

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

October, 2017

It's Hurricane Season—we used to call it Fall—and tens of thousands of Americans are hurting. Maybe someday we'll convince the dunderheads that human-made climate change is real, but today let's help who we can - see the middle of this page. In this issue: we face death with dignity, promote existentialism, poop on prayer, explore reality, compare Orwell and Huxley, recognize "Nambia", hunt black cats, and write a poem. *Come to Freethought Day Brunch Oct 8!* (page 7)— JR

HAPPY FREETHOUGHT DAY

John Rafferty

On October 12, 1692, Governor William Phips of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, repelled by the religious hysteria that had swept the colony and caused the executions of twenty people, fourteen of them women, suspended the infamous Salem Witch Trials, and ruled that the colony's courts would no longer accept "spectral evidence" (you know, teenage girls screaming in unison that they could see "demons" hovering around accused "witches").

It was the first "official" recognition in America of the superiority of reason and evidence over religious hysteria and spooky thinking. Today, 325 years later, in our beloved country that has become so infected with anti-reason, anti-science and anti-intellectual thinking (*Yeah, you know who I'm referring to*), it's worth celebrating America's three-century tradition of freethought.

So, on Thursday, October 12, 2017, raise a glass in honor of William Phips, and think freely all day long.

BUT FIRST ... on Sunday, October 8, come celebrate Freethought Day (and Freethought Month) in advance with 40-50 of your fellow (and sororal) freethinkers at the Secular Humanist Society of New York's Ninth Annual Freethought Day Brunch. Hear a witty and informative talk by our own Jon Engel on church/state separation, and enjoy one of the

best Brunch deals in the city for just \$25.

Read all about it on page 7.

AND THEN ... come to SHSNY Movie Night the very next night, Monday, October 9, at the Stone Creek Bar & Lounge, for a viewing of "The Crucible", the 1996 Oscar-nominated adaptation of Arthur Miller's drama that is really a parable of America's 1950s anti-communist witch hunt. Details on page 6.

YOUR DUES DOING GOOD

SHSNY will match your contribution to secular hurricane relief dollar-for-dollar, up to \$1000.

Board Member Matthew Callahan and Webmaster Colin Rafferty are in the process of creating a program whereby you can help the victims of hurricanes Harvey and Irma (and certainly more) - and have your contributions doubled!

Through our Facebook platform and our website, your contribution will be channeled to Foundation Beyond Belief, whose mission is "to unite the humanist community in volunteer and charitable efforts". And SHSNY will match all contributions received, dollar-for-dollar, up to \$1000.

Watch Facebook, Twitter, your email Inbox and even snail mail for details in the next few days. *Then give!*

BILL deBLASIO'S NOT-SO-HAPPY COLUMBUS DAY

John Rafferty

(Including excerpts from "Panel Will Devise Guidelines for Addressing Monuments Deemed Offensive", by William Neuman, in The New York Times, 9/8/2017)

After blowing hard—in the immediate aftermath of the white nationalist hatefest in Charlottesville, and sounding as if he was ready personally to take a sledgehammer to any statue that anyone in the city sniffed at and found offensive—Hizzoner has bowed to the multiethnic blowback and instead appointed an

18-member commission to merely "develop guidelines on how the city should address monuments seen as oppressive and inconsistent with the values of New York City".

What, like the statue of Columbus in, you know, Columbus Circle? Melissa Mark-Viverito, Speaker of the City Council (admit it, you'd forgotten who she was), wants

BOARD OF DIRECTORS: John Rafferty, *Pres./Editor*; Claire Miller, *V.P.*; Brian Lemaire, *Secty.*; Donna Marxer, *Treas.*; Kiwi Callahan; Matt Callahan; Jonathan Engel; Maria Graber; Dorothy Kahn; Carl Marxer; Carlos Mora; Bob Murtha; John Wagner
SHSNY, P.O. Box 7661, F.D.R. Station, New York, NY 10150-7661 / www.shsny.org / 646-922-7389

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

Articles published in PIQUE are archived at www.shsny.org. Original-to-PIQUE articles may be reprinted, in full or in part. 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).

Columbus gone, because of “the genocidal consequences for native peoples of his voyages to the Western Hemisphere”. Of course Italian-Americans called just as loudly to keep the monument of the Italian-born explorer.

Me, too. As I published in these pages in 2003, quoting my own letter to son Brian, then in college in 1992:

“The anti-Columbian fuss is a matter of misplaced emphasis, and has nothing to do with history or objective truth. ... The fashion of our times, I think, is what motivates the Columbus denouncers who want to judge a man who lived 500 years ago—and his whole contemporary society —by today’s most radically-chic multicultural standards. To fault Columbus for being a Eurocentric white male aggressor is like ticketing a bear for crapping in the woods.”

Who else could get the Mayoral axe, or sledgehammer? Well, Phillippe Petain, the French World War I hero who was later a Nazi collaborator in WW II, and who has a plaque in Lower Broadway. And let’s dynamite Grant’s Tomb, because Ulysses S. briefly ordered the expulsion of Jews from several states during the Civil War. And more, and more. In fact, the sure-to-dither 18-person commission will almost certainly be whelmed with demands for destruction.

You know what? Let’s not.

I’m okay with uprooting any monuments to the treasonous slavers and defenders of slavery who waged war against the United States — as well as those commemorating a lot of other bad guys—but let’s abjure dynamite and wrecking balls in favor of peaceful removal to museums where they can be studied by future generations in their historical contexts.

In other words, let’s not act like the Alt-Right.

DeBLASIO, THE HASIDIM, AND THOUSANDS OF FUNCTIONALLY ILLITERATE CHILDREN

Selim Algar

and the Editorial Board of *The New York Post*

(The following is excerpted from “DeBlasio, DOE, Are Ignoring Subpar Education At Yeshivas”, by Selim Algar, in The New York Post, 9/6/17, and “More Children Sacrificed For DeBlasio’s Political Ambitions”, by the Editorial Board of the Post, 9/7/17.)

Mayor de Blasio and schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña are neglecting a massive case of educational malpractice in the city’s ultra-Orthodox Jewish schools, an advocacy group said Wednesday.

Exposed mostly to intense religious instruction, yeshiva students often lack a basic understanding of math, English, science and social studies, according to Young Advocates for Fair Education (YAFFED), an activist group.

YAFFED founder Naftuli Moster said at a press conference at City Hall that de Blasio and the Department of Education are avoiding the issue for fear of tangling with a potent voting bloc. “This appears, to me, as one of the biggest scandals in this city — tens of thousands of children being denied education, and the mayor and the chancellor turning a blind eye,” Moster said.

