

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

December, 2015

Ho, ho, ho – herein we examine the myths and histories of America’s premiere national holiday (*the 4th of July doesn’t have presents*) and oh, why not, Hanukkah, too. We consider science, not-science and self-delusion, witness one None and celebrate a lot of new Nones, heed a dead President, beat on a dead nun, and fret about cat turds. We look at a woman in a funny hat, at a new word in Norwegian, and suggest that you look at some videos. Happy Ho-ho-holyDays. – JR

CELEBRATING WHAT’S-HIS-NAME’S BIRTH

Valerie Tarico

(Excerpted from *salon.com*, 5/14/2015)

Jesus has been described as the best-known figure in history, and also the least known. If you mentioned the name “Jesus” and someone asked “Jesus who?” you might blink. Or laugh. Even people who don’t think Jesus was God mostly believe they know a fair bit about him. You might be surprised that some of your most basic assumptions about Jesus are probably wrong.

We have no record of anything that was written about Jesus by eyewitnesses or other contemporaries during the time he would have lived, or for decades thereafter. Nonetheless, based on archeological digs and artifacts, ancient texts and art, and even forensic science, we know a good deal about the time and culture in which the New Testament is set. This evidence points to some startling conclusions about who Jesus likely was, and wasn’t.

Married, not single. Unlike the Catholic Church, Jews have no tradition of celibacy among religious leaders. Jesus and his disciples would have been practicing Jews, and all great rabbis we know of were married. A rabbi being celibate would have been so unusual that some modern writers have argued Jesus must have been gay. But a number of ancient texts, including the canonical New Testament, point to a special relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus. The Gospel of Phillip says, “[Jesus] loved her more than all the disciples, and used to kiss her often on her mouth.”

Cropped hair, not long. Jewish men at the time of Christ did not wear their hair long. A Roman triumphal arch of the time period depicts Jewish slaves with short hair. In the Apostle Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, he addresses male hair length. “Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him?”

Hung on a pole, not necessarily a cross. For centuries

scholars have known that the Greek New Testament word *stauros*, which is translated into English as cross, can refer to a device of several shapes, commonly a single upright pole, “torture stake” or even tree. The Romans did not have a standard way of crucifying prisoners, and Josephus tells us that during the siege of Jerusalem, soldiers nailed or tied their victims in a variety of positions. Early Christians may have centered on the vertical pole with a crossbeam because it echoed the Egyptian ankh, a symbol of life, or the Sumerian symbol for Tammuz, or because it simply was more artistically and symbolically distinctive than the alternatives. Imagine millions of people wearing a golden pole on a chain around their necks.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS: John Rafferty, *Pres./Editor*; Robert A. Murtha, Jr., *V.P.*; Donna Marxer, *Treas.*; Brian Lemaire, *Secty*; Maria Astifidis; Dorothy Kahn; Carl Marxer; Carlos Mora; David Orenstein; John Wagner; Mike Weiss
SHSNY, P.O. Box 7661, F.D.R. Station, New York, NY 10150-7661 / www.shsnny.org / 646-922-7389
Individual membership \$40 per year; Family membership \$65; Subscription only: \$30.

Articles published in PIQUE are archived in www.shsnny.org. They may be reprinted, in full or in part, in other newsletters. SHSNY is a Charter Chapter of the American Humanist Association (AHA), an Affiliate Member of Atheist Alliance International (AAI), an Affiliated Local Group of the Council for Secular Humanism (CSH) program of the Center for Inquiry (CFI), and an Endorsing Group in the Secular Coalition for New York (SCNY).

Short, not tall. The typical Jewish man at the time of the Roman Empire would have been just over five feet tall, which makes this a best guess for the height of Jesus. That he is typically depicted taller derives from the mental challenge people have distinguishing physical stature from other kinds of stature. Great men are called “big men” and “larger than life”. In ancient times they often were assigned “divine parentage” and miraculous births.

Born in a house, not a stable. The miraculous birth story of Jesus is a late, maybe second-century addition to the Bible, and it contains many fascinating mythic elements. But the idea that Jesus was born in a stable was added to the Christmas story even later. In the original narrative, Joseph and Mary probably would have stayed with relatives, and the phrase “no room for them in the inn (Gr: *kataluma*)” is better translated “no room for them in the upper room”.

Named Joshua, not Jesus. The name Joshua (in Hebrew Yhoshua, meaning “deliverance” or “salvation”) was common among Jews in the Ancient Near East as it is today. Joshua and Jesus are the same name, and are translated differently in our modern Bible to distinguish Jesus from the Joshua of the Old Testament.

Number of apostles (12) from astrology, not history. Whether Jesus had 12 disciples who ranked above his other devotees is an open question, as their names vary from list to list. Since the Gospels echo the story of Joshua, the “12” apostles most immediately mirror the 12 tribes of Israel. But the number 12 was considered auspicious by many ancient people, including the Israelites, and the 189 repetitions of the number 12 in the Bible ultimately may derive from the same pre-historical roots as the 12 signs of the zodiac and 12 months of the year. Astrotheology or star worship preceded the Hebrew religion, and shaped both the Bible and world religions more broadly. One might point to the 12 Olympian gods or 12 sons of Odin, or 12 days of Christmas or 12 “legitimate” successors to the prophet Mohammed.

Prophecies recalled, not foretold. Old Testament prophecies were well known to first-century Jews, and a messianic figure who wanted to fulfill some of these prophecies could simply do so. For example, in the book of Matthew, Jesus seeks a donkey to ride into Jerusalem “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet”. “Gospels” are a genre of devotional literature rather than objective histories, which means that the authors had every reason to shape their stories around earlier predictions. Scholars now believe that some Bible texts once thought to be prophecies actually relate to events that were current or past at the time of writing.

Some Jesus quotes not from Jesus; others uncertain. Lists of favorite Jesus sayings abound online. Some of the most popular are the Beatitudes (blessed are the meek, etc.) or the story of the woman caught in adultery (let he who is without sin cast the first stone) or the Golden Rule (do unto others as you would have them do unto you, which, we are told, sums up the Law and the Prophets).

Which words are actually from Jesus? The Gospels were written long after Jesus would have died, and no

technology existed with which to record his teachings in real time, unless he wrote them down himself, which he didn't.

We can be confident that at least some of the wise and timeless words and catchy proverbs attributed to Jesus are actually from earlier or later thinkers. For example, the Golden Rule was articulated before the time of Christ by the rabbi Hillel the Elder, who similarly said it was the “whole Torah”. By contrast, the much-loved story of the woman caught in adultery doesn't appear in manuscripts until the fourth century.

