize.

Overlooking the new government's mass shootings of hundreds of mostly unarmed protesters, its sweeping roundup of thousands of political opponents, and its suspension of all legal protection against arbitrary arrest or



(l-r) Reps. King, Bachmann, Gohmert

other police abuse, gormless Gohmert compared the new Egyptian Thug in Chief, Gen. Abdul-Fattah el-Sisi, to ... wait for it ... George Washington.

Question: Who authorized this taxpayer-funded circus?

SHSNY CALENDAR: OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2013

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURS, OCT 3, 7-8:30 pm

(Note new time)

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)

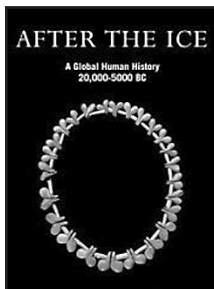
We'll discuss

AFTER THE ICE:

**A Global Human History,
20,000 - 5,000 BC**

Steven Mithen

20,000 B.C., the peak of the last ice age--the atmosphere is heavy with dust, deserts and glaciers span vast regions, and people exist in small groups, facing the threat of extinction.



But these people live on the brink of seismic change – 10,000 years of climate shifts culminating in abrupt global warming that will usher in a fundamentally changed human world. Drawing on the latest research in archaeology, human genetics, and environmental science, *After the Ice* takes the reader on a tour of 15,000 years of human history that is part history, part science, part time travel, offering a compelling portrayal of diverse cultures, lives, and landscapes that laid the foundations of the modern world. – *Paperback*

Join us even if you haven't finished reading.

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

LIKE SHSNY ON FACEBOOK

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

AND MEET US ON MEETUP

www.meetup.com/shsnny-org/

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURS, NOV 7, 7-8:30 pm

at Community Church of NY
28 East 35 Street (Park-Mad)

**THE REVENGE OF GOD:
*The Resurgence of Islam,
Christianity and Judaism in
the Modern World***
Gilles Kepel

In this translation of the best-selling French book, *La Revanche de Dieu*, Gilles Kepel, one of Europe's leading authorities on Islamic societies, offers a compelling account of the resurgence of religious belief in the modern world.

Kepel's focus is radical movements within Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. From Protestant televangelists to ultra-Orthodox Jews, from Islamic militants to the "charismatic renewal", he argues that they cannot be dismissed simply as a reaction to modernity. "They are true children of our time" who seek to recreate society according to a set of symbols and values in accordance with their holy scriptures. Watch out. – *Paper*

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURS, DEC 5, 7-8:30 pm at

Community Church of NY

28 East 35 Street (Park-Mad)

**FREETHINKERS: A History of
*American Secularism***

Susan Jacoby

An authoritative history of the vital role of secularist thinkers and activists in the United States, from a writer of "fierce intelligence and nimble, unfettered imagination" (*New York Times*).

Freethinkers offers a powerful defense of the secularist heritage that gave Americans the first government in the world founded not on the authority of religion but on the bedrock of human reason.

BRUNCH & CONVERSATION

SUNDAY, OCT 20, 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, 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.

**October Brunch Discussion:
*Labeling genetically modified food
(GMOs) – good or bad idea?***

(See page 3)

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, OCT 14, 7:00 pm

SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT

Stone Creek Bar & Lounge

140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)

THE LIFE OF EMILE ZOLA

Starring Paul Muni, this classic biopic won the 1937 Best Picture Oscar. Zola's career was capped by his "J'accuse!"

defense of Captain Alfred Dreyfus,

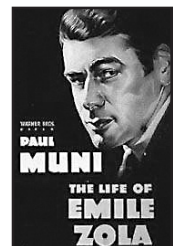
wrongly accused by French anti-Semites of spying for Germany.

And now we learn (*The New Yorker*, Sep 16) that Hollywood moguls colluded with the Nazis to soften the film's message.

**After-the-Film Discussion:
*Hitler, Hollywood, the Jews, and
anti-Semitism - then and now.***

SHSNY Movie Night is FREE.

