

# PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

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January, 2015

Are the holy-days over yet? Is it safe to go back to bashing religion? We do, six ways, while we debunk Biblical literalism and fight discrimination against, um, us. We celebrate Steven Hawking, Epicurus and Darwin Day; we dump on Deepak Chopra, the President of Turkey, the P.M. of India and our Dumbth nominees. We solicit your opinion about a major moral question, while we wonder where you get your opinions. But first, as good a New Year essay as we've ever seen. – JR

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## EARNING OUR LIVES

**David Orenstein (the Paleolibrarian)**

*(Reprinted from "The Urgent Need to Remain Humanistic in a World of Religious Violence", on the Paleolibrarian blog: <http://www.paleolibrarian.info/2014/11/>)*

Perhaps the biggest difference between those of faith, especially all those who believe in heaven, and freethinkers who accept that our lives end at death is the feeling of urgent need to heal the world in a secular fashion. For the secular it is more important to be judged by others rather than the divine. Most believers will modify behavior based on a promise to eventually get into a supernatural space upon death. This motivation to get into an exclusive heaven is a fear-based way to promote or take moral action.

Atheists and other non-believers conversely see their time – this specific time – as the best and only possible opportunity to help each other and ourselves. The reward comes from a better earth than an imaginary heaven. We can call this a genetically embedded and socially evolved golden rule or see it as structural empathy that keeps family units and whole societies for the most part intact. However, looking at history, it is clear that secular humanist societies are time and again the most peaceful and cohesive.

But while most freethinkers seek and stand for secular democracy, constitutional law and justice, even these worthy concepts and initiatives only tell half of the story as to why freethinkers feel the urgency to make things right, or at least make them better.

Perhaps this urgency is somewhat also related to the idea of legacy. It would be foolish to think that those of faith are not concerned with their legacy as well. However, from the rationalist perspective, there is perhaps a cleaner and clearer need to be kind and make the world safer for others

just because we accept that the magical place called heaven does not actually exist. For atheists and other non-believers this is the only time we have on the merry-go-round called life. And after 80 years or so we are gone forever in the same way that for the previous 14.5 billion years we didn't exist.

I'm reminded of one of the last scenes in "Saving Private Ryan", where a dying Captain Miller (Tom Hanks) tells Ryan (played by Matt Damon), to "earn this" and not waste the chance he's been given, a chance to make his time and his life better for himself and others because he's pulled out of combat. Miller, without needing to go into full explanation in his dying moments, tells Ryan that he owes his life to those who sacrificed so he could go on.

While I've no data to accept this idea is true, I believe that all people, humanists, atheists, believers and non-believers alike, all have their own "Saving Private Ryan" moment. Even if we were never soldiers or first responders, our lives can turn from calm to tragedy on a dime. I know from my own experience that I've been given at least four chances to make and remake my life and the lives of those around me better.

Like every human on the planet, my (all our) first chance comes with the randomness of conception and the successful birth and maturation of the fetus into a viable adult (in my case a CUNY professor, father of three, author and librarian who also teaches anthropology).

The second and third chances for me came in 1979 and 1987 with two separate aortic valve replacements. At no time did I pray for forgiveness or for more life from a magical force. However, I did seek out the best surgeons as well as the best hospital, which also had the most professional nurses and who, with years of experience and scientific and medical training, worked to keep me alive.

The fourth time came when an airplane I was a passenger on was going down the runway and lost all hydraulic

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

Articles published in PIQUE are archived in [www.shsny.org](http://www.shsny.org). They may be reprinted, in full or in part, in other newsletters. SHSNY is an Affiliated Local Group of the Council for Secular Humanism, a Charter Chapter of the American Humanist Association, and an Affiliate Member of Atheist Alliance International.

pressure moments before takeoff. Ten minutes later into the air and had the same fault occurred there would have been no Paleolibrarian; you'd be reading someone else's astute and insightful website.

Humanists accept that life hangs on a string and our good and bad deeds can leave us defined by others at any moment. Missing a plane or train by five minutes after it departs and sadly crashes leaves you alive. Or walking on the left rather than right side of the street when the piano falls means that by chance you have been given the opportunity to walk away when others perhaps couldn't.

It is for this reason that humanists agree that all life, not just human life, is precious. This is also the reason we give such high stature and meaning to our individual lives as well. Secular humanists understand that life is both fleeting and linear. There are no do-overs, no heaven or hell, no possible chance to be held accountable for our actions in this life in another space in time upon death.

The time which we consciously inhabit is our only chance to be here and to lead a healthy, positive and productive life as secular humanists. However, there is popular faith-based opposition to godlessness which states that non-believers will become raving anarchists and violent amoral people. When you hear holy men at the pulpit and religious lay leaders speak there is often an open rejection of secular humanism and secularists as we are portrayed as apostates.

The reality, though, is that secular humanism is a direct threat to the philosophy and moral authority of all organized religion.

Indeed, we rationalists are the least violent people. And when you witness what is done in the name of faith—murder, death, slavery, rape, anti-science, intellectual imperialism, violence against women and children, genocide and ethnocide—you come to understand why the high moral ground belongs to the non-believers and not those of organized faith.

So as we look in the mirror rather than out the window—to either love or damn what we see—secular humanism, with its focus on the now, the acceptance of the end and the realization that kindness is the answer, is certainly the more just, simple and un-slave-like way to live in this world.

It is a world to be made in the image of humans and of our common humanity, rather than through the impulse to subjugate and chastise others for not accepting magical beliefs that are unreasoned, delusional and unhealthy.

Beliefs that have shown themselves to not build commonality, but actually seek to diminish our common peaceful cause.

**T**he things we admire in men, kindness and generosity, openness, honesty, understanding and feeling are the concomitants of failure in our system.

And those traits we detest, sharpness, greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism and self-interest are the traits of success. And while men admire the quality of the first they love the produce of the second. — *John Steinbeck*

## NEXT ON OUR HUMAN AGENDA: “THE GREATEST MORAL DILEMMA”

Edward O. Wilson

*(Excerpted from The Meaning of Human Existence)*

**P**remier among the consequences [of having evolved intentional sense] is the capacity to imagine possible futures, and to plan and choose among them. How wisely we use this uniquely human ability depends on the accuracy of our self-understanding. The question of greatest relevant interest is how and why we are the way we are and, from that, the meaning of our many competing visions of the future.