The DOE said it initiated a probe into yeshivas more

than two years ago but has yet to submit any findings. Citing the extended delay, Moster dismissed the investigation as a “charade”. Just last month, Fariña declined to comment on the issue at a New York Law School event. “The investigation is ongoing and we are treating this matter with utmost seriousness,” DOE spokeswoman Toya Holness said.

A new YAFFED report estimated that there will be roughly 100,000 Hasidic school-aged kids in New York City by 2030 — roughly 8 percent of all students. “The average young Hasidic man leaves the yeshiva system completely unprepared to work in — or interact with — the world outside his community,” the analysis found. The average graduate “marries young and has many children and is forced to rely upon public assistance to support his large family”, according to the report.

The YAFFED report demanded the formation of a city task force to address the academic issue along with a slew of other yeshiva reforms. While not public, yeshivas still receive millions in taxpayer dollars and are not exempt from state education law that requires them to provide meaningful secular instruction.

Moster said that many in the Hasidic community have been enraged by his campaign and that he fears for his safety. One protester held a sign referring to Moster as “Monster”. Rabbi Yoel Loeb told *The Post* that Moster was luring children astray from their religious duties and origins. “We are Jewish people and our lives are committed to God,” he said, adding that conventional academic achievement is not compatible with their culture.

To hear Mayor de Blasio and Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña tell it, they’re doing the most comprehensive investigation ever to see if many yeshivas are depriving students of a legally required secular education.

The probe is well into its third year with no sign of ending anytime soon, and Fariña says her crack investigators plan to spend at least “the next few months” on the job — i.e., long past the November election. In fact, an August letter from DOE attorney Howard Friedman says they’ve only visited six of the 39 targeted schools.

You can see why the Orthodox Jewish activists who first raised this issue back in 2015 have lost any faith in Team de Blasio to treat this seriously. And why they rallied at City Hall this week to release their own report — compiled in far less time — listing the worst school offenders.

State law requires all parochial schools to offer instruction “substantially equivalent” to that in public schools. But the activists charge, and news reports confirm, that many Orthodox Jewish schools offer only the barest secular education in elementary school and none whatsoever after age 13. That leaves many students barely literate in English, unskilled in math and totally unequipped for the workforce.

It should be a simple matter to determine if the charges are true. But while the mayor insists he has “zero tolerance” for any violations, he also says his teams need to visit more schools “to get to a more firm conclusion” — a claim Fariña echoes. And neither will even hint at when their “investigation” will be finished.

It's an obvious stonewall, and plainly politically motivated. Add these yeshiva students to the long list of city children whom de Blasio is willing to sacrifice on the altar of his ambitions.

**THIS MAY HELP CLARIFY
THE ABOVE NY POST EDITORIAL
Dennis Middlebrooks**

It's an election year in New York City. The Hasidim in New York bloc vote and have supported Mayor Bill deBlasio, their water carrier first as Public Advocate and now as Mayor. He has been involved in a number of "pay to play" scandals with the Hasidim, but has escaped indictment.

The Hasidim control billions in real estate assets in the city, in upstate New York, Montreal and Israel. They are the largest developers of luxury condominiums in NYC and Montreal.

The Hasidim have the highest percentage of members on public assistance of any ethnic group in the USA.

The Hasidim are the only ethnic or religious group in NYC authorized to have their own vigilante patrols.

The Hasidim have taken over several towns in upstate New York and defunded the local public schools, which serve mostly minority students.

The Hasidim are not exempt from jury duty, but never report when summoned, without consequences.

The Hasidim are supporting Bill DeBlasio. Again.

**TRUMP NAMES SARAH PALIN AMBASSADOR
TO NEWLY-RECOGNIZED NAMBIA**

(Excerpted/inspired by "Nambia Withdraws From Covfefe Agreement", by Andrew Hall on Laughing In Disbelief on patheos.com, and Andy Borowitz on thenewyorker.com)

Kafka, Nambia: The capital of Nambia is boiling with rage. After being officially recognized on the floor of the United Nations by President Trump, who also named international-relations expert Sarah Palin U.S. ambassador, Nambian officials are dismayed that the rest of the world turns its back on this imaginary Sub-Saharan country.

Major fake news outlets like CNN, the failing *New York Times*, and, yes, even the august *Flat Earth Gazette*, are incorrectly reporting Nambia is a non-country. Reporters are reassuring audiences that their ignorance of the globe is tiny in comparison to that of the U.S.'s Commander-in-Chief.

This tiny nation, dubbed "the Iceland of Africa", is fighting back. President Andrew Canard is unilaterally withdrawing from the Covfefe Agreement of 1880 that settles the underlying issues regarding world trade, Lizard People immigration, and sweet sweet covfefe.

The only other country recognizing Nambia besides the United States is North Korea, and Nambians understand the awkwardness that occurs when nuclear-armed friends squabble.

"I'm throwing a birthday bash next month," said President Canard. "How the heck am I going to get Trump and Kim Jong Un sitting at the same table? Smashing the piñata open could lead to nuclear war."

The Humanist Activist

**SUPPORTING THE MEDICAL AID IN DYING ACT:
WHY HUMANISTS SHOULD FAVOR
BILL S.3151/A.2383¹**

Jessica Dapson

Dying with Dignity. Everyone favors dignity, so, shouldn't "dying with dignity" be a good thing? Presently, five states and Washington D.C. have legalized the right of individuals with terminal illnesses to choose to die at a time they choose, rather than let nature take its course. NY's bills failed to pass the legislature in 2017, reflecting opposition by a significant number of New Yorkers, yet many other New Yorkers and many humanists – including myself – support it. A diverse set of New Yorkers coming from many political or religious affiliations already support the bill. Let me share my humanist perspective on this policy.

First, there are important differences between "aids in dying" and suicide—though both are acts of personal choice. Suicide is generally unfortunate and tragic; an act that prematurely ends a person's life and generally signifies a psychological disorder. It is typically frowned upon by Catholics who, abiding by Canon law, view it as a sin. Jews who have taken their own lives are typically buried in a different part of Jewish cemeteries. Thus, religious apologists argue against this bill; however, the proposed law would neither revoke nor infringe upon the right of terminally ill New Yorkers who choose to abstain from partaking in physician-assisted dying because of religious beliefs. Likewise, there are strong arguments, grounded in humanist principles that suicide is a bad choice². In contrast, current law simply denies everyone the right to choose assistance in dying near the end of life. The current imbalance reflects the historic dominance of religion in creating civil law, but a more secular society should allow greater choice. The proposed law would give greater respect to the feeling of those who are dying and, often, suffering great pain in the process. Sometimes, death is better than living a life of very poor quality, and I believe that, near the end of life, the choice should be left to the individual, not the state.