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



SHSNY CALENDAR: OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2013

GREAT LECTURES ON DVD

WED, OCT 23, 7:00 pm
 Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
 140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)
**WHO WERE THE
 MOST INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE
 OF THE 20TH CENTURY?**

Charlie Rose Show: March 22, 1999

As the clock ticked down to the end of the century (but not really the end of the millennium), Charlie Rose assembled one of his best shows ever, a panel discussion on the greatest scientists and most influential people of the twentieth century. In the exchange of high-flying ideas: Peter Gaye, Maxine Singer, Steven Pinker, Robert Gallo, Bruce Sterling, and Daniel Dennett.



They offer their opinions in a spirited conversation that covers the splitting of the atom, the role of evil, genius, physics, Albert Einstein, the double helix, Hitler, Freud, anthropology, medicine, and diplomacy.

Definitely a must see.

After-the-DVD discussion:
**Who were the greatest influentials
 of the Late Great 20th Century?**

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

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

HUMANISM 102

MONDAY, OCT 28, 6:30-8:30
 Community Church of New York
 28 East 35 Street (red door)
Meeting/Discussion #1:
A Review of Humanism 101 Basics
Online at:

americanhumanist.org/Humanism
 Fred Edwords: *The Saga of Freethought and its Pioneers*
 Fred Edwords: *What is Humanism?*
 Fred Edwords: *The Humanist Philosophy in Perspective*
 Fred Edwords: *The Human Basis of Law and Ethics*

Google:

Paul Kurtz: *The Affirmations of Humanism*
 IHEU *Minimum Statement on Humanism*

Book:

No book assigned for Meeting #1.
Note: *You can do the online reading carefully in an hour or so (two at most). If you haven't done the reading, you may still audit the discussion – all are welcome!*

OTHER REASONABLE NEW YORK EVENTS

NY Society for Ethical Culture:
 Mon, Oct 7, 1 pm, Ethics in Literature: *Blasphemy*, by Sherman Alexie. Snacks & Bevs, \$5.

Fri, Oct 11, 6:30 pm, Ethics and the Theater: *Sin (A Cardinal Deposed)*, by Michael Murphy. Reception/Refreshments, \$10 suggested donation.
 Fri, Oct 18, Ethics in Film: *The Shawshank Redemption*. Snacks & Bevs, \$5 suggested.

Feminist Freethinkers of New York:
 Sat, Oct 12, 2 pm, *Women (Only) Support Group*, Beth's apt, bezu@rcn.com
 Wed, Oct 23, 6:30 pm, *General Meeting*, at NYSEC, 2 West 64
 Mon, Oct 28, 6:30 pm, Sony Atrium, 550 Madison Av (55-56) Book & Film Club: *Moral Combat* by Sikivu Hutchinson. *Continued ...*

MORE RNY EVENTS ...

Rationally Speaking Live: Sat, Oct 26, 2 pm, Jefferson Market Library, 425 6th Av (10St): *"Rationally Speaking Live 100th Episode: Massimo and Julia Answer Everything!"* – a full hour of audience Qs and Massimo and Julia's As. Social at a nearby bar follows.

Gotham Atheists: Sat, Oct 19, 1 pm, Hamilton Grange Library, 503 W 145 St, *"Promoting Reason, Opposing Superstition in the Community"* Discussion: How far will people go in letting go of belief once they are given a set of facts? Or will they hang on to belief?
CFI-NYC. Mon., Oct 14, 10 pm, Googie's Lounge (Upstairs at the Living Room), 154 Ludlow St.: *"Skeptics on the Mic Karaoke"*.

Dinner & Philosophy: Mon, Oct 7, 7 pm, *Camus: Living Without Transcendence*, Bamiyan, 358 3rd Av (26St), \$5 (+dinner). Info at meetup.com/dinner_and_philosophy/events/140912832/
New York Philosophy. Tue, Oct 28, 6-10 pm, Chelsea Manor, 138 West 25 St., Cocktails & Conversation: *"Apocalypalooza II: When Civilizations End"*. RSVP: nyphilosophy.com

Drinking With Atheists: Every Friday, fun and conversation. Details: meetup.com/RichiesList/

PLUS

Agnostic A.A.: Nine weekly AA-endorsed meetings. agnosticcAAnyc.org/meetings.html
Manhattan History Buffs: Every 3d Tues, 6:30, dinner/talk at Lili's (Chinese) rest, 83-84th/3rd. Oct 15: *President Warren Harding*. 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.