The advances of science and technology will bring us to the greatest moral dilemma since God stayed the hand of Abraham: how much to retrofit the human genotype. Shall it be a lot, a little, bit, or none at all? The choice will be forced on us because our species has begun to cross what is the most important yet still least examined threshold in the technoscientific era. We are about to abandon natural selection, the process that created us, in order to direct our own evolution by volitional selection—the process of redesigning our biology and human nature as we wish them to be. No longer will the prevalence of some genes (more precisely alleles, variations in codes of the same gene) over others be the result of environmental forces, most of which are beyond human control or even understanding. The genes and their prescribed traits can be what we choose. So—how about longer lives, enlarged memory, better vision, less aggressive behavior, superior athletic ability, pleasing body odor? The shopping list is endless.

*Comment: This is not the first time this subject has been raised in these pages. From October, 2007, PIQUE:*

## PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT ETHICAL QUESTION OF THE 21ST CENTURY

*“If we could make better human beings  
by knowing how to add genes, why shouldn't we?”*

— *James Watson*

*That quote, from one of the co-discoverers of DNA, is posted on a wall devoted to speculation about the future of human evolution in the new Hall of Human Origins at the American Museum of Natural History.*

*The opinions of PIQUE readers about the question—surely one of, if not the most important the human race has ever faced—are solicited for these pages.*

**T**he response from readers to the above was great enough to dominate both the November and December, 2007 issues—and you can read it all in the archives on the Newsletter page at [www.shsny.org](http://www.shsny.org).

And now we ask again: What do *you* think we—as individuals, as humanists, as citizens, as the progenitors of human generations to come—should do about our new and enhanced genetic capabilities? Please email your opinions to [editor@shsny.org](mailto:editor@shsny.org).

## YOUR OPINIONS, COURTESY OF GOOGLE AND FACEBOOK

Eli Pariser

*(Excerpted from The Filter Bubble: How the New Personalized Web Is Changing What We Read and How We Think)*

Most of us assume that when we “google” a term, we all see the same results — the ones that the company’s famous Page Rank algorithm suggests are the most authoritative based on other pages’ links. But since December 2009, this is no longer true. Now you get the result that Google’s algorithm suggests is best for you in particular — and someone else may see something entirely different. In other words, there is no standard Google anymore.

It’s not hard to see this difference in action. In the spring of 2010, while the remains of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig were spewing crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico, I asked two friends to search for the term “BP”. They’re pretty similar — educated, white, left-leaning women who live in the Northeast. But the results they saw were quite different. One of my friends saw investment information about BP. The other saw news. For one, the first page of results contained links about the oil spill; for the other, there was nothing about it except for a promotional ad from BP.

Even the number of results returned by Google differed — about 180 million results for one friend and 139 million for the other. If the results were that different for these two progressive East Coast women, imagine how different they would be for my friends and, say, an elderly Republican in Texas (or, for that matter, a businessman in Japan).

With Google personalized for everyone, the query “stem cells” might produce diametrically opposed results for scientists who support stem cell research and activists who oppose it. “Proof of climate change” might turn up different results for an environmental activist and an oil company executive. In polls, a huge majority of us assume search engines are unbiased. But that may be just because they’re increasingly biased to share our own views. More and more, your computer monitor is a kind of one-way mirror, reflecting your own interests while algorithmic observers watch what you click. ...

For a time, it seemed that the Internet was going to entirely redemocratize society. Bloggers and citizen journalists would single-handedly rebuild the public media. Politicians would be able to run only with a broad base of support from small, everyday donors. Local governments would become more transparent and accountable to their citizens. And yet the era of civic connection I dreamed about hasn’t come. Democracy requires citizens to see things from one another’s point of view, but instead we’re more and more enclosed in our own bubbles. Democracy requires a reliance on shared facts; instead we’re being offered parallel but separate universes.

My sense of unease crystallized when I noticed that my conservative friends had disappeared from my Facebook page. Politically, I lean to the left, but I like to hear what

conservatives are thinking, and I’ve gone out of my way to befriend a few and add them as Facebook connections. I wanted to see what links they’d post, read their comments, and learn a bit from them.

But their links never turned up in my Top News feed. Facebook was apparently doing the math and noticing that I was still clicking my progressive friends’ links more than my conservative friends’ — and links to the latest Lady Gaga videos more than either. So no conservative links for me.

I started doing some research, trying to understand how Facebook was deciding what to show me and what to hide. As it turned out, Facebook wasn’t alone.

With little notice or fanfare, the digital world is fundamentally changing. What was once an anonymous medium where anyone could be anyone — where, in the words of the famous *New Yorker* cartoon, nobody knows you’re a dog — is now a tool for soliciting and analyzing our personal data. According to one *Wall Street Journal* study, the top fifty Internet sites, from CNN to Yahoo to MSN, install an average of 64 data-laden cookies and personal tracking beacons each. Search for a word like “depression” on Dictionary.com, and the site [automatically collects and stores information about your computer or mobile device and your activities] so that other Web sites can target you with antidepressants. Share an article about cooking on ABC News, and you may be chased around the Web by ads for Teflon-coated pots. Open — even for an instant — a page listing signs that your spouse may be cheating and prepare to be haunted with DNA paternity-test ads. The new Internet doesn’t just know you’re a dog; it knows your breed and wants to sell you a bowl of premium kibble.

## SIX WAYS RELIGION DOES MORE BAD THAN GOOD

Valerie Tarico

*(Excerpted from “6 Ways Religion Does More Bad than Good” on AlterNet, 11/12/2014)*

Most British people think religion causes more harm than good according to a survey commissioned by The Huffington Post. Surprisingly, even among those who describe themselves as “very religious”, 20 percent say that religion is harmful to society. For that we can probably thank the internet [*Ed: See above*], which broadcasts everything from Isis beheadings to stories about Catholic hospitals denying care to miscarrying women, to lists of wild and weird religious beliefs, to articles about psychological harms from Bible-believing Christianity.

In 2010, sociologist Phil Zuckerman published *Society Without God: What the Least Religious Nations Can Tell Us About Contentment*. Zuckerman lined up evidence that the least religious societies also tend to be the most peaceful, prosperous and equitable, with public policies that help people to flourish while decreasing both desperation and economic gluttony.

We can debate whether prosperity and peace lead people to be less religious or vice versa. Indeed evidence

supports the view that religion thrives on existential anxiety. But even if this is the case, there's good reason to suspect that the connection between religion and malfunctioning societies goes both ways. Here are six ways religions make peaceful prosperity harder to achieve.