The person of Jesus, if indeed there was such a person, is shrouded in the fog of history, leaving us only with a set of hunches and traditions that far too often are treated as knowledge. The “facts” I have listed here are largely trivial; it doesn't really matter whether Jesus was tall or short, or how he cut his hair. But it does matter, tremendously, that “facts” people claim to know about how Jesus saw himself, and God and humanity are equally tenuous.

The teachings attributed to Jesus mix enduring spiritual and moral insights with irrelevancies and Judaica and bits of Iron Age culture, some of which are truly awful. That leaves each of us, from the privileged vantage of the 21st century, with both a right and a responsibility to consider the evidence and make our own best guesses about what is real and how we should then live. A good starting place might be a little more recognition that we don't know nearly as much as we'd like to think, and a lot of what we know for sure is probably wrong.



THE FIRST “WAR ON CHRISTMAS” The Week Staff

(Reprinted from *The Week* magazine, 12/20/2011)

How did the first settlers celebrate Christmas? They didn't. The Pilgrims who came to America in 1620 were strict Puritans, with firm views on religious holidays such as Christmas and Easter. Scripture did not name any holiday except the Sabbath, they argued, and the very concept of “holy days” implied that some days were not holy. “They for whom all days are holy can have no holiday,” was a common Puritan maxim.

Puritans were particularly contemptuous of Christmas, nicknaming it “Foolstide” and banning their flock from any celebration of it throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. On the first December 25 the settlers spent in Plymouth Colony, they worked in the fields as they would on any other day. The next year, a group of non-Puritan workmen caught celebrating Christmas with a game of “stoole-ball” — an early precursor of baseball — were punished by Governor William Bradford. “My conscience cannot let you play while everybody else is out working,” he told them.

Why didn't Puritans like Christmas? They had several reasons, including the fact that it did not originate as a Christian holiday. The upper classes in ancient Rome celebrated December 25 as the birthday of the sun god Mithra. The date fell right in the middle of Saturnalia, a month-long holiday dedicated to food, drink, and revelry, and Pope Julius I is said to have chosen that day to celebrate Christ's birth as a way of co-opting the pagan rituals. Beyond that, the Puritans considered it historically inaccurate to place the Messiah's arrival on December 25. They thought Jesus had been born sometime in September.

So their objections were theological? Not exclusively. The main reason Puritans didn't like Christmas was that it was a raucously popular holiday in late medieval England. Each year, rich landowners would throw open their doors to the poor and give them food and drink as an act of charity. The poorest man in the parish was named the “Lord of Misrule”, and the rich would wait upon him at feasts that often descended into bawdy drunkenness. Such decadence never impressed religious purists. “Men dishonor Christ more in the 12 days of Christmas”, wrote the 16th-century clergyman Hugh Latimer, “than in all the 12 months besides.”

When did that view win out? Puritans in the English Parliament eliminated Christmas as a national holiday in 1645, amid widespread anti-Christmas sentiment. Settlers in New England went even further, outlawing Christmas celebrations entirely in 1659. Anyone caught shirking their work duties or feasting was forced to pay a significant penalty of five shillings.

Christmas returned to England in 1660, but in New England it remained banned until the 1680s, when the Crown managed to exert greater control over its subjects in Massachusetts. In 1686, the royal governor of the colony, Sir Edmund Andros, sponsored a Christmas Day service at the Boston Town House. Fearing a violent backlash from Puritan

settlers, Andros was flanked by redcoats as he prayed and sang Christmas hymns.

Did the Puritans finally relent? Not at all. They kept up their boycott of Christmas in Massachusetts for decades. Cotton Mather, New England's most influential religious leader, told his flock in 1712 that “the feast of Christ's nativity is spent in reveling, dicing, carding, masking, and in all licentious liberty ... by mad mirth, by long eating, by hard drinking, by lewd gaming, by rude reveling!”

European settlers in other American colonies continued to celebrate it, however, as both a pious holiday and a time for revelry. In his *Poor Richard's Almanac of 1739*, Philadelphian Benjamin Franklin wrote of Christmas: “O blessed Season! Lov'd by Saints and Sinners / For long Devotions, or for longer Dinners.”

So Christmas was finally accepted at that time? No. Anti-Christmas sentiment flared up again around the time of the American Revolution. Colonial New Englanders began to associate Christmas with royal officialdom, and refused to mark it as a holiday. Even after the U.S. Constitution came into effect, the Senate assembled on Christmas Day in 1797, as did the House in 1802. It was only in the following decades that disdain for the holiday slowly ebbed away. Clement Clarke Moore's poem “A Visit From St. Nicholas” — aka “'Twas the Night Before Christmas” — was published in New York in 1823 to enormous success.

In 1836, Alabama became the first state to declare Christmas a public holiday, and other states soon followed suit. But New England remained defiantly Scrooge-like; as late as 1850, schools and markets remained open on Christmas Day. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow finally noted a “transition state about Christmas” in New England in 1856. “The old Puritan feeling prevents it from being a cheerful, hearty holiday; though every year makes it more so,” he wrote.

Christmas Day was formally declared a federal holiday by President Ulysses S. Grant in 1870.

CHRISTMAS IS A TIME FOR LOVE, NOT HATE

Being an atheist is okay. Being an atheist and shaming religions and spirituality as silly and not real is not okay.

Being a Christian is okay. Being homophobic, misogynistic, racist or otherwise hateful in the name of Christianity is not okay.

Being a reindeer is okay. Bullying and excluding another reindeer because he has a shiny nose is not okay.

THE FOUR STAGES OF LIFE: CHRISTMAS EDITION

1. You believe in Santa Claus
2. You don't believe in Santa Claus
3. You are Santa Claus
4. You look like Santa Claus

December 25th is National Jews Go to the Movies Day.

— Jon Stewart

HANUKKAH, WHAT'S NOT TO LIKE?

Sid Finehirsh

Even as an atheist, I have to say that I like Hanukkah. No doubt my appreciation derives, first of all, from its minimalist religiosity — say a short prayer, light a few candles and bam! On to fun and games: presents for the kids, all the latkes you can eat, and in my family, a vicious game of “Yankee Swap” — a grab bag free-for-all where participants get to “steal” each other’s gifts. Just think of it as the polar opposite of Secret Santa.