WHY ARE BELIEVERS IGNORANT ABOUT ATHEISTS? BECAUSE THEY DON'T BOTHER TO TALK TO ANY FIRST

Greta Christina

(Excerpted from *Alternet.com*, 6/30/2012)

Editor: In the first third of this too-long-for-PIQUE essay, Ms Christina recounted the claim of Anglican minister Rev. Gavin Dunbar of Georgia that "grief is necessary for love and humanity... [who] went on to argue that, unless you believe in God, you have no reason to care whether the people you love live or die, or even to love them in the first place". And that, ergo, "The grieving atheist cannot provide any reason why he grieves, or why he (rightly) respects the grief of others."

After venting her (appropriate) rage, Ms Christina made the following excellent argument. – JR

Many atheists look at the idea that we create our own meaning, not as a loss of meaning, but as a gain. We feel that life and love, morality and grief, have more meaning – not less – because we create that meaning for ourselves, instead of persuading ourselves that it was handed to us by an invisible creator who's mapped out the meaning of our lives and handed it to us wholesale. And for many atheists, the fact that life is finite makes it more precious, not less. It makes us value it more highly – and it makes us grieve its loss more deeply.

Yes, atheists think that life and morality and love and grief are all part of the physical world. But that doesn't make it less real for us. That makes it more real. The physical world is the one we know really exists. Atheists aren't the ones insisting that the true source of life and morality and love and grief is an invisible, intangible, supernatural being that nobody can agree on and that we have no good reason to think exists. Accusing us of seeing these things as illusions is the height or irony.

The Parthenon is a human construction, too. That doesn't make it an illusion, or meaningless. That's one of the dumbest ideas I've ever heard.

But after I'd thought about all this for a while, my urges to both blind rage and line-by-line demolition gave way ... to a baffled irritation, focusing on one big question: Couldn't he have asked us?

Couldn't Dunbar have gone down to his local atheist organization and asked them, "You know, I don't get it about atheist grief – if you don't believe in God or the soul, why do you value life and grieve over death?"

Couldn't he, at the very least, have spent 10 minutes Googling the phrase, "atheist grief"? If he had, he would have found: the Grief Beyond Belief support network, several news articles (including one by me) about the Grief Beyond Belief support network, an atheist grief support group on the Atheist Nexus social network, an article titled "Grief Without God" on the RichardDawkins.net Web site, a book titled *Godless Grief* ... I could go on and on. If he'd pursued any of these abovementioned avenues, he could have been directed to any number of other essays,

journal entries, blog posts, works of fiction, pieces of music, pieces of art, and long, thoughtful, heartfelt conversations about this exact topic, and answering his question about why atheists grieve before ignorantly bloviating about it.

Why didn't he do it? What was he afraid of finding? This is the question I keep coming back to. I wish I could say this was an isolated incident. It's not.

I can't count the number of opinion pieces I've seen from religious leaders, speculating fervently on how atheists clearly have no basis for morality, and only reject religion so we can be free of its rules ... when they could have simply Googled the phrase "atheist morality," and found out just how passionate most atheists are about right and wrong, and where we think the basis for this morality lies. I can't count the number of opinion pieces I've seen from religious leaders, blithely opining about how atheists have no meaning to our lives, how atheists have no joy, how atheists hate God, how there are no atheists in foxholes ... when, again, a simple Google search could have disabused them of these notions in ten minutes.

And this refusal to hear what atheists say about ourselves extends beyond the pulpit and the opinion pages. It's distressingly common among ordinary citizens in everyday life. On a regular and frequent basis, atheists are criticized – vilified, even – simply for being open about our atheism. When atheists run billboards and bus ads saying simply that we exist and are good people, there's almost always an angry, intensely offended reaction from religious believers: protests, boycotts, demands that the ads be taken down, even vandalism. Transit companies will sometimes stop accepting any religious or controversial ads entirely, rather than let atheists advertise with them. In fact, a bus company in Pennsylvania recently rejected an ad from an atheist organization – an ad that literally had nothing on it but the URL of the organization, and the word, "Atheists." The mere act of atheists saying, "We exist" – this is enough to send many believers into fits, accusing us of being offensive, provocative, mocking, flaunting, and hateful. The mere act of hearing atheist voices sends far too many believers into a rage.