1. Religion promotes tribalism. *Infidel, heathen, heretic*. Religion divides insiders from outsiders. Rather than assuming good intentions, adherents often are taught to treat outsiders with suspicion. "Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers", says the Christian Bible. "They wish that you disbelieve as they disbelieve, and then you would be equal; therefore take not to yourselves friends of them", says the Koran (Sura 4:91).

At best, teachings like these discourage or even forbid the kinds of friendship and intermarriage that help clans and tribes become part of a larger whole. At worst, outsiders are seen as enemies of God and goodness, potential agents of Satan, lacking in morality and not to be trusted. Believers might huddle together, anticipating martyrdom. When simmering tensions erupt, societies fracture along sectarian fault lines.

2. Religion anchors believers to the Iron Age. *Concubines, magical incantations, chosen people, stonings*. The Iron Age was a time of rampant superstition, ignorance, inequality, racism, misogyny, and violence. Slavery had God's sanction. Women and children were literally possessions of men. Warlords practiced scorched earth warfare. Desperate people sacrificed animals and enemy soldiers as burnt offerings intended to appease dangerous gods.

Sacred texts, including the Bible, Torah and Koran all preserve and protect fragments of Iron Age culture, putting a god's name and endorsement on some of the very worst human impulses. Any believer looking to excuse his own temper, sense of superiority, warmongering, bigotry, or planetary destruction can find validation in writings that claim to be authored by God.

Today, humanity's moral consciousness is evolving, grounded in an ever deeper and broader understanding of the Golden Rule. But many conservative believers can't move forward. They are anchored to the Iron Age. This pits them against change in a never-ending battle that consumes public energy and slows creative problem solving.

3. Religion makes a virtue out of faith. *Trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus*. So sing children in Sunday schools across America. *The Lord works in mysterious ways*, pastors tell believers who have been shaken by horrors like brain cancer or a tsunami. *Faith is a virtue*.

As science eats away at territory once held by religion, traditional religious beliefs require greater and greater mental defenses against threatening information. To stay strong, religion trains believers to practice self-deception, shut out contradictory evidence, and trust authorities rather than their own capacity to think. This approach seeps into other parts of life. Government, in particular, becomes a fight between competing ideologies rather than a quest to figure out practical, evidence-based solutions that promote wellbeing.

4. Religion diverts generous impulses and good intentions. *Feeling sad about Haiti? Give to our mega-church*. Crass financial appeals during times of crisis thankfully are not the norm, but religion does routinely redirect generosity in order to perpetuate religion itself. Generous people are encouraged to give till it hurts to promote the church itself rather than the general welfare. Each year, thousands of missionaries throw themselves into the hard work of saving souls rather than saving lives or saving our planetary life support system. Their work, tax free, gobbles up financial and human capital.

Besides exploiting positive moral energy like kindness or generosity, religion often redirects moral disgust and indignation, attaching these emotions to arbitrary religious rules rather than questions of real harm. Orthodox Jews spend money on wigs for women and double dishwashers. Evangelical parents, forced to choose between righteousness and love, kick queer teens out onto the street. Catholic bishops impose righteous rules on operating rooms.

5. Religion teaches helplessness. *Que sera, sera – what will be will be. Let go and let God*. We've all heard these phrases, but sometimes we don't recognize the deep relationship between religiosity and resignation. In the most conservative sects of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, women are seen as more virtuous if they let God manage their family planning. Droughts, poverty and cancer get attributed to the will of God rather than bad decisions or bad systems; believers wait for God to solve problems they could solve themselves.

This attitude harms society at large as well as individuals. When today's largest religions came into existence, ordinary people had little power to change social structures either through technological innovation or advocacy. Living well and doing good were largely personal matters. When this mentality persists, religion inspires personal piety without social responsibility. Structural problems can be ignored as long as the believer is kind to friends and family and generous to the tribal community of believers.

6. Religions seek power. Think *corporate personhood*. Religions are man-made institutions, just like for-profit corporations. And like any corporation, to survive and grow a religion must find a way to build power and wealth and compete for market share. Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity – any large enduring religious institution is as expert at this as Coca-cola or Chevron. And just like for-profit behemoths, they wield their power and wealth in the service of self-perpetuation, even if it harms society at large.

In fact, unbeknown to religious practitioners, harming society may actually be part of religion's survival strategy. In the words of sociologist Phil Zuckerman and researcher Gregory Paul, "Not a single advanced democracy that enjoys benign, progressive socio-economic conditions retains a high level of popular religiosity." When people feel prosperous and secure the hold of religion weakens.

The composition of sermons is not very difficult. Invent first and then embellish. – Samuel Johnson

**THE BIBLE: 2,000 YEARS OLD.  
LITERAL BELIEF IN THE BIBLE: NOT SO OLD.**

**Reza Aslan**

*(Excerpted from "Reza Aslan destroys biblical literalism: 'The Gospels are absolutely replete with historical errors'", by Sarah Gray, on Salon.com, 11/17/2014)*

**W**e come from a world in the 21st century in which we assume that biblical literalism, the notion that the Bible is literal and inerrant, is just sort of an inherent part of belief in the Bible. ...

[But] in the 2,000 year history in which the Gospels have existed, the idea that what you are reading in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John is literal and inerrant is a little more than 100 years old. It was the result of a very interesting movement, a backlash to Christian liberalism and the Scientific Revolution at the end of the 19th century ... by a group of American Protestants who began a movement that was launched by a series of tracts that were written called "The Fundamentals", and that is where we get the term "fundamentalism". It's a very new phenomenon. ...

I'll put it in the simplest way possible ... the Gospels are absolutely replete with historical errors and with contradictions. The gospel of Matthew says that Jesus was born in 4 B.C. The gospel of Luke says Jesus was born in 6 A.D. That's 10 years difference! Which one was right?

Now, let me ask you a much more important question than which one is right. Do you think that the church fathers who in the fourth century decided to put both Matthew and Luke in the canonized New Testament didn't bother to read them first? They didn't notice that they have different dates for Jesus' birth? They didn't notice that the gospel of John absolutely contradicts the entire timeline of Matthew, Mark and Luke? They didn't notice that there are two completely different genealogies for Jesus in Matthew and Luke?

Of course they did! They didn't care, because at no point did they ever think that what they were reading was literally true.