Saying a permanent good-bye is never easy, yet missing out on the chance to say good-bye can be even harder. In my lifetime, I witnessed too many of my parents' friends take their own lives for various reasons—all before I was ten years old. These young people who I had grown close to were all in their 20s: Bill, Pete, Bob, Rodney, and others. I saw the shock and sadness that my parents experienced each and every time they learned that their close friends were gone. Unexpected news and unanswered questions were probably the two most significant factors that contributed to their grief each and every time. My experience and the experience of my parents convinced me that suicide is simply not a good option.

The experience of suicide by a healthy person is in marked contrast to the option envisioned by the "Aid-in-Dying" law. Under this law, terminally ill people would

have the opportunity to choose and, if they wished, to share the news of their decision with their family and close friends; they could prepare for the end of life together, and support one another's emotional needs. Opportunities for questions, acceptance, and healthy progress through the cycle of grief are all possible. There are appropriate safeguards built into the law, and these safeguards have worked well in the states that have similar laws.

Moments of love, laughter, and heartache are all possible experiences among those preparing to say good-bye to a loved one deciding to die with dignity. Whether Catholic, Jewish, humanist, or other, all New Yorkers should be granted the freedom to choose. How the decision is approached should be left up to personal discretion, religiously-inspired or not, rather than a restrictive civil law. Many individuals come to the belief that choosing death rather than a few more weeks or months of life makes sense to them. That person should be allowed to make the determination. Indeed, I believe that it is important to recognize the bravery and control of individuals who predetermine the day on which they say their last goodbyes.

If you are interested in further exploring these issues, reading about the experiences of people facing the end of their life, or helping to change NY's law to provide greater choice; Compassion and Choice³ (compassionandchoice.org) is an excellent source for information and help in lobbying your legislators. They are always looking for help and funding.

1. *These numbers are from the 2017 legislative session and will probably change in the 2018 session.*
2. *See the well-written and persuasive book, Stay, by Jennifer Michael Hecht.*
3. <https://www.compassionandchoices.org/time-for-new-york-to-pass-medical-aid-in-dying/>

The above is, I think, an excellent intro for the following excerpts on life and mortality from our reading for October 30 Studying Humanism meeting (see page 7). – JR

OUR EXPERIENCE OF THE WORLD IS WHAT WE ARE Sarah Bakewell

(Excerpted from Chapter 13, "Having Once Tasted Phenomenology", in At The Existentialist Café: Freedom, Being, and Apricot Cocktails)

This idea of Being or human existence as having an inbuilt expiry date never sat so well with [Jean-Paul] Sartre. He accepted it in principle, but everything in his personality revolted against being hemmed in by anything at all, least of all by death. As he wrote in *Being and Nothingness*, death is an outrage that comes to me from outside and wipes out my projects. Death cannot be prepared for, or made my own; it's not something to be resolute about, nor something to be incorporated and tamed. It is not one of my possibilities but "the possibility that there are for me no longer any possibilities". [Simone de] Beauvoir wrote a novel pointing out that immortality would be unbearable (*All Men*

Are Mortal), but she too saw death as an alien intruder. In *A Very Easy Death*, her 1964 account of her mother's last illness, she showed how death came to her mother "from elsewhere, strange and inhuman". For Beauvoir, one cannot have a relationship with death, only with life.

The British philosopher Richard Wollheim put all this another way. Death, he wrote, is the great enemy not merely because it deprives us of all the future things we might do, and all the pleasures we might experience. It takes away the ability to experience anything *at all*, ever. It puts an end to our being a Heideggerian clearing for things to emerge into. Thus, as Wollheim says, "It deprives us of phenomenology, and, having once tasted phenomenology, we develop a longing for it which we cannot give up." Having had experience of the world, having had intentionality, we want to continue it forever, because that experience of the world is *what we are*.

Unfortunately, this is the deal we get. We can taste phenomenology only because, one day, it will be taken from us. We clear our space, then the forest reclaims it again. The only consolation is to have had the beauty of seeing light through the leaves at all: to have had something, rather than nothing.

LIFE: BACKWARDS AND FORWARDS Sarah Bakewell

(Excerpted from Chapter 11, "Croisés Comme Ça", in At The Existentialist Café: Freedom, Being, and Apricot Cocktails)

Sartre and Beauvoir were not penitents ... but they were aware of stern eyes looking back at them from the future. "We feel that we are being judged by the masked men who will succeed us," wrote Sartre in 1952, adding, "our age will be an object for those future eyes whose gaze haunts us."

Beauvoir wrote in her last volume of memoirs that she had once felt superior to earlier writers because, by definition, she knew more history than they did. Then the obvious truth dawned: her generation too would one day be judged by future criteria. She saw that her contemporaries would suffer what historian E. P. Thompson later called "the enormous condescension of posterity".

Sartre still believed, however, that one must call the shots as one sees them at that time. If you fence-sit just because you are scared to make an error, then you are definitely making one. As Kierkegaard had said:

It is perfectly true, as philosophers say, that life must be understood backwards. But they forget the other proposition, that it must be lived forwards. And if one thinks over that proposition it becomes more and more evident that life can never really be understood in time because at no particular moment can I find the necessary resting-place from which to understand it.

There will never be a point of stillness and contemplation. For Sartre, in politics as in everything the correct direction was always onwards – even if that onward road led you round U-turns, and even if you went too fast to be fully in control.

A LOT OF US READ A LOT

John Rafferty

Inspired by Massimo Pigliucci's anecdote ("What Novel Would You Recommend to a Newcomer to America?", Sep PIQUE) of having been introduced to American culture by a friend via Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.'s apocalyptic novel, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, I had the happy idea of asking readers of PIQUE what novel they would recommend to acclimate someone new to our shores.

You all never disappoint. More than 40 of you responded, with 32 different suggestions, from the obvious (*me*) to the new-to-me (*my beautiful daughter-in-law Marleny*), the political (*Benny Pollak, Steven Green, Massimo Pigliucci, and Martine and Bill Reed*), and the head-smacking/why-didn't-I-think-of-that? (*Chris Everett*).

So, here they are, alphabetically by title. In the case of books with more than one recommender, names are given in the order in which they were received.