What are they afraid of finding?

Now, I'm sure some believers will read all this and say, "But atheists do the same thing! They live in their atheist bubble, they imagine what believers think and feel, and they don't ever talk to us to find out!" And sometimes that's true. But not usually. According to the U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, atheists, on average, are better informed about religion and religious believers than believers are. In fact, atheists are generally better informed about the specifics of given religions than the believers in those very religions. We know a lot more about them than they do about us.

It's important to remember that most atheists were once believers. We're familiar with religion because we've believed it ourselves. And it's important to remember that, in most of the world, religious belief is the dominant culture. Atheists have to be familiar with it. It's shoved in

our faces on a regular basis. Our friends believe it, our families, our co-workers believe it, it's all over the media. We can't be ignorant of religion. We're soaking in it.

Believers, on the other hand, are not soaking in atheism. Many atheists are trying to change this, of course, and are working to make atheism more visible and harder to ignore — but there's still a huge amount of ignoring, and of ignorance. And far too much of this ignorance is willful and deliberate. People ignore us, even when they're supposedly trying to figure us out.

Why? When believers write and talk and think about atheists, and about what they imagine atheists think and feel — why don't they bother to ask us? What are they afraid of finding out?

I've read and talked with a lot of believers — and with a lot of atheists who used to believe. And it's hard to avoid the conclusion that, if believers actually found out how atheists think and feel, it would present a serious challenge to their beliefs.

When you look at the most common arguments for religion and against atheism, you'll find that most of them aren't actually arguments. They're not attempts to look at the evidence and logic supporting theism and atheism. They're attempts to deflect the question. They're attempts to shield religion from ever being seriously questioned. The notion that any criticism of religion is intolerant; the idea that religion shouldn't have to defend itself in the marketplace of ideas; the endless parade of "Shut up, that's why" arguments that typically get marshaled against atheists ... it all exists to protect religious faith from ever being seriously examined. Not to mention the more obvious attempts to silence atheists — like preventing atheist high school students from organizing clubs, and overt bullying and harassment of atheists, and blasphemy laws in theocracies that put atheists in prison and even execute them. Religion is like a house of cards — protected by a massively strong fortress.

And one of the largest pillars in this fortress is the bigoted mythology about atheists. The idea that atheists are amoral? That our lives lack meaning and joy? That we're only atheists so we can reject religious rules? That we hate God? That our atheism is shallow, and we reject it and embrace religion when faced with suffering and death? That we have no basis for human emotions like love and friendship and grief? It's hard to avoid the conclusion that all this mythology exists to keep believers from listening to anything we have to say.

The very existence of atheists and atheism is a challenge to religious belief. Religion relies on social consent to perpetuate itself. Religion is the Emperor's new clothes ... and if enough people start saying out loud that the Emperor is naked, it's going to be harder to ignore the guy's pecker hanging out in the breeze.

It's easier to ignore those voices if they're marginalized. It's easier to ignore those voices if people can pretend that we don't care about right and wrong, that we think everything is physical and therefore nothing matters, that

we see love and compassion as illusions, that we have no reason for grief. It's easier to ignore those voices if people can pretend that we're not quite human.

DANA PERINO IS "TIRED OF ATHEISTS"

John Rafferty

(Based on "Dana Perino Is 'Tired Of Atheists'; Fox News Host Says 'They Don't Have To Live Here'" by Yasmine Hafiz, on HuffingtonPost.com, 9/6/2013)

Dana Perino, the former White House Press Secretary whose most famous public utterance was her pronouncement in 2009 that, "We did not have a terrorist attack on our country during President Bush's term", has renewed her credentials for public cluelessness.

Now a Fox News host — which position seemingly does not require any familiarity with the First Amendment's promise of freedom of belief and expression — Perino recently commented on the Massachusetts Pledge of Allegiance case (see above, page 4). "I'm tired of them," she said of atheists on live national TV, and suggested that if they (we) don't like having "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance, well, "they [we] don't have to live here".