I also have fond memories of my first Hanukkah gift: a fire truck with ladders that I dearly loved. Not only was it great fun, but in my mid-century Jewish family, there was no tradition of gift-giving to children. I can remember many Hanukkahs without a holiday present beyond a few chocolate coins and dreidels. But then when I was 5 or 6, at the urging of my Italian Catholic uncle Pete Yakapelli (Oh, bless that courageous union in a day when mixed marriage was apostasy for all sides), my Dad gave me that fire truck. Suddenly I had reason to brag to my gentile friends at school.

This all goes to say that Hanukkah has gone through some big changes in my lifetime, from a minor religious holiday to a major marketing opportunity. It is now not only fully integrated into American life but menorahs are lit from Brooklyn to Peking. But it wasn’t always so.

It was the rabbis of 6th century Iraq who first called for a lamp to be placed in a window (at least if there were no Jew haters around) to commemorate what was in fact, a revolt that had taken place some 700 years earlier in Judea. They made up the story of the oil that miraculously lasted eight nights, a tale never heard of previously.

However, even for the rabbis the whole thing was a minor affair worthy of no more than a few paragraphs out of their collective corpus of some 2 million words known as the Talmud. In their rambling text, they never mentioned the leader in that pivotal Jewish history, the celebrated Judas Maccabeus, but they wrote an entire treatise about the totally fictional Queen Esther of ancient Persia, the basis of the holiday of Purim. Esther made it into the Bible, Judas was forgotten.

Perhaps their indifference to Hanukkah is best illustrated by their refusal to preserve for a Jewish audience the chronicle of the revolt by the revolutionaries’ own supporters: the *Books of the Maccabees (I & II)*. We have these today, thanks not to the rabbis, but to the Catholic Church because *Maccabees* was included in the early Greek translation of the Old Testament used by the Gospel writers. And probably because they liked the tales of history’s first religious martyrs.

In fact, there is reason to suspect that the rabbis hated the leaders of the Jewish revolt. (Indeed, they had some mighty good reasons for hating them, which I will come to.)

The history told in the books of the Maccabees is the story of the Macedonian king, Antiochus IV, who ruled a huge hunk of Asia as an heir to a piece of Alexander the Great’s empire. For some reason, Antiochus decided to suppress the traditional cult of the Jews.

Why he did so is one of the great mysteries of history, because no other ruler in the ancient world had ever done such a thing to a subject people. Some chroniclers thought that he was trying to create a uniform Greek state and culture. Others put the blame on Jewish elites who put him up to it so they could gain easier access to the Hellenic world. Some Roman historians thought he was just plain nuts. In fact, even back then he was known as “Antiochus the mad man” (*Epimanes*), a pun on the name he chose for himself, “Antiochus God manifest” (*Epiphanes*).

If not born crazy he was probably made crazy by the Romans, who conquered the western portion of his kingdom and extracted enormous tribute. Then, when Antiochus invaded Egypt, expecting an easy victory, he was stopped by a single Roman consul, Gaius Popillius Laenas, who drew a circle in the sand around Antiochus and dared him to step out of it. Antiochus promptly took his army and went home, passing through his province of Judea.

Along the way he stopped to put down an insurrection in Jerusalem and plunder its Temple. Fresh from his humiliation at the hands of the Romans and confronted with his insubordinate Jewish subjects, he issued his infamous decree banning Jewish ancestral rites such as Sabbath observance, circumcision, and the prohibition of idol worship. A country priest from a family known as the Hasmoneans sparked a mass uprising with the act of killing a fellow Jew who had agreed to sacrifice to an idol. His son, Judas the Hammer (*Macabbeus*), led the revolution whose ranks included the most fervently orthodox Jews.

The struggle had its up and downs, with bits of terrorism and banditry here and there, but the rebels did succeed in retaking the Temple, which they purified of Hellenic idolatry, and reestablished the traditional cult (but never seemed to express any concern about the oil supply).

From that high point the revolt suffered defeats and the death of Judas in battle, but with a series of alliances, including Rome as well as some pretenders to Antiochus’s throne, the Hasmoneans succeeded in establishing a kingdom with themselves as the royal family.

Alas, no one lived happily ever after. The longer the Hasmoneans ruled, the more their regime resembled the hated Macedonians. They hired mercenaries for use against neighboring states as well as their own population, engaged in ethnic cleansing and forced conversion. But worse in the eyes of the most orthodox Jews, their monarchy was illegitimate, since these kings were not descendants of David and, still worse, they brought blood impurity into the Temple in the form of a warrior High Priest.

The orthodox eventually revolted, but were defeated by the mercenaries of the Hasmonean King Alexander Jannai. He celebrated his victory by crucifying 800 rebels, who were forced to watch the slaughter of their wives and children while they themselves suffered slow death on their crosses. Alexander took in the spectacle from his royal balcony while he cavorted with his concubines.

Who were Jannai’s victims? We don’t exactly know, but in all probability they were the intellectual forebears of the

same rabbis who marginalized the role of the Hasmoneans in Jewish history. Perhaps that was their revenge.

So Hanukkah, what’s not to like? — Plenty! Will I go to my Hanukkah party, enjoy the warmth of family, the joy of the children, and the fun of trying to steal the best gift in the grab bag, while eating my fill of latkes? You bet! With all due respect to Santayana, sometimes the past is best forgotten, at least temporarily.

HOW I BECAME A NONE, AND THEN SOME Walter Balcerak

My parents, nominal Roman Catholics, attended church only for weddings or funerals. My sister and I had no such luck. Mom insisted that we go to church every Sunday and attend catechism lessons after Mass and during released-time from public school (a violation of the U.S. Constitution). Ultimately, we were initiated into the sacraments of Communion and Confirmation, whose significance I scarcely remember.

That was a long time ago—so long ago, in fact, that Mom gave us just a nickel each for the Sunday collection basket. In those days, it was not a meaningless sum. I’m pleased to report that Sis and I spent those precious nickels on candy bars.

The nuns who oversaw our indoctrination started me on the path to becoming a “None”. Perhaps they were not typical of the sisterhood, but the ones who ran our catechism classes were severe and humorless. Worse, they instilled in me an existential terror. If I violated certain crucial rules, I was told, I’d agonize in hell for eternity. To this day, in my seventh decade, I remember the fear that sometimes possessed me as I said my nightly prayer: “If I should die before I wake, I pray that God my soul will take ...”