- ***Adventures of Augie March, The***, Saul Bellow – Remo Cosentino ("Picaresque celebration of the dubious promises of mid-20thC America.")
- ***American Gods***, Neil Gaiman – David Rafferty ("Immigrants learn the difference between the old country and new."); Colin Rafferty ("Great book, on the real American gods: TV, money, fame.")
- ***American Pastoral***, Philip Roth – Harvey Offenhartz ("Immigrant culture achieves American dream, collapses during American political unrest.")
- ***Black Like Me***, John Howard Griffin – John Wagner ("What was it like to live under Southern racial segregation.")
- ***Blessing Way, The*** – Tony Hillerman – Brad Wheeler ("His first mystery – beautiful New Mexico, realistic, humanistic, (Native!) Americans.")
- ***Bostonians, The***, Henry James – Donna Marxer ("Post Civil War prescience: feminist upheaval, political and cultural warfare.")
- ***Breakfast of Champions***, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. – Brian Lemaire
- ***Burgess Boys, The***, Elizabeth Strout – Edith Finell
- ***Catch 22*** – Joseph Heller – Flash Light ("Because it's funnier than 'Slaughterhouse Five'.")
- ***Catcher in the Rye, The***, J. D. Salinger – Adrienne Karp ("Coming of age in America.")
- ***Chosen, The***, Chaim Potok – Bob Murtha ("The immigrant experience; the humanity of people we find strange.")
- ***Coal Miner's Daughter***, Loretta Lynn & George Vecsey – Roger Walton ("First chapters are the world I grew up in.")
- ***Confederacy of Dunces, A***, John Kennedy Toole – Chris Everett
- ***Double Whammy***, Carl Hiaasen – Dorothy Kahn ("Funny, and the Florida culture he portrays is really America.")
- ***Edge of Eternity***, Ken Follett – Harold Saferstein
- ***Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas***, Hunter S. Thompson – Brian Rafferty ("The musings of a madman, utterly unbelievable and entirely real.")
- ***Grapes of Wrath, The***, John Steinbeck – Nan Blythe; Chic Schissel

- ***Great Gatsby, The***, F. Scott Fitzgerald – John Rafferty
- ***Hamlet, The***, William Faulkner – Bob Ondricek ("An American family, warts and all, where better spirits shine.")
- ***How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents***, Julia Alvarez – Marleny Rafferty
- ***Huckleberry Finn***, Mark Twain – Jack Herschlag ("Breaking the race rules: 'Alright, then, I'll go to hell ...'"); Larry Shaw; Spiro Condos ("It IS America, still desperately relevant today.")
- ***In the Beginning***, Chaim Potok – Fred Pomerantz
- ***Invisible Man, The***, Ralph Ellison – John O'Brien ("Eloquent, in my opinion the great American novel.")
- ***Little House on the Prairie***, Laura Ingalls Wilder – Lorraine Gudas ("The 19th century frontier spirit that continues to animate Americans.")
- ***Look Homeward, Angel***, Thomas Wolfe – Walter Balcerak ("Thomas Wolfe was a quintessentially American artist.")
- ***My Antonia***, Willa Cather – Blaikie Worth
- ***On the Road***, Jack Kerouac – Pedro Lujans
- ***Plot Against America, The***, Philip Roth – Benny Pollak; Steven Green; Massimo Pigliucci ("Alternative history, where America slides toward anti-semitism and fascism."); Martine Reed; Bill Reed
- ***Scarlet Letter, The***, Nathaniel Hawthorne – Elaine Heller ("Illustrates a strong streak of puritanism that still exists today.")
- ***To Kill a Mockingbird***, Harper Lee – Charles Iwanusa ("Still pertinent as evidenced by August 12 in Charlottesville"); Beth Everett
- ***Tom Sawyer***, Mark Twain – Giles Kelly
- ***Tree Grows in Brooklyn, A***, Betty Smith – Pat Morris ("The book that made me a reader.")

Some further thoughts ...

Jack Herschlag, Larry Shaw, and Spiro Condos seem to agree with Ernest Hemingway that "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*. ... All American writing comes from that. There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since."

Interestingly, no one mentioned such supposedly America-defining novels as ... *Babbitt*, Sinclair Lewis; *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, Tom Wolfe; *The Fortunate Pilgrim*, Mario Puzo; *Giant*, Edna Ferber; *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*, Sloan Wilson; *Primary Colors, A Novel of Politics*, Anon (Joe Klein); and *Rabbit, Run*, John Updike.

Contra the literary riches above, I was struck by the number of non-responders—at least a dozen—who told or wrote me during the past month, "I don't read fiction."

Wow. I don't want to even imagine a life without the company of Hemingway's Nick Adams, Vonnegut's Kilgore Trout, or Donna Leon's Commissario Guido Brunetti of the Venice Police.

Give yourselves—and your imaginations—a break, you too-serious humanists. Even Gilbert Ryle, one of the 20thC's foremost philosophers, when asked if he ever read novels, answered, "Oh, yes. All six, every year."

By which he meant, of course, the output of Jane Austen ... which I really have to start reading.

SHSNY CALENDAR: OCTOBER - DECEMBER

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURS, OCT 5, 7-8:30 pm
THE COMMUNITY CHURCH
OF NEW YORK

28 East 35 St. (front lounge)
We'll discuss

THE WAR ON SCIENCE:

*Who's Waging It,
Why It Matters,*

What We Can Do About It
Shawn Lawrence Otto

Winner of the MN Book Award for Non-fiction. "Wherever the people are well informed," Thomas Jefferson wrote, "they can be trusted with their own government."



But what happens when they are not? From climate change to vaccinations, transportation to technology, health care to defense – we are in the midst of an unprecedented expansion of scientific progress and a simultaneous expansion of danger.

At the very time we need them most, scientists and the idea of objective knowledge are being bombarded by a vast, well-funded, three-part war on science: the identity politics war on science, the ideological war on science, and the industrial war on science.

This provocative new book offers a vision, an argument, and some compelling solutions to bring us to our collective senses, before it's too late.

Paperback and Kindle available.

Join us even if you haven't finished reading.

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

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURS, NOV 2, 7-8:30 pm
Community Church of New York

THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD – SO FAR:

Why Are We Here?

Lawrence Krauss

Award-winning theoretical physicist Lawrence Krauss tells the dramatic story of the discovery of the hidden world of reality – a grand poetic vision of nature – and how we find our place within it.

Krauss beautifully explains how our refusal to believe that there are unknowable cosmic truths has rewarded humanity with brilliantly precise answers to puzzles previously obscured by the fog of dogmatic assurance.