JOHN WAGNER IS TIRED OF DANA PERINO

She's "tired"? I'm exhausted by such ignorance. "Under God" was added to the pledge in 1954 in a fit of anti-communist fear. This country isn't a theocracy — yet. Perhaps Ms Perino should be the one to leave if she can't be a good citizen of a secular democracy.

DAWKINS ON DOUBLE STANDARDS

After my Christmas lectures I received letters from the pious saying that they would have no objection if only I had qualified my remarks by saying: "But I should warn you that many well-informed people think differently."

When did you last hear a priest in the pulpit, on radio, on television, in infants' Sunday School, qualify his statement with, "But I should warn you that many well-informed people don't think God exists at all."?

Comment: Beautiful, Richard. Score one for atheism!

DAWKINS ON ... OH, JUST STOP, RICHARD

(From "Richard Dawkins Pedophilia Remarks Provoke Outrage" by Trevor Grundy on HuffingtonPost, 9/11/13)

In an interview in *The Times* (London) magazine, Richard Dawkins said he was unable to condemn what he called "the mild pedophilia" he experienced at an English school when he was a child in the 1950s.

Referring to his early days at a boarding school in Salisbury, he recalled how one of the (unnamed) masters "pulled me on his knee and put his hand inside my shorts."

He said other children in his school peer group had been molested by the same teacher but concluded: "I don't think he did any of us lasting harm."

"I am very conscious that you can't condemn people of an earlier era by the standards of ours. Just as we don't

look back at the 18th and 19th centuries and condemn people for racism in the same way as we would condemn a modern person for racism, I look back a few decades to my childhood and see things like caning, like mild pedophilia, and can't find it in me to condemn it by the same standards as I or anyone would today."

He said the most notorious cases of pedophilia involve rape and even murder and should not be bracketed with what he called "just mild touching up".

Comment: Beautifully logical, Richard, but Jesus, don't you know when to just shut up? Another knock against atheism. – JR

GOD EXPLAINS HIS INTELLIGENT DESIGN

Simon Rich

(From Free-Range Chickens, forwarded by Beth Zucker)

God: Check out this human I designed.

Angel: Wow, that looks incredible. How does it work?

God: It's pretty complicated. Point to something, and I'll tell you what it does.

Angel: Okay, what are those?

God: Teeth. They're for chewing up food.

Angel: How come there are so many of them?

God: I threw in, like, three or four extra. If they don't like them, they can pull them out somehow, I guess.

Angel: What about this weird bag thing.

God: That's the appendix.

Angel: What does it do?

God: It explodes.

Angel: Really? That's all?

God: Pretty much.

Angel: What causes that to happen?

God: It just happens randomly. Like you'll be walking down the street, or driving a car, and boom!

Angel: Geez ... that's terrifying. Does it kill the person?

God: (*shrugs*) Sometimes.

ALL THINGS DULL AND UGLY

Eric Idle

All things dull and ugly, all creatures short and squat,
All things rude and nasty, the Lord God made the lot.
Each little snake that poisons, each little wasp that stings,
He made their brutish venom, He made their horrid wings.

All things sick and cancerous, all evil great and small,
All things foul and dangerous, Lord God made them all.

Each nasty little hornet, each beastly little squid –
Who made the spiky urchin, who made the shark? He did.

All things scabbed and ulcerous, all pox great and small,
Putrid, foul and gangrenous, the Lord God made them all.

Amen.

The right-wing loves religion, not because it teaches people right from wrong, but because it teaches people to know their place in the grand scheme of things. Because free thought and secularism can pose a threat to the established order. – *Howard Thorpe*

INTRODUCING FEMINIST FREETHINKERS OF NEW YORK

(feministfreethinkers.org)

Beth Zucker & Syd LeRoy

Returning from Center for Inquiry's "Women in Secularism" conference, we perceived a need for a local group supporting women in the secular and humanist community of NYC. Safe spaces coupled with open house discussions are invaluable to a comfortable and inclusive environment.

Our group will meet to discuss women's issues and the role of women in the secular and humanist community, as well as to host social activities that encourage a supportive and vibrant community. We will also find ways to support local and national initiatives tackling gender equality and women's rights. In fact, FFNY will have four modules.