The experience that turned me resolutely against religion occurred in a confessional booth when I was a teenager. I had been taught that masturbation was a sin, and I unwisely admitted to partaking of that forbidden pleasure. “How many times?” the invisible priest asked through the grate that separated us. I don’t remember my answer, but I vividly recall his response: “If you don’t stop, you will end up in an insane asylum!” he ejaculated (figuratively speaking) in a quaking voice. To this day, I’m unsure whether the blessed Father was in the throes of agitation or excitement. Given what we’ve learned about the proclivities of so many priests recently, I’d say the odds are fifty-fifty.

Soon after that, I gained intellectual support for rejecting religion when I read *The Age of Reason* by revolutionary patriot Thomas Paine. His book methodically debunked Judeo-Christian beliefs by citing the Bible’s many contradictions, absurdities and horrors.

I led much of my life after this free of the shackles of unthinking faith. I went to college, got married to my beloved Dolores, and helped to bring up Laura, our dear adopted daughter from China. For decades I worked as the editor of a newspaper published by a labor union that represented over 100,000 working men and women, a job I

found challenging and socially meaningful. During this period of my life, religion was completely irrelevant to me. If asked about my religious affiliation, I would have answered, “None”.

It was only after I retired that I became an outspoken atheist. Attending graduate school played a role in that, but the main cause was being exposed to a group I think of as The Four Horsemen of the Atheist Apocalypse: the late, much-lamented Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett. Thanks to them, religion was no longer irrelevant. They convinced me that its influence is mostly malign and must be opposed.

So I joined various branches of the Center for Inquiry and began to read *Free Inquiry* and *Skeptical Inquirer* magazines. I attended free-thought conferences. I added *The Skeptic* magazine to my reading list. I joined the Freedom from Religion Foundation, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the American Humanist Association, and last, but far from least, the Secular Humanist Society of New York.

Today, I’m no longer a “None”. When it comes to religion, I’m now a “Hell, no!”

WE HAVE A VIDEO LIBRARY ON YOUTUBE

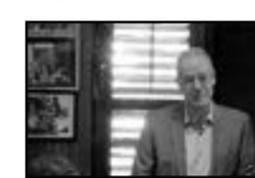
Carl Marxer



SHSNY is now a presence on YouTube, with more than 30 videos up and running, from one- or two-minute “Why I Am a Humanist” testimonials (check out Mike Weiss’ “It just makes sense”) to hour-plus coverages of some of our Darwin Day, Freethought Day and Day of Reason celebrations. To browse, go to: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCieq52ZLXG4VncfiilFvfv/videos>

While you’re there, please hit the red “Subscribe” button on the right side of the page—it will make sure you’re alerted when I post new videos—and it will help boost SHSNY’s clout and exposure on YouTube.

Make sure you see the first two “Chronicles of Humanism” 4-5-minute videos (especially #2, on Freethought Day and the Salem Witch Trials – the first was, well, a first attempt), starring our own ebullient, dynamic Kiwi Callahan. More to come.



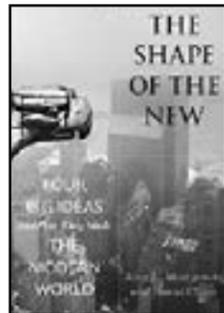
Extra Added Attraction: Massimo Pigliucci’s “Stoicism Today” presentation at our October 12 Freethought Day brunch is up and available in 4K resolution (i.e., four times the quality of standard HD television). Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XG7oUbjLj0>

-- click on the little gear icon at the bottom of the frame for “Quality”, and choose 4K resolution (if you have enough bandwidth).

SHSNY CALENDAR: DECEMBER 2015 - FEBRUARY 2016

SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURS, DEC 3, 7-8:30 pm
THE COMMUNITY CHURCH
OF NEW YORK
40 East 35 St. (basement)
We'll discuss
THE SHAPE OF THE NEW:
Four Big Ideas and How They
Made the Modern World
Scott L. Montgomery and
Daniel Chirot

This panoramic book tells the story of how revolutionary Enlightenment ideas about freedom, equality, evolution, and democracy have shaped the world we know.



The Shape of the New offers unforgettable portraits of Adam Smith, Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, Charles Darwin, and Karl Marx – heirs of the Enlightenment who embodied its highest ideals about progress – and shows how their thoughts, over time and in the hands of their followers and opponents, transformed the very nature of our beliefs, institutions, economies, and politics.

Yet these ideas also hold contradictions. They have been used in the service of brutal systems such as slavery and colonialism, been appropriated and twisted by monsters like Stalin and Hitler, and provoked reactions against the Enlightenment's legacy by Islamic Salafists and the Christian Religious Right. – *Hardcover, Kindle*
Join us even if you haven't finished reading. The SHSNY Book Club is open to all ... and free!

SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURS, JAN 7, 7-8:30 pm
Community Church of New York
NONZERO
The Logic of Human Destiny
Robert Wright

Evolution meets game theory in this follow-up to Wright's *The Moral Animal*. Wright contends that history progresses in a predictable direction and points toward a certain end: a world of increasing human cooperation where greed and hatred have outlived their usefulness.

"Insightful, witty, profound, *Nonzero* offers breathtaking implications for what we believe and how we adapt to technology's ongoing transformation of the world." – *All formats.*

SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURS, FEB 4, 7-8:30 pm
Community Church of New York
BEFORE RELIGION: A History
of a Modern Concept
Brent Nongbri

Religion has been understood as a universal phenomenon, a part of the "natural" human experience. Brent Nongbri shows that the idea of religion as a sphere of life distinct from politics, economics, or science is a recent development in European history.

Examining a wide array of ancient writings, Nongbri demonstrates that in antiquity, there was no conceptual arena that could be designated as "religious" as opposed to "secular". – *All formats.*

LIKE SHSNY ON FACEBOOK
<https://www.facebook.com/SHSofNY>
MEET US ON MEETUP
www.meetup.com/shsny-org/
TEXT US ON TWITTER
 @NY_Sec_Humanist

SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT
MON, DEC 14, 6:30 pm
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)
THE UNBELIEVERS

Richard Dawkins (*The God Delusion*) and Lawrence Krauss (*A Universe from Nothing*) – the dynamic duo of modern science – travel the globe together, seeking to promote a scientific worldview and the rational questioning of religious belief, with celebrities (Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Woody Allen), academics and ordinary folk supporting their work.

After-Film Discussion:
LK to RD: "Richard, what's more important, explaining science or destroying religion?"
Is that attitude our problem?
SHSNY Movie Night is FREE.
(But put something on the bar besides your elbow.)