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURS, DEC 7, 7-8:30 pm
Community Church of New York

HOMO DEUS: A BRIEF HISTORY OF TOMORROW

Yuval Noah Harari

Harari, author of the international phenomenon *Sapiens*, returns with an equally original, compelling, and provocative book, turning his focus toward humanity's future, and our quest to upgrade humans into gods.

Homo Deus explores the projects, dreams and nightmares that will shape the twenty-first century – from overcoming death to creating artificial life. It asks the fundamental questions: Where do we go from here?

LIKE SHSNY ON FACEBOOK

<https://www.facebook.com/SHSofNY>

MEET US ON MEETUP

www.meetup.com/shsny-org/

TEXT US ON TWITTER

@SHS_NewYork

SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT

MON, OCT 9, 6:30 pm
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)

THE CRUCIBLE

Playwright Arthur Miller's parable of the 1950s anti-communist witch hunts (thinly veiled here as the real Salem, MA, witch trials of 1692) in this film adaptation.



After married John Proctor (Daniel Day-Lewis) breaks off his affair with young Abigail Williams (Winona Ryder), she leads other local girls in an occult rite to wish death on his wife, Elizabeth (Oscar-winner Joan Allen). And a literal witch hunt gets underway.

After-Film Discussion:

Which witches do we hunt today?

SHSNY Movie Night is FREE.

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

BRUNCH & CONVERSATION

SUN, OCT 15, 11:30 am

The Gem Saloon

375 Third Ave. (27 St)

Yes, The Gem is our new Sunday-morning home – at least through football season. We have the first-floor, behind-the-bar room to ourselves (and we'll rearrange seating to cut down noise).



So see the menu at thegemsaloonnyc.com, and come join 20 or more of your fellow freethinkers for food, fun and convivial conversation, including the Dorothy Kahn-led ...

After-Brunch Discussion:

What book has had the greatest influence on your life?

SHSNY CALENDAR: OCTOBER - DECEMBER

GREAT LECTURE - LIVE!

WED, OCT 25, 7 pm

Stone Creek Bar & Lounge

140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)

**FIXING U.S. ELECTIONS:
DUOPOLY COLLUSION OR
POLITICAL PARTY THEFT?**

Julia Willebrand

Voting booth results often have not matched voter preference polls. Despite major presidential upsets, little media attention was/is given to extensive statistical and observational evidence of fraud, e.g., exit polls are “adjusted” when they don’t match vote totals, and millions of voters have been disenfranchised, ostensibly for voting twice.

Julia Willebrand, frequent Green Party candidate for office, has been following the evidence for years. After reviewing the evidence we will discuss the mystery of why the Democrat losers do nothing about the electoral losses.

STUDYING HUMANISM

MON, OCT 30, 6:30-8:30 pm

Community Church of New York

28 East 35 St. (Gallery)

2017-18 Meeting #2

EXISTENTIALISM

It was the philosophy of the 20th Century, concerned with finding self and the meaning of life through free will, choice, and personal responsibility. Steven Green will discuss what Existentialism is and isn’t, then lead a freewheeling discussion during our second hour.

Required Reading:

Google Existentialism and go to Wikipedia. Read – about half-an-hour – Sections 1-7.

And just for fun, try Sarah Bakewell’s delightful, best-selling *At The Existentialist Cafe*.

Reserve your place today:

SHSNY’s 9TH ANNUAL FREETHOUGHT DAY BRUNCH

Sunday, October 8,

at 12 Noon, at

PETE’S TAVERN,

129 East 18 Street (Irving Place)

with speaker

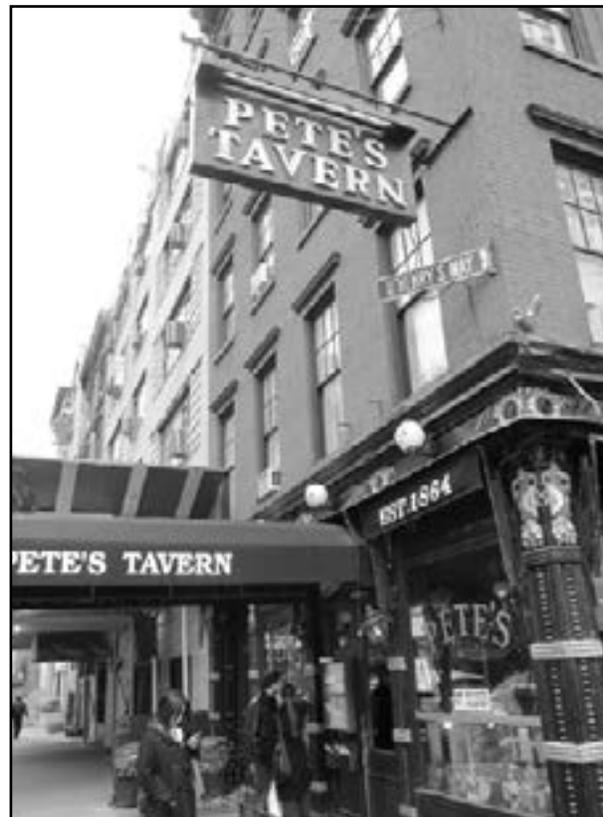
JONATHAN ENGEL

on

“Separation of Church & State Isn’t in the Constitution” ... and Other American Myths

Nationally-recognized First Amendment Authority, Jon’s 2013 Freethought Day presentation for us, “The History of Church/State Separation in America”, was an insightful and witty knockout. Now, here’s a peek into his current thinking:

I’m concentrating on what I consider to be three current myths about separation: that it “isn’t in the constitution”, that “the 10 Commandments are the basis for our laws”, and that “while government can’t favor any one religion over another, it can favor religion over non-religion”.



Join us!

Brunch is \$25

... for the best brunch bargain in New York, with your choice of 11 excellent entrees, one drink (Bloody Mary, Mimosa) and coffee or tea, and including all taxes and tips.

**Pre-pay (really recommended) at
shsny.org**

... to reserve your place, because the room at Pete’s only seats 48 – don’t get shut out. Questions? email editor@shsny.org ... or call 646-922-7389, and leave a call-back number.

HOUSTON AND THE CULTURE WARS (Not the name of an indie rock band)

Jonathan Engel

There was an interesting juxtaposition of articles in the Op-Ed section of the August 28 *New York Times*. On one side of the page was an article by Mimi Swartz about the Houston flooding. On the other side was a piece by Jim Lyons about Trump's plan to open up public lands to more drilling for fossil fuels. Really? Fossil fuels? While a storm partially enhanced by global warming destroys the fourth largest city in the country? And of course this storm hit Houston a mere two days after Trump issued an executive order rolling back anti-flooding regulations that had been put into place by the Obama administration. Is all this really related to the so-called "culture wars" in this country? I think it is.