We think that truth and fact mean the same thing. Indeed, science tells us, "that which is true is that which can be factually verified." But that's not what the ancient mind thought.

They were not as interested in the facts of Jesus' life as they were in the truth revealed by Jesus' life. When they constructed these stories about Jesus, and I mean that quite literally, they *constructed* these stories. If you asked them, "Did this really happen?" they wouldn't even understand the question. What do you mean did this really happen? You're missing the point! The point isn't "Are these facts true?" the point is, "What does this story reveal about the nature of who Jesus is?"

**T**he religion of one age is the literary entertainment of the next. – *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

**S**ay what you will about the Ten Commandments, you must always come back to the pleasant fact that there are only ten of them. – *H. L. Mencken*

**STUDYING HUMANISM – 2014-2015**

**John Rafferty**

**O**ur "Studying Humanism" group met for the first session of our 2014-2015 "semester" on November 24 in our cozy new digs in the basement conference room of the Community Church. We reviewed basic "What is Humanism?" online materials, then planned our January-to-June readings.

Titles and details are subject to change and development, but here's what the schedule looks like as of now.

**Jan 26 – Is there an "American Humanism"?**

Tracing the progression, from ...

- The deism of the Founders (Jefferson), to ...
- The Transcendentalists (Emerson), to ...
- Ingersoll, to ...
- American Humanism (Dewey, Lamont).

John Rafferty will moderate - see page 7

**Feb 23 – Feminism (and Humanism) – Then and Now**

- Book: Mika Brzezinski, *Knowing Your Own Value*
- Online: Gloria Steinem, *After Black Power, Women's Liberation*; Elaine Heller, *Short Bios of Selected Feminist Thinkers*

Elaine Heller and Donna Marxer will moderate.

**Mar 30 – Religion and Spirituality: What's the Difference?**

- Sam Harris's *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion*
- Online materials for a balanced reading list.

John Rafferty will moderate. Who wants to help?

**Apr 27 – Islam and Humanism: Is Co-existence Possible?**

- Reza Aslan/Bill Maher – Is Islamophobia "racist"?
- Is Islam having its "Protestant Revolution" now
- Is humanism possible in an Islamic society now?

Mike Weiss will back up John Rafferty, who will

also invite Islam scholar Sid Finehirsh (essays in *PIQUE*, Oct, Dec) to suggest readings and to participate.

**May 25 – What it Really Means to Be Human**

- Humanism and new discoveries in neuroscience
- Aesthetics and the humanities under attack in education as irrelevant ("corporatism")
- Nietzsche for Dummies + *Mein Kampf* and Ayn Rand and what they mean to neo-liberalism.

Mike Orzechowski will moderate.

**Jun 29 – How Should Humanists Die?**

- Is how we end our lives the new "choice", e.g., Brittany Maynard?
- Epicurus on the "meaninglessness" of death
- Julian Barnes's new book: *Nothing to Be Afraid Of*

John Rafferty will develop the reading list and moderate. Who wants to help?

**STUDYING HUMANISM IS A STUDY GROUP ...**

... not a book club or a kaffee klatsch. All are welcome, especially newcomers, but to participate in the discussion, you must do the reading. See page 7 each month for details and updates on each month's meetings.

More info? Contact John Rafferty at editor@shsn.org, or 646-922-7389 (leave a call-back number).

Repeat: *All are welcome!*

# SHSNY CALENDAR: JANUARY - MARCH 2015

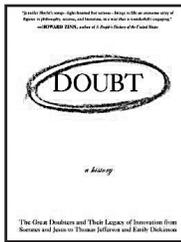
**SHSNY BOOK CLUB**  
**THURS, JAN 8, 7-8:30 pm**  
**THE COMMUNITY CHURCH**  
**OF NEW YORK**

**40 East 35 St. (Park-Mad)**  
 (Church basement - elevator)

We'll discuss

**DOUBT: A HISTORY**  
**The Great Doubters and**  
**Their Legacy of Innovation**  
**Jennifer Michael Hecht**

Yes, this is a second evening devoted to this marvelous book – this session focusing on Chapters 4-7 (See March 5 for final “Doubt” evening.)



Poet, historian, and our knock-'em-dead Freethought Day speaker, Hecht champions doubt as one of the great, if unheralded, intellectual traditions that distinguish the Western mind.

This is an account of the world's greatest “intellectual virtuosos”, and of their attempts to reconcile the seeming meaninglessness of the universe with the human need for meaning ... ranging from the early Greeks and such Hebrew figures as Job and Ecclesiastes, to modern critical thinkers like Schopenhauer, Darwin, Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, the existentialists. – All formats.

*Join us even if you haven't finished reading.*

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

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**SHSNY BOOK CLUB**  
**THURS, FEB 5, 7-8:30 pm**  
**Community Church of New York**  
**FIELDS OF BLOOD:**

**Religion and the**  
**History of Violence**  
**Karen Armstrong**

The radicals who founded America set their sights on a revolution of the mind. Derided as “infidels” and “atheists” in their own time, they wanted to liberate us from the tyranny of supernatural religion. “Stewart’s lucid and passionate investigation surprises, challenges, enlightens, and entertains at every turn.” – All formats.

**SHSNY BOOK CLUB**  
**THURS, MAR 5, 7-8:30 pm**  
**Community Church of New York**  
**DOUBT: A HISTORY**

**The Great Doubters and**  
**Their Legacy of Innovation**  
**Part 3**

**Jennifer Michael Hecht**

We'll conclude our study of this groundbreaking history – from Chapter 8 through the Conclusion – with what promises to be a lively discussion around the conference room table.

Details: See the January 8 notice.

## 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 The Pullman Kitchen

**Great Lectures: 4th Wednesday**  
 at Stone Creek Lounge.

**Studying Humanism: Last Monday**  
 at the Community Church of NY

More info: [www.shsny.org](http://www.shsny.org),  
 and/or 646-922-7389

**BRUNCH & CONVERSATION**  
**SUN, JAN 18, at 12 Noon**  
**CASUAL SUNDAY BRUNCH**  
**The Winslow Public House**  
**243 East 14 St. (West of 2nd)**

Our first meet in December in the back room at The Winslow went well (and well-attended), so let's go back for a broad (and excellent) brunch menu, with selections from \$8-\$20 (add a Bloody Mary or Mimosa for just \$4).

Come join 15-20 other freethinkers and humanists for food, fun and well-fed conversation.