BRUNCH & CONVERSATION
SUN, DEC 20, 11:30 am
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)

We gather in the saloon's back room, where we have enough privacy to have different conversations around the several large tables, as well as the big one led by Dorothy Kahn.



The expanded pub-grub menu has been enhanced with an \$11 breakfast special, the Bloody Marys are hot, the beer is cold, and conversation sparkles.

Come join 20 or more freethinkers for food, fun and conversation.

Discussion:
Should Election Day be a National Holiday?

SHSNY CALENDAR: DECEMBER 2015 - FEBRUARY 2016

OUR DECEMBER
UN-SCHEDULE
NO GREAT LECTURE
NO STUDYING HUMANISM
 Rather than risk *Great Lectures* being bumped by heavier-drinking holiday crowds at Stone Creek, or trying to *Study Humanism* in mid-Xmas/New Year week, we'll take a pass in December. Both back in January – stay tuned.

SAVE THE DATE!
FRIDAY, FEB 12, 7pm
Byblos Restaurant
80 Madison Ave. (28 Street)
SHSNY 8th Annual
Darwin Day Celebration

Make plans now to celebrate Charles Darwin's 207th birthday – and the 28th Anniversary of the founding of SHSNY – with 60 or more of your fellow freethinkers at top-rated Byblos Restaurant in midtown.

Enjoy a bountiful buffet (lots of veggie choices) ... mingle, mix and make new friends ... vote for the Dumbth of the Year ... and enjoy a fascinating guest-speaker presentation ... all for just \$55 per person, tax/tip included (cash bar).
 Details in January PIQUE.

PLANNING AHEAD
The usual SHSNY schedule is ...
Book Club: First Thursday
 at the Community Church of NY
Movie Night: Second Monday
 at Stone Creek Lounge.
Brunch: Third Sunday
 at Stone Creek Lounge
Great Lectures: 4th Wednesday
 at Stone Creek Lounge.
Studying Humanism: Last Monday
 at the Community Church of NY
More info: www.shsny.org,
 and/or 646-922-73

SUN, DEC 6, 11am
JENNIFER MICHAEL HECHT
Wonderful: Poetic Insights on
Awe, Mood, and Meaning
Society for Ethical Culture
2 West 64 St.

"We today have a meaning problem because, as a culture, we just got out of a relationship with a character named God. ... I will draw on the history of doubt and unbelief, and on poetry, to instigate some awe and re-envision mood and meaning."

OTHER NYC
FREETHOUGHT EVENTS
New York Philosophy:

- Cocktails & Conversation at 49 Grove. Free. www.meetup.com/New-York-Philosophy/
- Sat, Dec 5, 10am–6pm: SkeptiCamp NYC 2015: New York's Open Conference on Science and Skepticism. Listen, discuss, or be a presenter. Free! Baruch College, 17 Lexington Ave (23 St), Room 306. Registration is recommended: <http://www.SkeptiCampNYC.org/Register.aspx>. Info: www.SkeptiCampNYC.org

NY Society for Ethical Culture:

- Fri, Dec 4, 7 pm, Ethics in Film: *Surrogates* (2009). Snacks/bevs, \$5.
- Sun, Dec 6, 2pm, Sunday Assembly NYC: speakers, songs, socializing, coffee and cookies.
- Fri, Dec 11, 7 pm, Ethics and the Theater: *The Great God Pan* by Amy Herzog. 6:30 reception, light refreshments, \$10 suggested.
- Thu, Dec 31, 9pm–12:30am: New Year's Eve Party: Live music, dancing, entertainment, wine/cheese, light buffet dinner. Purchase tickets: www.eventbrite.com/e/new-years-eve-at-ethical-tickets-19513925677

5TH ANNUAL
REASONABLE NEW YORK
WINTER SOLSTICE PARTY
SAT, DEC 19, 5:30-10:30pm
New York Society for Ethical
Culture, 2 West 46 St.



This year, to celebrate the Winter Solstice, Reasonable New York has partnered with Raymond Arnold and his *Brighter Than Today Secular Solstice* singalong event.

Reasonable New York will host a reception in the Social Hall from 5:30 or so until 10:30pm. Come hang out at the reception for wine and snacks and conversation with members of all the Reasonable New York organizations - and it's all free! (*Donations accepted.*)

The Solstice singalong concert will take place in the auditorium. Tickets for the concert are \$25 – available at www.humanistculture.com – and also at the reception.

Once you have a ticket, feel free to go back and forth throughout the evening.



OF MICE AND MEN AND INTELLIGENT DESIGN

John Rafferty

In “What Makes a Happy Gut or Stinky Feet”, a November 6 *New York Times* review of the new American Museum of Natural History exhibition, “The Secret World Inside You”, William Grimes informs us that our bodies are “teeming” with trillions of bacteria, viruses and microbes. In fact, “the microbes in the intestinal tract alone outnumber the stars in the Milky Way.”

Wow. *Trillions!*

And most of them are good for us. “Benign microbes vastly outnumber bad actors,” Grimes teaches, even though, “when magnified, they are hideous” and “their lifestyle leaves a lot to be desired, too. It is squalid.”

Of course the same thing could be said about many of us, but doesn’t it all make sense as part of God’s plan, His “intelligent design”?

Microbes, it turns out, may play a critical role in appetite, mood and mental illness. A case in point: Toxoplasma gondii. This single-cell protozoan, a parasite, reproduces only in the intestines of cats. To reach this destination it takes up residence in a mouse that has eaten food contaminated by the feces of infected cats. Then it sends messages to the mouse brain that there is nothing to fear from cats. When a cat feasts on a deluded mouse, it absorbs the parasite and passes it along through defecation to other warm-blooded animals, including humans.

Recent studies suggest that men affected by the parasite behave more recklessly, break rules and become less aware of how others see them. Women become more sociable, trusting and image-conscious. Both sexes get into more car accidents. This is even stranger than cheese fungus.

So humans—whom the “Intelligent Designer” created in His image and placed at the center of the universe, and who are, in fact, the very reason there is a universe at all—are behaviorally dependent on random contact with cat turds.

As Neil deGrasse Tyson explained during a “science vs. religion debate” on the November 4 edition of Larry Wilmore’s “Nightly Show” ...

“Any time someone describes their understanding of God, typically it involves some statement of benevolence or some kind of kindness.