For years environmentalists have been warning the state of Texas (and everyone else) that changes to the earth's climate, due largely to the burning of fossil fuels, would multiply the strength of tropical storms. At the same time environmentalists in Texas have been telling the city of Houston that its unchecked urban sprawl has been paving over wetlands that are vital to protecting the city from catastrophic flooding. What was the reaction to these warnings from the average Texan and their elected representatives? It was to not heed these warnings, to not even respectfully disregard them based on conclusions reached by alternative (hopefully peer reviewed) research. Rather, it was sneering derision about the "tree-hugging socialist libtards" who were sounding the alarm. And that's probably one of the gentler statements.

It is not enough for conservatives to disagree with liberals, they have to hate them to be seen as truly authentic. Trump supporters on the hard right will take a stand that hurts themselves just so they can delight in the fact that it angers liberals. The destruction of Houston is a small price to pay in order to hurt liberals' feelings. At least it is if you are a sociopath. Who doesn't happen to live in Houston.

What is it about liberal values that so sets off right-wing Republicans, rendering the manifestly ugly and unfit Trump appealing to them? I have a hypothesis about this that also helps to explain Hillary Clinton's surprising defeat in November (of course, only in America can winning by three million votes be turned into a defeat, but that's another story). Many of the values that are viewed as part and parcel of liberalism are also those that are seen as "female" attributes by our society.

These include values such as sympathy, empathy, generosity, unselfishness, tolerance, compromise, and cooperation. In our current toxic atmosphere, environmentalists become "tree-huggers"; those espousing negotiation and compromise are "girly-men"; and traits such as caring and compassion are derided as being "weak", which in Trumpworld is the ultimate insult.

In this atmosphere liberals and environmentalists (not necessarily the same thing, but a lot of overlap) are scorned and ignored because they exhibit traits that are seen as

"womanly". Misogyny is a rot that hurts the country and the world in incalculable ways. In the loss of talented women who don't go into tech fields because they don't feel welcome there. In the denial of the presidency to one of the most qualified people to ever run for that office. And in strategic decision-making—on subjects ranging from wars to the environment—that are made on the basis of trying not to look weak (read: female) as opposed to simply trying to do what makes the most sense.

And now the most powerful man on the planet is someone who disdains women whose appearance doesn't measure up to his standards, and who thinks the ones who meet his standards of pulchritude exist only to exalt his virility and to be manhandled when the mood strikes him. And so the girly-men environmentalists are scorned and ignored, and Houston drowns.

Is abject stupidity a male trait in the same way that empathy is a female trait? As the holder of a y chromosome I'd like to think not. But if American culture (and really human culture) continues to see nurturing traits as being "female" and to devalue those traits precisely because they are seen that way, then to paraphrase Bob Dylan, a hard rain will continue to fall on us all.

READERS RESPOND TO SEPTEMBER PIQUE

To the Editor: In case you find this bit of applied secular humanism relevant to PIQUE, I'm forwarding it. I got this message on Facebook:

Hi, we are starting a prayer chain for all the people in Houston, Texas. Please say a prayer and pass it on to as many people as you can. If you can't pass this on, please let me know so the chain doesn't stop. Please just pass it on to as many as you can.

I replied:

Sorry, I can't pass this on because I don't believe a prayer chain could be of any help in this case.

If, like Ann Coulter, you believe the hurricane was more likely the act of a god than due to climate change, then how could praying to that cruel god possibly be of any help?

If you don't believe a god caused the hurricane, then why believe a god could do anything to help now? Surely people down there were praying, but it didn't stop the hurricane, so why would prayer be any more effective now?

Religion can sometimes be helpful, such as a religious group providing aid to flood victims, but it appears it's their actions that have the good effect, not necessarily their prayers.

Therefore I suggest donations would be far more effective than prayers in helping these flood victims.

She replied:

I do not believe this is an act of god! And I think Ann Coulter is a moron! This is just a symbolic gesture to show support! Peace and love!

My conclusion:

If the religious are willing to see their prayers as merely symbolic gestures, sounds like progress. Cheers,

– Flash Light

To the Editor: Regarding the Detestable Tragedy (“Deposing Donald Trump is a Humanist Issue”, Sep PIQUE), the answer is all-too obvious: 2018.

Find competitive House and Senate races. Volunteer. Donate. Persuade. – *Brad Wheeler*

To the Editor: “The Democrats’ Religion Problem” (Sep PIQUE), excerpted from *The NY Times* Op-Ed page, ended with these words:

“They need to take the time to learn the religious values of their audience. They need to be honest about their own secularity, but acknowledge their debt to the religious traditions that have shaped their progressive ideology.

“Only through a willingness to ground their policy proposals in the religious values of prospective voters will they be able to convince people of faith that they are not a threat to their values but are instead an ally in a common cause.”

This article almost gets it right. We share many of the moral conclusions of our liberal religious brothers and sisters. And we should highlight this common cause. But we came to these morals independently of religion. The secular fight for the 99 percent is not grounded in religion. These values entered the religious world from the secular world.

– *Brian Lemaire*

To the Editor: Some further thoughts on certainty and uncertainty, stimulated by Zat Rana’s excellent piece (“Want to Be Smarter? Learn to Say ‘I don’t know’”, Sep PIQUE) on learning to say “I don’t know.”

Despite all the knowledge humanity has gained through science—through observation, experimentation, research and reflection—uncertainty prevails and always will. Science is not about establishing certainty. Science is about gaining the best understanding we can about our world, and about the readiness to modify our understanding when new information becomes available. Paradoxically, as knowledge expands, our awareness of how much we do not know also expands. A few brief quotations state the case far more eloquently than I can:

“Doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is an absurd one.” – *Voltaire*

“All knowledge is to some degree doubtful and we cannot say what degree of doubtfulness makes it cease to be knowledge any more than we can say how much loss of hair makes a man bald.” – *Bertrand Russell*

“Each of us has a moral obligation to be skeptical, to demand the credentials of every statement that claims to be a fact.” – *Bergen Evans*

“My self-imposed rule is to retain the courage of one’s doubts as well as one’s convictions, in this world of dangerously passionate certainties.” – *Eric Sevareid*

“Knowledge is a finite island in a sea of inexhaustible mystery.” – *Chet Raymo*

“Penetrating so many secrets, we cease to believe in the unknowable. But there it sits, calmly licking its chops.”