**After-Brunch Discussion:**  
**Cops & Community**

**MON, JAN 12 at 7:00 pm**  
**SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT**  
**Stone Creek Bar & Lounge**  
**140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)**  
**CITIZEN RUTH**



A comedy about abortion? In this 1998 satire, “unfit mother” of four Ruth Stoops (Laura Dern) discovers while in jail that she's pregnant again. The judge charges her with endangering the fetus, but tells her he'll reduce the charges if she has an abortion.

When word of this gets out, Ruth's caught between anti-abortion and abortion rights activists who want to use her to get their messages across.

Also starring Swoosie Kurtz, Mary Kay Place, Kelly Preston and Burt Reynolds.

**After-Film Discussion:**

**Whose “rights” trump whose?**  
**SHSNY Movie Night is FREE.**

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

# SHSNY CALENDAR: JANUARY - MARCH 2015

**GREAT LECTURES ON DVD**  
**WED, JAN 28, 7:00 pm**  
**Stone Creek Bar & Lounge**  
**140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)**

**"ENEMIES OF REASON":**  
**RICHARD DAWKINS**  
**INTERVIEWS**  
**DEEPAK CHOPRA**

For his British TV series, "The Enemies of Reason", Dawkins interviewed Dr. Chopra, a physician who grew up in India, emigrated to the US in 1970, and later backed away from the practice of medicine to become an advocate of Ayurvedic and other alternative medicines, as well as a teacher of "spirituality", becoming, in the process, very rich.



In this uncut interview ethologist, evolutionary biologist, Oxford emeritus professor and "new atheist" Dawkins challenges Chopra's unreason.

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

## SHSNY MEMBERS ALSO ...

- *Through Sat, Jan 10*, artist **Flash Light** exhibits a new animated digital art work titled, "Pope Vernita Summons Dragons", in the show, "Holiday Madness", at Viridian Artists, 548 West 28th St. #632.
- *Through Sat, Jan 31*, artist **Irene Christensen** will show two paintings in the 35th Anniversary Exhibition of the Ashok Jain Gallery, 58 Hester Street.

**NOTE:** If you are a member of SHSNY and *actively and personally* involved in an event open to the public, send your info to editor@shsn.org.

**STUDYING HUMANISM**  
**MON, JAN 26, 6:30-8:30**  
**Community Church of New York**  
**40 East 35 St (church basement)**  
**2014-15 Meeting/Discussion #2**

*Is there an*  
**"American Humanism"?**

*Online: (Links to all are at shsn.org/Calendar)*

- Preamble to the Declaration of Independence
- Emerson: Summaries of his essays, "Nature" and "The American Scholar"
- pbs.org: "The American Renaissance & Transcendentalism"
- Excerpts from "The Great Agnostic and the Golden Age of Freethought", Chap 6 of *Freethinkers*, by Susan Jacoby (*Read all of Chap 6 if you have the book*)
- Excerpts from "The Substance of Humanism", Chapter 4 of *American Humanism*, by Howard Mumford Jones

**Note:** All of the above can be read in little more than an hour.

**Note:** *Studying Humanism is a study group, not a book club. If you have not done the reading, you may still audit the discussion – all are welcome, definitely including newcomers!*

## OTHER REASONABLE NEW YORK EVENTS

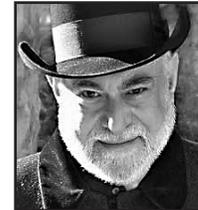
*www.reasonablenewyork.org*  
**Drinking With Atheists:** Every Friday, fun and conversation. meetup.com/GothamAtheists/  
**Feminist Freethinkers of NY:** Check feministfreethinkers.org  
**New York Philosophy:** For date and place of *Jan Cocktails & Conversation:* www.nyphilosophy.com  
**NY Society for Ethical Culture:** Full Jan calendar at nysec.org/calendar-date\_nysec/month/2015-01  
**See the full RNY calendar at**  
*reasonablenewyork.org*

**Book now - Save \$5! For the ...**  
**7TH ANNUAL**  
**SHSNY ANNIVERSARY &**  
**DARWIN DAY**  
**CELEBRATION & BANQUET**  
**THURS, FEB 12, 7:00pm**  
**Golden Unicorn Restaurant**  
**18 East Broadway**

Come gather with your fellow (and sororal) NYC free-thinkers at "the Cote Basque of Chinese restaurants" to celebrate the 206th birthday of Charles Darwin and the 27th Anniversary of the founding of SHSNY.

### Highlights of the Evening:

- 13-Course Chinese Banquet (yes, lots of vegetarian choices)
- Election & Presentation of the 11th Annual SHSNY Dumbth Award
- Guest Speaker & Video



Darwin Scholar/  
 Entertainer  
 Richard Milner's  
 Alfred Russell Wallace Centennial  
 Address at the  
 American Museum  
 of Natural History  
 "Wallace and Spiritualism"

Cost of the evening, all-inclusive, is just \$45 per person (cash bar).  
**Book early (by Feb 5) and save 10% - just \$40/pp.**



Prepay (credit card or PayPal) at www.shsn.org. Or mail your check to SHSNY, PO Box 7661, FDR Station, New York, NY 10150-7661.

Questions? Call 646-922-7389 (leave a callback number).

## WHO GETS THE 2014 SHSNY DUMBTH AWARD? THE EIGHT CLUELESS CONTENDERS

It's time to decide: Which nationally-recognizable personality was most spectacularly wrong-headed, denying or clueless about reality in 2014?

"Dumbth" is the coinage of the late secular humanist and humorist Steve Allen. In 1992, PIQUE Editor Warren Allen Smith proposed that SHSNY give Dumbth Awards to "those who deserve to have their illogic pointed out". Mr. Smith suggested, as an example:

*"A person who falls five floors down an elevator shaft, is rescued by a policeman who crawls into the dark hole unaided, is saved by EMS personnel who rush to the scene, is operated on by a skilled surgeon, is nursed back to health by therapists, and who then credits God with 'a miracle'."*

So, who among our numbskull nominees will receive the not-so-coveted horse's-ass trophy first won by TV personality Star Jones, who said in 2005 that God "blessed" her by postponing the 2004 Christmas-week tsunami that killed 230,000 people until after her honeymoon?

Now-rich TV actor Craig T. Nelson whined about government bailouts in 2010: "I've been on welfare and food stamps - did anyone help me?" And in 2012 the runaway winner was Senate candidate Todd Akin of Missouri, who gave the English language a new definition of sexual assault when he said that pregnancy caused by rape "... is really rare. If it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down."