“I look out to the universe and yes, it is filled with mysteries, but it’s also filled with all manner of things that would just as soon have you dead. Like asteroid strikes, and hurricanes, and tornadoes, and tsunamis, and volcanoes, and disease, and pestilence.*

There are things that exist in the natural world that do not have your health or longevity as a priority. And so I cannot look at the universe and say that yes, there’s a God, and this God cares about my life – at all. The evidence does not support this.”

*And cat shit, Neil – don’t forget cat shit.

WHAT IS OUR “FAITH”?

Neil McKelvie

Secular humanism attracts thinking people, but many such do not have the fanatical emotional commitment to The Cause as do the crowds of religious zealots. We do not see, thankfully, hordes of secular non-humanists mounting military assaults on Mecca or the Vatican. (We may indeed consider how much better the world could be without both institutions.) Still, where is the emotion to bring masses of devotees to the cause?

Jesus and Mohammed and the Buddha and so many others are all dead. Our knowledge of so much is far, far beyond that of the great thinkers of the past. Scientific research has never shown *any* supernatural influence anywhere, and I certainly give zero credence to the Catholic Church’s “miracles”.

Let us have *faith*, yes, in the capacity of mankind to evolve. This may be as misguided as our many religions, but at least this is something that can be actively helped.

This is what I believe, much as I dislike that word.

JESUS INSTRUCTS MOHAMMED IN “LET’S PRETEND”

(Transcribed from jesusandmo.net/2013/12/04/fools2/)

Jesus: You know what I like most about being religious? It’s knowing the answers to all the difficult questions. Is there a God? Yes? Is there life after death? Of course. Non-religious people don’t know the answers to those questions. Ha-ha, the fools!

Mohammed: Strictly speaking, we don’t know the answers, either. We just believe them.

Jesus: Ah, but that’s where faith comes into it. We can convince ourselves that what we believe is actual knowledge.

Mo: So faith just means pretending.

Jesus: Not just pretending – pretending *really* hard.

Man is certainly stark mad. He cannot make a worm, and yet he will be making gods by the dozens.

– Michel de Montaigne

“TAILORED FACTS” FOR SALE

Wiley Miller

*(Transcribed from the comic strip “Non Sequitor”, 11/6/15) (Six-year-old Danae has set up her business on the front lawn and is sitting at a desk displaying a sign: **Studies ‘R’ Us.**)*

Curious Woman: So, what’s this all about, little girl?

Danae: Providing reports to support what you want to hear, ma’am.

Woman: Oh, you mean junk science to validate bogus claims for delusional people who won’t admit being wrong?

Danae: Um ... I call it “tailored facts”.

Woman: I see ... *(as she opens her purse)* ... got anything to prove the health benefits of eating a box of chocolates every day?

Danae *(handing over thick sheaf of papers):* One of our best sellers.

JOHN UPDIKE: SCIENCE ISN’T ENOUGH.

ADAM GOPNIK: SURE IT IS.

Adam Gopnik

(Excerpted from “Bigger than Phil”, Gopnik’s 2014 New Yorker essay that was our November Book Club selection.)

Cosmically, I seem to be of two minds,” John Updike wrote, a decade ago. “The power of materialist science to explain everything—from the behavior of the galaxies to that of molecules, atoms, and their sub-microscopic components—seems to be inarguable and the principal glory of the modern mind. On the other hand, the reality of subjective sensations, desires, and—may we even say—illusions composes the basic substance of our existence, and religion alone, in its many forms, attempts to address, organize, and placate these. I believe, then, that religious faith will continue to be an essential part of being human, as it has been for me.”

Does religion alone address the reality of our subjective sensations? It’s perfectly possible to believe that there are many things that will never be subjects of science without thinking that they are therefore objects of faith. Human beings are unpredictable. We can’t know what songs they will sing, what new ideas they will come up with, how beautifully they will act or how badly. But their subjective sensations do not supply them with souls. They just make them people. Since Darwin’s starting premise is that individual variation is the rule of nature, it isn’t surprising that the living things that are able to have experiences have them in varied and individual ways.

The plausible opposite of “permanent scientific explanation” is “singular poetic description”, not “miraculous magical intercession”.

SCIENCE IS DIFFERENT

Michael Shermer

(Excerpted from Why People Believe Weird Things)

Science has certain built-in self-correcting features: experimentation, corroboration, and falsification. These characteristics make scientific paradigms different from all other paradigms, which include pseudoscience, non-science, superstition, myth, religion, and art. The reason that pseudoscience, non-science, superstition, myths, religion, and art are not progressive is that they do not have the goal or the mechanism to allow the accumulation of knowledge that builds on the past. Progress, in this cumulative sense, is not their purpose. This is an observation, not a criticism. Individuals in these paradigms do not stand on the shoulders of giants in the same manner as scientists. While there is change in myths, religions, and art styles, it is not progressive change. Artists do not improve upon the styles of their predecessors, they change them.

One thing I have learned in a long life: that all our science, measured against reality, is primitive and childlike – and yet it is the most precious thing we have. – *Albert Einstein*

THE GOOD NEWS, AND IT’S ONLY GOING TO GET BETTER

Michael Stone

(Reprinted from “Good News: U.S. Becoming Less Religious”, at Progressive Secular Humanist, on Patheos.com, 11/3/2015)

Good news for rational people: A new poll shows more Americans continue to abandon belief in God, while the number of Americans who identify as religiously unaffiliated continues to rise.

According to a comprehensive new study released by the Pew Research Center, Americans are becoming less religious, and anti-science, anti-gay rhetoric seems to be a significant factor in driving many Americans away from religious superstition.

Pew reports that “a growing share of Americans are religiously unaffiliated, including some who self-identify as atheists or agnostics as well as many who describe their religion as ‘nothing in particular’.” Altogether, the religiously unaffiliated (also called the ‘nones’) now account for 23 percent of the adult population, up from 16 percent in 2007. Among the findings:

The share of Americans who say they are “absolutely certain” that God exists has dropped eight percentage points, from 71 percent to 63 percent, since 2007, when the last comparable study was made.

The percentage of adults who describe themselves as “religiously affiliated” has shrunk six points since 2007, from 83 percent to 77 percent.

The shares of the U.S. adult population who consider religion “very important” to them, pray daily, and attend services at least once a month have declined between three and four percent over the last eight years.

Raw Story reports the trend is most pronounced among young adults, with only half of those born from 1990 to 1996 absolutely certain of their belief in God, compared to 71 percent of the “silent generation”, or those born from 1928 to 1945. Younger people also are less likely to pray daily, at 39 percent, compared to “silent generation” adults at 67 percent. Young adults are also much less likely to attend religious services, the survey found.