– *H.L. Mencken*

Certainty is not for scientists, nor for those of us—secular humanists and others—who want to have a serious understanding of the world. Certainty is for religious fundamentalists who know that God created the world a few thousand years ago, that his creations are eternal and unchanging and that his commandments are inviolable.

– *Peter Rogatz*

To the Editor: Thanks for a stimulating Labor Day issue. Here are a few comments you might enjoy. I found Harari’s article (“The Meaning of Life Without Work”, Yuval Noah Harari, Sep PIQUE) particularly enlightening; we do indeed have a large and growing useless class.

How to keep our surplus or useless class happy, if not productive, is a rapidly expanding problem. Virtual reality is unhealthy and not real enough. Work, useful if possible, must be provided. The Egyptians solved the problem by constructing enormous triangular stone pyramids. A Chinese solution was to build a stupendous useless stone wall.

Perhaps DTrump’s proposal for a great Mexican wall makes some sense. Why not also build a great wall along the Canadian border? – *Cy Adler*

BRAVE NEW (VIRTUAL) WORLDS? Flash Light

I design virtual worlds, which I use as sets for my art work, so I was interested in Yuval Noah Harari’s, “The Meaning of Life in a World Without Work” (Sep PIQUE, and see immediately above – *JR*). Based on my virtual world experiences, I agree with several of his points, but disagree with many others.

Yes, 3D virtual worlds can offer “more excitement and emotional engagement than the ‘real world’”. Especially if your “real world” is in some cultural backwater, whereas your avatar can engage in intellectual conversations in virtual world cultural centers. However, it turns out virtual worlds don’t appeal to couch potatoes, who don’t want to be bothered with interacting; they want entertainment to flow out of a screen requiring no thoughts, or effort on their part.

I have to point out that while all video games are set in virtual worlds, not all virtual worlds are video games. Some are platforms for communication and/or education: it’s more efficient to hold virtual meetings than to fly people across countries for real life meetings, or classes. However, even for people who play video games, comparing their virtual worlds to religion insults them. They are not under the delusion their virtual worlds are real, and people who use virtual worlds to communicate, or teach, are speaking to real people behind the avatars, not imaginary friends.

Yuval is correct that, “The crucial problem is creating new jobs that people perform better than algorithms.” ATMs have replaced bank tellers. Artificial intelligence has replaced telephone receptionists. Self-checkout is replacing sales clerks. Self-driving vehicles will replace truck and taxi drivers. IBM’s Watson is being marketed to replace lawyers doing legal research.

Yuval is also correct that, “And even if the ex-insurance agent somehow makes the transition into a virtual world designer, the pace of progress is such that within another decade he might have to reinvent himself yet again.” It will probably be much less than a decade before that design job is outsourced to someone in a third world country, working for less than a minimum wage.

I don’t have a solution, but neither does the author, because the one solution he suggests is totally impractical: “The same technology that renders humans useless might also make it feasible to feed and support the unemployable.” While it might be economically feasible, it’s typically psychologically and socially impossible. Remember the outcry against “welfare queens”? The public generally will not tolerate the idea that they should have to permanently support a class of able bodied non-workers.

Although the author says, “A significant number of ultra-orthodox Jewish men never work. They spend their entire lives studying holy scriptures and performing religion rituals,” those men are being supported by religious people who actually believe that is useful work. Video games are not a valid analogy because their government would never offer subsidies for ultra-orthodox men, or anyone else, to play secular video games.

Finally he concludes, “Do we want to live in a world in which billions of people are immersed in fantasies? ... Well like it or not, that’s the world we have been living in for thousands of years.” Not quite.

I, for one, would much rather live in a world where billions of people realize they are immersed in fantasies, rather than the one where billions of people believe their fantasies are real, and try to impose their beliefs on everyone around them.

WHAT COULD BE WORSE THAN 1984? HOW ABOUT A BRAVE NEW WORLD?

Neil Postman

(Reprinted from Delanceyplace.com 9/07/17)

The first half of the 20th century saw two competing visions of the future from British authors George Orwell (1903-1950) and Aldous Huxley (1894-1963). Though it came 17 years later, Orwell’s dystopian novel *1984* is better known; however, Huxley’s *Brave New World* has proven more relevant.

Written in the shadow of Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin, *1984* shows a world ruled by an oligarchical dictatorship with perpetual war, pervasive government surveillance and incessant public mind control. Set in 2540 AD, *Brave New World* was published in 1932 and began as a parody of H. G. Wells’ optimistic and utopian novel *Men Like Gods*. Neil Postman contrasted the two visions in the foreword to his 1985 classic *Amusing Ourselves to Death*:

“We were keeping our eye on 1984. When the year came and [Orwell’s] prophecy didn’t, thoughtful Americans sang softly in praise of themselves. The roots of liberal democracy had held. Wherever else the terror had happened, we, at least, had not been visited by Orwellian nightmares. But we

had forgotten that alongside Orwell’s dark vision, there was another – slightly older, slightly less well known, equally chilling: Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*.

“Contrary to common belief even among the educated, Huxley and Orwell did not prophesy the same thing. Orwell warns that we will be overcome by an externally imposed oppression. But in Huxley’s vision, no Big Brother is required to deprive people of their autonomy, maturity and history. As he saw it, people will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think.

“What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance.

“Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of the feelies, the orgy porgy, and the centrifugal bumblepuppy. As Huxley remarked in *Brave New World Revisited*, the civil libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny ‘failed to take into account man’s almost infinite appetite for distractions’. In 1984, Huxley added, people are controlled by inflicting pain. In *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us.

“This book [*Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*] is about the possibility that Huxley, not Orwell, was right.”

The (Still) Bad News ...

WE FLUNK THE SERIAL KILLER TEST

Benedict Carey

(Excerpted from “The Serial Killer Test: Biases Against Atheists Emerge in Study”, in The New York Times, 8/07/2017)

Most people around the world, whether religious or not, presume that serial killers are more likely to be atheists than believers in any god, suggests a new study, which counters the common assumption that increasingly secular societies are equally tolerant of nonbelievers. Avowed atheists exhibited the same bias in judging sadistic criminals, the study found.

The new report, appearing in the journal *Nature Human Behaviour*, included more than 3,000 people in 13 countries, both secular states like the Netherlands and Finland, and deeply religious ones like the United Arab Emirates and India. The findings suggest that, despite declining attendance at churches, mosques and temples in many communities, the cultural tenet that religion is a bulwark against immorality remains intact, experts said, even in

those who deny it explicitly.

Previous studies had found evidence of broad-based public suspicion of nonbelievers in smaller samples within religious countries, like the United States. The new survey suggests the findings may extend globally, and it finds that the same kinds of suspicion pervade even highly secular societies.