Tough acts to follow, certainly. But some dunderhead has to win, so here, in the chronological order of their nominations, are 2014's clueless contenders.

Arizona businessman Jim Brown ran for Congress on a "Christian Conservative" platform. Jim hates federal spending and modern-day "entitlements" so much he thinks they're worse than slavery, because they hurt business. In April he Facebooked:

*"Back in the day, slaves were kept in slavery by denying them education and opportunity while providing them with their basic needs. Not by beating them and starving them. (Although there were isolated cases, of course.) Basically slave owners took pretty good care of their slaves and livestock, and this kept business rolling along."*

Well, okay, as long as business kept rolling along.



In April, too, former Republican House Leader—and convicted money launderer—Tom DeLay, came back from the not-quite dead with a new scheme to restore morality in politics and preserve the Constitution as "a document of faith". Faith? Yes, because ...

*"The Constitution is based upon a*

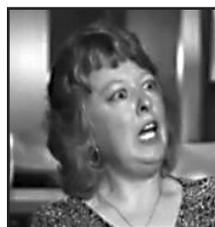
*higher authority. God created this nation and He wrote the Constitu-tion."*

And just ignore those guys in Philadelphia in 1787.

One more in April: ex-Senator Jim DeMint (and now President of the Heritage Foundation right-wing brain trust), afraid someone could think "big gummint" might ever have accomplished something, rewrote some history:

*"Well the reason that the slaves were eventually freed was the Constitution, it was like the conscience of the American people. ... It came from a growing movement among the people, particularly people of faith, that this was wrong. ... So no liberal is going to win a debate that big government freed the slaves."*

So much for "big government's" Union Army and Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation.



Reactionary Minnesota activist Marjorie Holsten, said in a radio interview in May that the only reason schools teach sex ed is that liberal educators are trying to increase the number of "Democrat" voters.

*"People say to me, Why would they teach such awful things to our children?*

*... when children are desensitized to sexual things, that affects their ability to bond with a spouse ... they're not going to have a stable marriage. When you have unstable, broken households, how do they vote? Democrat."*

She also predicted that teachers would be punished if they do not "teach that Obama's the messiah".

Past Champion Ann Coulter, who won the horse's-ass statuette in 2007 for her suggestion that Jews could be "perfected" by becoming Christians, made a strong bid for the 2014 (dis) honors by dissing July's World Cup mania and soccer/futbol as a plot against America.

*"Any growing interest in soccer can only be a sign of the nation's moral decay" ... [because] "you can't use your hands" ... "girls can play with boys" ... [because there is not enough] "personal humiliation or major injury" [and, finally], "it's foreign".*

Speaking of "foreign", she also announced, "No American whose great-grandfather was born here is watching soccer."



Kentucky State Senator Brandon Smith, the owner of a mining company, argued before the state senate's Natural Resources and Environment Committee meeting in July that man-made climate change is scientifically

implausible because ...

*"I won't get into the debate about climate change but I'll simply point out that I think in academia we all agree that the temperature on Mars is exactly as it is here. Nobody will dispute that. Yet there are no coal mines on Mars. There's no factories on Mars that I'm aware of."*



## NEIL deGRASSE TYSON EXPLAINS WHY STEVEN HAWKING IS IMPORTANT

(and why we should see the new film)

*(Transcribed from salon.com/2014/12/17/that's\_badass\_neil\_degrasse\_tyson\_explains\_stephen\_hawkings\_groundbreaking\_black\_hole\_theory/?source=newsletter)*

*(Ed: The makers of "The Theory of Everything" asked Tyson to make a promo video for their new film about the greatest living cosmologist. He complied with this.)*

**Y**ou go into science because you want to make a discovery, you want to advance our understanding of the universe. Not everyone gets to accomplish that. Steven Hawking has; Steven Hawking has a *phenomenon* named after him.

Perhaps what he's most known for is something called Hawking Radiation. Until he published that paper, our understanding of black holes was pretty clear. It's a region of space where matter has collapsed to such density, that the gravitational field is so high that nothing can escape it, not even light.

What Hawking showed was that in fact black holes can evaporate. The mass of a black hole can become energy, and that energy can be radiated away. He arrived at this conclusion by merging our understanding of quantum physics, the science of the small, with our understanding of general relativity, put forth by Einstein, which is the science of the large. No one had done that before.

That, that ... that's badass.

I'm enchanted by the fact that, of late, science, as a topic, and scientists, as characters, have piqued the interest of storytellers. Just think about what scientists *do*, and what kind of storytelling can derive from it. Just take it, run with it, and sit back and enjoy it.

## FIGHTING STATE-MANDATED DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ATHEISTS

Laurie Goodstein

*(Excerpted from "In Seven States, Atheists Push to End Largely Forgotten Ban", The New York Times, 12/7/2014)*

**A** bookkeeper named Roy Torcaso, who happened to be an atheist, refused to declare that he believed in God in order to serve as a notary public in Maryland. His case went all the way to the Supreme Court, and in 1961 the court ruled unanimously for Mr. Torcaso, saying states could not have a "religious test" for public office.

But 53 years later, Maryland and six other states still have articles in their constitutions saying people who do not believe in God are not eligible to hold public office. Maryland's Constitution still says belief in God is a requirement even for jurors and witnesses.

Now a coalition of nonbelievers says it is time to get rid of the atheist bans because they are discriminatory, offensive and unconstitutional. The bans are unenforceable dead letters, legal experts say, and state and local governments have rarely invoked them in recent years. But for some secular Americans, who are increasingly visible



**B**ryan Fischer, the Director of Issue Analysis for Government and Public Policy at the American Family Association, hosts a radio show. On air in September Fisher gave us all absolute and indisputable proof that the United States is a Christian nation:

*"Do you want one single item of proof that America is a Christian nation? ... We freely allow restaurants and grocery stores to sell and to serve bacon. That can only happen in a Christian country. You can't do that in Israel ... because it is a Jewish country. You go to a Muslim country, you are not going to get pork; you're not going to get bacon; you're not going to get a ham sandwich anywhere. The fact that we allow the consumption of bacon is absolute proof that we are in fact a Christian nation."*

And we're all so glad that has finally been cleared up.

**C**ongresswoman Renee Ellmers, a North Carolina Republican, addressed an RNC Women's study group in September on her party's lagging popularity with women. The problem, she says, is that ...