The poll reflects a well-established trend showing Americans of all ages abandoning religious superstition. According to a comprehensive study released last May by Pew, every demographic group in the U.S. has seen a significant drop in people who call themselves Christians.

The survey of 35,000 American adults shows the Christian percentage of the population dropping sharply. In 2007, the last time Pew conducted a similar survey, 78.4 percent of American adults called themselves Christian. In 2014, 70.6 percent of Americans called themselves Christians, reflecting a drop of nearly 8 percent.

Bottom line: the percentage of Americans who say they believe in God, pray daily, and attend church regularly is declining.

And that is good news.

IN CASE YOU THINK THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN AMERICA IS GOING TO GET ANY MORE LIBERAL

John Rafferty

(Based on and excerpted from “When Priests Marry”, by Garry Wills, a review of Keeping the Vow: The Untold Story of Married Catholic Priests, by D. Paul Sullins, in The New York Review, 11/19/2015)

I have long felt – “believed” is too strong a word – with no science to back me up, that many Catholic young men and boys, horrified by the stirrings of gay lust in their loins, fly into the arms of the Church rather than those of their locker-room neighbor. After all, they have been taught that homosexuality is vile, disgusting, and a “mortal sin in the eyes of God”, so what surer way to avoid an eternity in Hell than to live a lifetime of celibacy, starting in the seminary?

Now Garry Wills, in a *New York Review* essay, “When Priests Marry”, adds some expert heft to my amateur conjectures, and along the way points to a future in which the Church in America is even more conservative, more opposed to reform, than it is now.

Though the number of men entering Catholic seminaries has decreased drastically, those who do ask for entry are naturally the ones willing to submit to all papal doctrine – placing them at odds not only with their fellow priests but with the laity they mean to serve. The older clergy and the laity are favorable to married priests, women priests, and contraception. The younger priests are not. They naturally seek admission to dioceses with conservative bishops. Since their seminaries have recruited more applicants than those with progressive bishops (though the scale is still small), conservatives boast that the way to increase “vocations” is to get stricter.

It is a system in which leaders are sought who will have a little in common with their putative followers. This turns upside down the differences in attitude according to priests’ age. In 1970, a survey made by the priest-sociologist Andrew Greeley and a colleague found that 82 percent of those under thirty-five favor optional celibacy. Now the younger priests are the ones most opposed to any change.

Another way that the younger priests differ from the older is in their attitude toward homosexuality. As one would expect from the older men’s attitude toward celibacy, they are less condemning than the Vatican of gay behavior. Reputable studies estimate the number of gay priests as ranging from 15 to 50 percent, and a median estimate indicates that the percentage of gays in the priesthood is ten times that of gays in the general population. The Vatican says that the homosexual inclination, though it is morally disordered, is not a sin if one does not act on it. Anyone who thinks that this concentration of men with a gay inclination will not result in gay activity is as blind to reality as any pope. Years of study and counseling by the Catholic psychiatrist Richard Sipe led him to conclude that only 40 percent of priests, gay or straight, permanently practice celibacy.

The effect of mandatory celibacy may be less the abstention from sex than an obsession with it. The younger priests who accept the condemnation of homosexuality have been outspoken in denouncing their elders for fostering a gay subculture in some seminaries, making straight men uncomfortable there. Does the number of gay priests shock or disgust lay Catholics? Why should it, since another 2014 Pew poll shows that 85 percent of Catholics under thirty (and 70 percent of all Catholics) favor the moral acceptance of homosexuality, and 75 percent of the under-thirties (57 percent of all Catholics) favor gay marriage?

So, what kind of future can we expect from an institution that is already miles behind its own followers on the issues of homosexuality and celibacy, in hypocritical denial on both counts (not to mention the role of women in the church – why are these even *issues?*), and which is raising a generation of leaders who want to not only halt any forward motion, but, indeed, to do an about-face?

Not much good, I think. Certainly no “liberalization”, no matter how popular the current “reformer” in the Vatican. Gary Wills sees hope in Francis, “a pope who is unafraid”.

I don’t.

“SUFFER THE LITTLE CHILDREN ...”

Mother Theresa may be dead (let’s be thankful for small favors), but her reactionary, fascist policies live on in the organization she founded.

According to a *Washington Post* article excerpted in November *Humanist Monthly*, the newsletter of the Capital District (Albany) Humanist Society, thirty orphanages run by the group founded by Mother Teresa have decided to shutter their adoption services in India rather than comply with a new government system that makes it easier for single and divorced people to adopt children.

“We have already shut our adoption services, because we believe our children may not receive real love,” said Sister Amala at Nirmala Shishu Bhawan, a New Delhi orphanage run by the Missionaries of Charity. “We do not wish to give children to single parents or divorced people. It is not a religious rule but a human rule. Children need both parents, male and female. That is only natural, isn’t it?”

Estimates of the number of orphans in India vary from 16 million to 30 million.

IS THIS GOOD FOR US, OR JUST SILLY?

Michael Stone

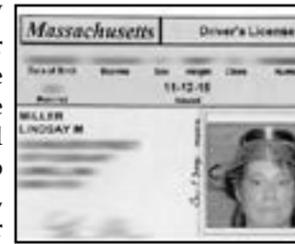
(Excerpted from “Pastafarian Wins Right To Wear Colander In Driver’s License Photo” on *patheos.com*, 11/13/2015)

Flying Spaghetti Monster For The Win: A Massachusetts woman has won the right to wear a pasta strainer in her driver’s license photo.

The American Humanist Association reports that the Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) is permitting Lindsay Miller, a Pastafarian, to wear a colander in her driver’s license photo.

Previously the RMV denied Miller’s request to wear the pasta strainer, despite the fact that Pastafarians recognize the pasta strainer to be a sacred religious head covering worn to bring honor upon their deity, the Flying Spaghetti Monster (Sauce Be Upon Him).

Comment: Seriously, is this good for us or silly? Your thoughts – sincere or silly – are solicited. – JR



NOW YOU KNOW A WORD IN NORWEGIAN:

“TEXAS”

(Or, *Why We Live in New York #214*)

Janet Allon

(Excerpted from “Norwegians Are Literally Using ‘Texas’ As Slang for ‘Crazy’ Now” on *AlterNet*, 10/21/2015)

Texas is many things to many people—a state the size of a medium-sized country; home to several idiot governors, one who became president, and a current one who thinks it’s a good idea for college students to openly carry firearms. ... To people in Norway, “texas” with a small “t” is a synonym for crazy, bonkers, out of control and wild. As in, *that’s totally texas*. Or in Norwegian: *det var helt texas*.