“What’s exciting about the paper for me is that it’s a great first step,” said Richard Sosis, a professor of anthropology at the University of Connecticut. “They’ve got a method that can be used to see how this bias plays out not just in judging a sociopath, but for many more mundane moral violations.”

The study was as simple as it was ambitious. Led by Will M. Gervais, an associate professor of psychology at the University of Kentucky, an international team of researchers recruited samples of about 100 or more adults in 13 countries, spanning North America, Europe, Asia, the Middle East and the antipodes. The participants filled out a short questionnaire, providing their age, ethnicity and religious affiliation or lack thereof, with choices like “atheist,” “agnostic” or “none.”

One item on the questionnaire began with a description of a sociopath: a man who, having tortured animals when young, later began hurting people and “has killed five homeless people that he abducted from poor neighborhoods in his home city. Their dismembered bodies are currently buried in his basement.” A question followed. Half the participants in each country got one version of the question: “Which is more probable? 1) The man is a teacher; or 2) The man is a teacher and does not believe in any gods.”

The other half got another version: “Which is more probable? 1) The man is a teacher; or 2) The man is a teacher and a religious believer.” The questionnaire also included several brainteasers and other questions to distract from the purpose of the study.

“We used this psychopathic serial killer because we thought that, even if people didn’t trust atheists enough to let them babysit their children, they wouldn’t necessarily assume them to be serial killers,” Dr. Gervais said.

But they did — overwhelmingly. About 60 percent of the people who had the option to flag the teacher as an atheist did so; just 30 percent of those who had the option to flag the teacher as a religious believer did so. Self-identified nonbelievers were less biased than the average, but not by much, the study found.

As expected, the bias was stronger in highly religious countries, like the United Arab Emirates, than in more secular ones, like New Zealand. Dr. Gervais, whose work explores bias against nonbelievers, had publicly backed off some of his own earlier studies, finding them too small to be convincing. “This time we got the numbers, and the effect was clear,” he said.

The relationship between religious belief and moral behavior is, in fact, not well understood. Some studies find that devout believers live more morally upright lives, compared with nonbelievers; others find no differences at all. The research is plagued by differing definitions of

what moral behavior is and what constitutes true religious devotion (e.g., self-identification, or daily ritual?). Even the definition of nonbelief is a moving target: A person may identify as atheist, agnostic, “lapsed” or merely indifferent depending on his or her mood and understanding of those terms.

The urge to impute beliefs, motives and mental states to mass murderers, moreover, is often misplaced, experts said. Some mass killers clearly commit atrocities because of their professed religious beliefs, like terrorists. But modern history’s register of assorted serial killers, spree shooters and other mortal predators is a rogue’s gallery of mostly male, aggrieved actors who are sometimes believers, sometimes not, and who half the time do not qualify for any specific psychiatric diagnosis, as disturbed as they are, according to an analysis of more than 200 such killers by Dr. Michael Stone, a New York forensic psychiatrist.

A large number — perhaps 25 percent, in Dr. Stone’s estimation — showed evidence of paranoid schizophrenia, which is characterized by delusional thinking. Those delusions, often enough, are infused with religious symbolism.

But ...

HAVE YOU HEARD THE GOOD NEWS?

FEWER PEOPLE BELIEVE “THE GOOD NEWS”

(Transcribed from “Poll: Beliefs in divine creation over evolution hit all-time low in US”, at aol.com, 5/25/2017, forwarded by Dennis Middlebrooks)

A recent Gallup poll regarding American views on creation and evolution returned some unprecedented results. The acceptance of Creationism, the belief that God made humans as they are today and did so roughly 10,000 years ago, has hit its lowest point since Gallup began asking the question 35 years ago. Only 38 percent of the respondents chose it to describe their understanding of how we all ended up here.

The same percentage of people picked a more hybrid explanation of life as we know it, agreeing that gradual change over very long periods of time has occurred, but adding that God has been guiding the process. 19 percent believe in evolution as a stand-alone explanation of human existence.

In a release about the poll results, Gallup notes, “This is the first time since 1982 — when Gallup began asking this question using this wording — that belief in God’s direct creation of man has not been the outright most-common response.”

Education-level questions asked during the creation or evolution poll revealed that those who had attended college were more apt to give a response involving evolution, be it divinely assisted or not. While education certainly appears to have a great influence on how one explains life at large, a survey by the Pew Research Center conducted in 2014 suggests that people’s overall views on religion are changing.

After questioning 35,000 people, the center found

“that the percentages who say they believe in God, pray daily and regularly go to church or other religious services all have declined modestly in recent years”.

It also learned, “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’.”

Comment: That’s “Nones” – we’re called Nones! – JR

Men of simple understanding, little inquisitive and little instructed, make good Christians. – *Montaigne*

Believing there is no God gives me more room for belief in family, people, love, truth, beauty, sex, Jell-O and all the other things I can prove and that make this life the best life I will ever have.” – *Penn Jillette*,

THE BLACK CAT ANALOGY

Philosophy is like being in a dark room and looking for a black cat.

Metaphysics is like being in a dark room and looking for a black cat that isn’t there.

Theology is like being in a dark room and looking for a black cat that isn’t there and shouting, “I found it!”

Science is like being in a dark room and looking for a black cat while using a flashlight. – *forwarded by Stan Friedland*

POEM (Maybe song) Peter Flom

On Quora: “What are some of the gods, deities, or divinities whose existence atheists lack belief in?” I answered with this ...

There are all the Valkyries,
There’s Atla and there’s Gerd.
There’s tons and tons of deities
Of whom you haven’t heard.
There’s Loki and there’s Iden,
There’s gods both small and big,
There’s Neptune and Poseidon,
There’s Magni, Hod and Frigg.
There’s Amaterasu
(The sun god in Japan)
There’s Bosatsu and there’s Butsu
But we do believe in man.
We don’t believe in Babd Catha
Nor Arawn nor Vishnu
Not Dazbog not Podaga
But we believe in you.

... which has gotten much praise. Maybe we could set it to music and use it as our SHSNY song?

Comment: It “sounds” (to me, at least) much like the verse of “There Is Nothing Like A Dame” from South Pacific, by Rodgers & Hammerstein, so you already have your/our music, Peter. – JR

Page 5
Newbie Americans
We recommend novels for

Page 3
Dying with Dignity
Humanist Activism:

Page 2
(or maybe we don’t)
We rethink Columbus Day

Page 7
Brunch, Sunday, October 8
Freethought Day!
Come celebrate