Education: The history and current state of feminism;

Activism: Taking part in appropriate actions;

Support: Consciousness-raising for male and female feminists;

Social: Book and film readings/discussions, and other activities related to our community.

Feminist Freethinkers of New York City is cognizant of the intersections between gender, race, sexuality, class, and ability, and will strive to maintain an inviting space for all.

Join <http://www.meetup.com/Feminist-Freethinkers-of-NY/> for our current activities.

Comment: It's about time – join! – JR

Our Own Political Action Committee

AMERICAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

CENTER FOR HUMANIST ACTIVISM

LAUNCHES THE

FREETHOUGHT EQUALITY FUND PAC

The first nontheist Political Action Committee to have full time paid staff advocating for the rights of nonbelievers was launched September 18 by the Center for Humanist Activism. The Freethought Equality Fund (FEF) will back candidates who support the constitutional principal of church-state separation and defend the civil liberties of secular Americans.

The mission of FEF is to change the face of American politics by supporting candidates at all levels of government who identify as humanist, atheist or agnostic, as well as candidates who identify as religious but who support the rights of nonbelievers – in other words, any candidate who shares our goals of protecting the separation of church and state and defending the civil liberties of secular Americans.

"I am pleased that we're able to meet this need for political representation for atheist, humanist, and other freethinkers," said FEF Executive Director Roy Speckhardt. "To be able to provide financial assistance to candidates who support secular government will benefit all Americans, including those who value the absence of government entanglement in religious beliefs."

More info at freethoughtequality.org.

**REIGN OF ERROR: THE HOAX OF THE
PRIVATIZATION MOVEMENT AND THE DANGER
TO AMERICA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS,**

by Diane Ravitch,

**A review by Edd Doerr, President
Americans for Religious Liberty**

Make no mistake, America's public schools, an indispensable component of our democracy, are under serious siege. Hordes of pseudo-reformers, privatizers, voucherizers, charterizers, hucksters, snake-oil salesmen, privateers, wealthy right wing foundations, billionaire busybodies, hijackers, conservative ideologues, Religious Right gurus, political hacks, assorted non-educators, and media toadies are working day and night to undermine, weaken and destroy our public schools. Their tsunamis of funds spent on lobbying and influencing elections dwarfs to insignificance the paltry sums spent by the teacher unions on advocacy for children and teachers.

Education historian Diane Ravitch, author of the important 2010 book, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education*, spells this out in fine, well-documented detail in *Reign of Error*, which may well be the most important single book on education in a century. She shows how the pseudo-reformers are wrongly portraying our schools as "failing" when the reality is that they have been making steady progress, despite being inadequately and inequitably funded, and despite years of incessant conservative sniping. (The book has 41 charts of NAEP data in the appendix.) She shows clearly how the mania for testing, testing, testing undermines education and forces schools to neglect science, history, civics, the arts and languages in order to concentrate on preparing students for endless useless tests; how vouchers, charter schools and virtual or cyber schooling are horribly overrated; how wholesale closing of public schools (viz. New York, Chicago, etc.) damages communities and children. She names names (like the execrable Michelle Rhee), identifies the powerful groups undermining public schools, pins the tail on the jackasses working to wreck public education.

Ravitch does not just expose what is wrong with the pseudo-reformers and privatizers, she offers common sense, reasonable, tested ideas for improving the already steadily advancing public schools: serious efforts to alleviate the poverty affecting 25 percent of American kids; prenatal care for all pregnant women; high-quality early childhood education for all kids; enriched curriculum in all schools; lower class sizes (note that the private schools patronized by the wealthy all have small class sizes); revamping charter schools to their original purpose as locally run community schools run by professional teachers working with, not against, local regular public schools; a full range of medical and social wraparound services; elimination of high-stakes standardized tests; upgrading the teaching profession (as in Finland); maintaining democratic control of public schools.

A short review like this cannot begin to cover

the riches in this book. It has to be read – by every teacher, every administrator, every parent, every citizen (liberal, conservative, moderate, whatever) who cares about the future of our country and our children. As a teacher for 8 years and as an education activist and writer for nearly 50 years, I cannot praise this book too highly.

Buy it. Read it. Act on it.