Texas Monthly discovered this hilarious (or humbling, depending on your perspective) piece of slang on Tumblr. The magazine accumulated several pieces of evidence that this is really a thing in Norway.

A Norwegian explained what “texas” meant to him in a Reddit discussion earlier this year, writing: “When I think of the word I picture a cowboy crashing a party and shooting two revolvers into the air. It’s completely texas!”

A QUESTION FOR NYC HUMANISTS

In response to a recent *New York Post* editorial on “charter school excellence”, our own Dennis Middlebrooks fired off this letter, which was printed, slightly altered, November 13:

Dear Editor:

Although the Post may deny it, the selectivity of NYC charter schools is well-established. Their student populations contain a far lower percentage of children with learning disabilities or who cannot speak English than do the regular public schools. Disruptive students are quickly expelled and kids who cannot cut it academically are routinely “counseled out” to become the responsibility of the “failing” public school system.

It is also no secret that the vaunted charter school “lotteries” draw in kids from stable families who are more committed to their children’s education rather than kids from dysfunctional family backgrounds. – Dennis Middlebrooks

The Question: Is charter schools vs. public schools a humanist concern? Reader response is requested.

REGARDING LAST MONTH’S TERROR IN PARIS, ONE RELIGIOUS LEADER GOT IT RIGHT

Responding to the recent massacre in Paris, the Dalai Lama argues for “humanistic values” while declaring that the problem of terrorism “cannot be resolved through prayers”.

“We need a systematic approach to foster humanistic values, of oneness and harmony. If we start doing it now, there is hope that this century will be different from the previous one. It is in everybody’s interest. So let us work for peace within our families and society, and not expect help from God, Buddha or the governments.”

BUT YOU CAN COUNT ON THE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS RIGHT TO GET IT ALL WRONG

Pastor Steven Anderson of Faithful Word Baptist Church in Tempe, Arizona, who has called for the public execution of gays and lesbians, reacted to the horrific terror attacks in Paris by denouncing France as a “sinful nation” and blaming the victims at the Bataclan theater because they were there to attend a “death metal” concert, paying to see a “drug-pushing hillbilly faggot”. (Both excerpts above from *Progressive Secular Humanist on patheos.com*, 11/16/2015)

THE ECONOMIST (NO “LIBERAL RAG”) OFFERS A FACT FOR THE TERRIFIED WHO WOULD BAR REFUGEES FROM THE U.S.

Three-quarters of a million refugees have been settled in America since 9/11. Not one has been arrested on domestic terrorism charges.

A REPUBLICAN PRESIDENT’S ADVICE IN A TIME OF EVEN GREATER TERROR

Jeffrey Frank

(Excerpted from “Ike’s Advice: How to Avoid a Multiplicity of Fears”, on *newyorker.com*, 11/18/2015)

You could hear Eisenhower at his best during a televised speech that he delivered on April 5, 1954, one he began by asking his listeners to survey America’s “strength, its problems, its apprehensions, and its future”. The talk was soon called the “multiplicity of fears” address (he’d actually used the phrase in a press conference a few weeks earlier) because, above all, Eisenhower wanted to tamp down what he properly sensed was enormous uneasiness in a world that had changed so rapidly in his lifetime. ...

Because it was the height of the Cold War, the President acknowledged that “we are concerned about the men in the Kremlin”, who also had the bomb ... But what he most wanted people to hear was that “... greater than any of these apprehensions is the need that we look at them clearly, face to face, without fear, like honest, straightforward Americans, so we do not develop the jitters or any other kind of panic, that we do not fall prey to hysterical thinking.”

FURTHER THOUGHTS ON “SAYING GRACE”

Richard Dawkins

(Editor: Just after November PIQUE, with its Page 1 views on “saying grace” at Thanksgiving, went to the printer, I found this in Dawkins’ new book, Brief Candle in the Dark. – JR)

One of my predecessors as Sub-Warden [of New College, Oxford], the ancient historian Geoffrey de Ste Croix, used to refuse to say grace on conscientious grounds (he described himself as “an atheist, politely militant”). I, however, was of the school of thought of the great philosopher Sir Alfred Ayer who, when Sub-Warden of New College, cheerfully said grace on the grounds that “I will not utter falsehoods but I have no objection to making meaningless statements.”

AND ONE MORE THOUGHT FROM DAWKINS

Fareed Zakaria: Jeb Bush was asked about it [evolution] and he said, “Well I sort of believe it, but I don’t believe it should be taught in schools.”

Richard Dawkins: Well, this is not something you believe in or not – this is a fact. It is just as much a fact as that the earth goes around the sun. You can’t *not* believe it unless you’re ignorant. I don’t believe those presidential candidates are all ignorant. I think what they’re doing, is that they think they’ve got to say that to appeal to their constituency.

And if that’s true, it’s deeply depressing.

IT’S THAT TIME OF YEAR. PUT SHSNY ON YOUR SHOPPING (AND GIVING) LIST

SHOP:

For every freethinker on your holiday list, a gift of a full year (11 issues) of PIQUE, the newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York, costs just \$30. Share your knowledge and enjoyment of humanism with the people who truly matter to you.

To order, email editor@shsny.org, or call 646-922-7389 (leave a call-back number). We’ll send a “You have a gift” announcement if you like, timed to arrive when you want. Just tell us what you want us to do, and we probably will.

GIVE:

What to do with those oodles of cash you have lying around at the end of the year? Help the cause of humanism and reason in America with a gift to SHSNY. Your gift to SHSNY—a 501(c)3 educational non-profit—is 100 percent tax-deductible.

We are an all-volunteer organization, with no fixed overhead or paid staff, so every penny of your gift will be used to promote humanism in and around New York, to build SHSNY membership and to expand our already-vibrant calendar of events (your suggestions for new programs are welcome). So if you’re in a tax-reducing, charitable-giving mode, seek no further – give to SHSNY.

SHSNY: Your Tax Haven
Page 12

Learn Norwegian
Page 11

Microbes “R” Us
Page 8

We’re Up on YouTube
Page 5

Hanukkah History (not nice)
Page 4

Christmas for Freethinkers
Pages 1-3