*"Men do tend to talk about things on a much higher level. ... Many of my male colleagues, when they go to the House floor, you know, they've got some pie chart or graph behind them and they're talking about trillions of dollars and, you know, how the debt is awful and, you know ... we need our male colleagues to understand that if you can bring it down to a woman's level and what everything that she is balancing in her life - that's the way to go."*

"Down to a woman's level." Wow.

Winners all! But only one can take home the silver horse's-ass statuette, and *you* will determine who.

### Cast Your Vote Now, and Again in February

Balloting begins now, through January 31. Cast your vote at editor@shsny.org, or leave a message at 646-922-7389. Celebrators will get a second ballot at our February 12 Anniversary/ Darwin Dinner, at which the winner of the not-so-coveted horse's-ass trophy will be announced. - JR

and organized, removing the bans is not only a just cause, but a test of their growing movement's political clout.

Todd Stiefel, the chairman and primary funder of the Openly Secular coalition, said: "If it was on the books that Jews couldn't hold public office, or that African-Americans or women couldn't vote, that would be a no-brainer. You'd have politicians falling all over themselves to try to get it repealed. Even if it was still unenforceable, it would still be disgraceful. So why are we different?"

It would be unthinkable for such "naked bigotry" against white people or Presbyterians or Catholics to go unnoticed if state constitutions still contained it, said Rob Boston, director of communications for Americans United for Separation of Church and State, an advocacy group. "Right now we hear a lot of talk from conservative Christians about their being persecuted and their being forced to accommodate same-sex marriage. But there's nothing in the state constitutions that targets Christians like these provisions do about nonbelievers," Mr. Boston said.

The six states besides Maryland with language in their constitutions that prohibits people who do not believe in God from holding office are Arkansas, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas.

Mississippi's Constitution says, "No person who denies the existence of a Supreme Being shall hold any office in this state." North Carolina's says, "The following persons shall be disqualified for office: First, any person who shall deny the being of Almighty God." Pennsylvania's Constitution contains no prohibition, but does say that no one can be "disqualified" from serving in office on the basis of religion — as long as they believe in God "and a future state of rewards and punishments" (heaven and hell).

Article VI of the United States Constitution says no "religious test" should ever be required for federal office.

The Openly Secular coalition, which includes 30 groups and was formed this year, is trying to win greater acceptance for nonbelievers by encouraging them to go public. Taking a page from the gay rights campaign called It Gets Better, the coalition has posted short video testimonies from people who declare that they are happily nonbelievers. Among those who have recorded videos are former Representative Barney Frank and Chris Kluwe, a former punter for the Minnesota Vikings\*.

Now the coalition plans to lobby legislators in the seven states, plus Pennsylvania, to rid the constitutions of the discriminatory language. The process of changing the constitution is different in each state, but the first hurdle will be finding legislators willing to stand up for nonbelievers. But there may be some resistance from legislators who see the effort to remove the clauses as sensible, but politically and symbolically unpalatable.

Christopher B. Shank, the Republican minority whip in the Maryland Senate, said that while he believed in pluralism, "I think what they want is an affirmation that the people of the state of Maryland don't care about the Christian faith, and that is a little offensive."

\**And me.* — JR

## LET'S PICK OUR FIGHTS

Edd Doerr (arlinc.org)

Roy Torcaso and I were friends. I met him shortly after moving to Maryland in 1966 to work for Americans United. I delivered a eulogy at his memorial service at his Unitarian congregation in Maryland. Roy was a very gutsy guy. His Supreme Court case, *Torcaso v. Watkins*, was a great victory for church-state separation and religious freedom.

That said, it is important to comment on the *New York Times* story (*Ed: see preceding*). Yes, there are statements mandating certain religious beliefs in order to hold public office in Maryland and several other state constitutions. However, thanks to the Torcaso ruling, these are all inoperative museum relics, dead letters. But then, many state constitutions are crammed with such inoperative relics, such as one state's ban on a guy kissing a woman in public on a Sunday and other nonsense.

Can these relics be removed? Very unlikely. And attempts to do so will surely fail. Not only will they fail, but they could well generate backlash that will actually harm the secularist cause. Further, tinkering with a state constitution could open a real can of worms, whether through a legislatively proposed constitutional amendment or a state constitutional convention. The result could be constitutional changes that divert public funds to faith-based private schools, further restrict abortion rights, allow "creationism" to be taught in public schools, or cause other mischief.

Let's note that the US Constitution, Article I, Section 2, still says African Americans only count as 3/5 of a person for determining the composition of the House of Representatives. This was rendered inoperative by the 14th Amendment, but it's still in the Constitution — forever.

Attempts to remove these offensive provisions from state constitutions will not only fail but will distract attention and energy from dealing with really important hot issues like climate change, right wing attacks on public education and reproductive choice, the transfer of wealth to the top 1 percent from the rest of us, and other matters.

Instead of wasting time, energy, money and good will on a lost cause, secularists need to be broadminded and practical enough to work with others across the religious-political spectra to accomplish important goals on the issues that really count.

## TOUGH TALK FROM DEEPAK CHOPRA

Joel Galker

A few weeks ago I received an email inviting me to an event at the Rubin Museum of Art. What better inducement could a spiritual person have for spending \$45 than to hear the revealed word of Deepak Chopra himself, who is perhaps the most well-known personality among the spiritual-not-religious tribe, and to receive a copy of his new book, *The Future of God*?

Here's the nitty-gritty of the pitch they posted. I imagine that Chopra wrote it as a blurb for his book and the

Rubin posted it thinking it would be a pretty good draw.

*"In the midst of religious controversy fueled by 'militant' atheism on one hand and militant jihadism on the other, does an embattled God have a future?... In his new book, The Future of God, Deepak Chopra, MD. FACP, offers an answer based on personal experience – not simply his but the experience of countless seekers who have left the faith they were brought up in – to seek a modern spiritual alternative to atheism."*

Removing any doubt about the identity of the militant atheist leaders—counterparts to the militant jihadists such as Bin Ladin or “the blind sheik” in federal supermax come to mind—“Chopra has positioned himself for over a decade as a public opponent of the militant atheism of Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett.”