READERS RESPOND TO PIQUE

To the Editor: I enjoyed Sam Harris's piece on the always vexing question of free will (PIQUE, September). It brings to mind these words of Harold Clurman's (from one of his plays, I think) that I have always admired:

"I believe that life is essentially irrational, but I also believe that human beings must use their reason – with due recognition of its limitations.

"I believe that men and women may not be perfectible, but that they must act as if they were.

"I believe that although we may not possess free will, we must behave as if we do." – Peter Rogatz

To the Editor: In response to the question in September PIQUE, i.e.: What kind of atheist am I? I believe that I fall into the #1 category.

In the past I would debate believers and on extremely rare occasions may even have changed some views. But after many years I finally gave up, growing tired of discussing religion with those who were stone deaf to any thoughts that didn't mesh with their beliefs.

Ten years ago, I died on the table while being examined for a heart attack, with no vital signs for almost two minutes. The only white light I saw was probably the light above the table and, since there was no one waiting to meet or greet me, the medical team jump started me and I came back to life. That experience solidified my lack of belief: if even my devout former friends and relatives were not waiting on "the other side", what chance did I, an unbeliever, have?

I am enough of a misanthrope that I do not embrace the "humanist" label; it is enough for me to just be an atheist. However, those of you who pass the "humanist" test, carry the banner high.

I flunked. – Art Harris

P.S.: At my age I'm also a sexual atheist, but I have perfect recall.

To the Editor: September PIQUE was enormously enjoyable: I was most engaged by Sam Harris's piece on "free will". Not only is it a common sense explanation of "will" and "choices", it's an accurate and clear description, for me, of how we come to decisions. Except for those elements of mind and fact that we obsess over, then all is chaos and hard to explain or rationalize. This may be my present description of religion. – Remo Cosentino

PS: I've decided that if I don't read PIQUE, my chance of getting Alzheimer's rises one percent each month.

ORWELL ON DECENCY

Barry Gewen

(From a review of *Diaries By George Orwell*, in *The New York Times Book Review*, 9/2/2012)

Orwell was against abstractions of every kind: fascism, Communism, especially nationalism; "Americanism", he once said, was a term that could easily be used for totalitarian ends. His socialism was pragmatic, anti-utopian, perhaps little more than an expression of his hope that the conditions of the poor and the powerless could be improved.

Abstractions, he knew, were the enemy of the powerless. They destroyed the diverse particulars of everyday life and necessarily culminated in some type of inhumanity, killing people for the sake of an idea. And because intellectuals were especially susceptible to those "smelly little orthodoxies", Orwell repeatedly disdained the group to which he so evidently belonged.

He placed his faith in common people, who went about their lives without the need for Big Ideas, practicing what he saw as the common people's singular virtue - decency. Decency didn't require an idea, let alone an ideology, for validation. It was the morality of the here and now, available to everybody.

"One has the right to expect ordinary decency even of a poet," he said.

CARL SAGAN ON THINKING FOR OURSELVES

(Excerpted from *The Demon-Haunted World*)

If we can't think for ourselves, if we're unwilling to question authority, then we're just putty in the hands of those in power. But if the citizens are educated and form their own opinions, then those in power work for us.

In every country, we should be teaching our children the scientific method and the reasons for a Bill of Rights. With it comes a certain decency, humility and community spirit. In the demon-haunted world that we inhabit by virtue of being human, this may be all that stands between us and the enveloping darkness.

THE GOOD NEWS FROM THE SEPTEMBER 11 NEW YORK CITY PRIMARIES

Charles J. Hynes, once a great Brooklyn District Attorney, who got too cozy with the black hat leaders of the borough's Ultra-Orthodox Jews, even allowing them to protect pedophile predators from exposure and trial, was defeated in his bid for a seventh term.

And Anthony Weiner* got less than 5 percent of the vote in the Democratic mayoral primary.

**And no one got – no one even noticed! – the pun in the last article in September PIQUE?*

Here come the Feminist
Freethinkers of NYC
Page 10

Getting rid of "under God"
... um ... wait a minute.
Page 4

Heresy! Maybe GMO food
labels are a bad idea.
Page 3

Vive la France!
Page 1

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