Simply put, Chopra juxtaposes jihadists—religious fanatics whose militancy amounts to murder of infidels and members of different Moslem sects and ethnicities—with atheists whose militancy consists of coming out as atheists, humanism, advocating for the constitutional guarantee of separation of church and state and for social tolerance? I can imagine that bad-mouthing atheists could get some mileage in heavily fundamentalist Christian country, but in cosmopolitan New York City?

It seems, according to Chopra, that “the need for a meaningful spiritual life ... among the countless seekers who have left the faith they were brought up in”, i.e., the spiritual-not-religious, does not exclude vilifying atheists. I’m not speaking of disputing atheism or even delegitimizing freedom from religion, but of smearing atheists.

The radical novelty of modern science lies precisely in the rejection of the belief ... that the forces which move the stars and atoms are contingent upon the preferences of the human heart. – *Walter Lippman*

## NET NEUTRALITY IS A NON-ISSUE

Bill Chapman

Andrea Marcotte’s article (“Why Internet ‘Net Neutrality’ is Vital for Freethinkers”, PIQUE, December) argues that religions have so much money they’ll buy up all the bandwidth, leaving nothing for the relatively poor non-theists to get their word out, unless we have net neutrality. Nonsense.

A: This won’t happen, because we already don’t have, and never have had, net neutrality and a takeover hasn’t happened yet.

B: This won’t happen, because bandwidth is constantly getting cheaper and faster. For the amount of money you pay now, you will get more and more bandwidth over time.

C: This won’t happen, because nothing will be “throttled” unless it is using humongous amounts of bandwidth compared to streaming a movie. Someone posting a typical atheist website with nothing but still pictures and text already has, and will continue to have, tons more bandwidth than they need at a tiny cost.

## YOU THINK OUR POLITICIANS ARE MISOGYNIST IDIOTS?

John Rafferty

*(Based on and excerpted from “Turkish President Says Women Shouldn’t Be Considered Equals”, by Sebnem Arsu, in The New York Times, 11/24/2014; and “Turkish President restates his belief that Muslims discovered America”, National Secular Society (UK) News, 11/20/2014)*

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the fundamentalist Muslim President of Turkey is dismantling the secular, progressive Turkish state that Kemal Ataturk founded in the 1920s. In November Erdogan used an international conference on justice and rights for women to declare that women should not be regarded as equal to men.

Erdogan, who as prime minister until recently led the Islamic-inspired Justice and Development Party that controls the government, said that pregnancy and motherhood were sacred in Islam, repeatedly called for Turkish women to bear at least three children, wanted to limit cesarean sections (arguing that women who give birth that way usually cannot have more than one child), and sought to abolish most abortions.

Okay, misogynist and reactionary enough to be called Neanderthal, but not really stupid, right?

Oh, yeah, stupid.

After Erdogan claimed Muslim sailors discovered the Americas in the 12th century, Christopher Columbus has been removed from the Turkish school syllabus. “It is alleged that the American continent was discovered by Columbus in 1492,” he said. “In fact, Muslim sailors reached the American continent 314 years before Columbus, in 1178.” His proof? Columbus, in his log, observed that the shape of a mountain on one of the Caribbean islands resembled a mosque. Really, that’s it.

The removal of Christopher Columbus is not the only change made to Turkey’s censored textbooks. Pictures of genitals in biology textbooks had been replaced with images of “fluffy ducklings, cute polar bears and a human mother with her newborn baby”, and “sexually explicit” words like “breast” have also been removed.

## WAIT, WAIT ... ONE MORE

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi argued that genetic science and cosmetic surgery were first invented by ancient Indians. Modi cited Karna [the Hindu Moses] and Ganesha [the elephant-headed god] as evidence.

“We can feel proud of what our country achieved in medical science at one point of time. We all read about Karna in the Mahabharata. If we think a little more, we realize that the Mahabharata says Karna was not born from his mother’s womb. This means that genetic science was present at that time. That is why Karna could be born outside his mother’s womb.

“We worship Lord Ganesha. There must have been some plastic surgeon at that time who got an elephant’s head on the body of a human being and began the practice of plastic surgery.”

## HAPPY TWENTIETH, EPICUREANS!

Luis Granados

*(Excerpted from The Humanist.com, 3/20/2014)*

While reading Stephen Greenblatt's award-winning book, *The Swerve*, three years ago, I stumbled on a delightful fact. It seems that devotees of the Greek philosopher Epicurus, for hundreds of years after his death, continued to celebrate his birthday. Not just once a year, as people observe birthdays nowadays, but every month.

Epicurus was born on the twentieth day of the Greek equivalent of January, and on the twentieth day of every month of the year his fans would get together to open a wineskin, share a meal, and, most importantly, enjoy each other's company.

I'm generally a little slow on the uptake, but for once I was seized by an inspiration. I could do that too! Ever since then, I've been a zealous observer of the Twentieth, making me part of a small but growing band of "Twentiers".

The rationale for celebrating often is central to the Epicurean ideal. Epicurus taught that if there actually were any gods, they were so far above humankind as to not really care about us, any more than most humans care about individual ants.

So, Epicurus's reasoning goes, we're on our own, and since there's no point in attempting to cater to uncaring gods, the most we can hope for is to be happy.

What exactly "being happy" entailed was of intense interest to Epicurus and his students, who gave the question a great deal of disciplined thought. ...

After comparing and contrasting all the different forms of happiness (a pleasant pastime in and of itself), Epicurus and his followers decided that the greatest happiness of all was found in the simple act of communing with friends. There are probably some deep psychological and evolution-driven reasons for this that surpass my understanding; but if you search your own soul, I doubt you can come up with any activity that more consistently produces true happiness than good conversation with good friends. ...

The biggest thing organized religion has going for it is the community it provides. There are humanist organizations that have met regularly for years, and now there is an atheist "Sunday Assembly" gaining some traction. More power to them, but for the congenitally lazy like me, committing to a regular group that doesn't even promise eternal salvation just isn't going to work. I can, though, commit to connecting with another human once a month, and I'm grateful to old Epicurus for having a birthday that gives me a most excellent motivation and excuse to do so.

### BIG NEWS: POPE SAYS DOGS GO TO HEAVEN

Just when I was looking forward to an eternity without stepping in dog shit. - Sam Milligan

Celebrate the 20th  
of every month  
Page 12

Vote for 2014's Dumbtest  
Page 8

E.O. Wilson's Moral Dilemma  
Page 3

Earning Our Lives  
Page 1

7th Annual Darwin Day &  
SHSNY Anniversary Banquet  
— Book now!  
Page 7

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