

# PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

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June, 2019

Busy, busy. Herein, we compare oaths and affirmations (not the same thing), as well as religion and morality (neither are they). We wonder if we can just say No to Alabama, why so many of “them” watch so much Fox “news”, and why so many of “us” watch/read/listen to great art by not-so-great guys. We expose a few more idiots, find more reasons not to believe, and get foul-mouthed by a fairly *nice* guy. But first, a hundred years of immigration history – you know, facts. – JR

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## IMMIGRATION 101

Or

*Everything You Always Wanted To Know About Illegal Immigration, But Didn't Know Whom To Ask*

**Michael Tomasky**

*(Excerpted from Mr. Tomasky's "If We Can Keep It: How The Republic Collapsed and How It Might Be Saved", on delanceyplace.com, 5/13/2019)*

*The Delancey Place introduction to the book excerpt:*

*The U.S. restricted immigration with the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924. Then in 1942, facing the manpower shortages of World War II, the Roosevelt administration and the Mexican government created the “bracero” program that allowed seasonal workers to come to the U.S. to harvest crops and then return. The number of workers reached as high as 400,000 in a single year. The program was ended in 1964, but it created networks and relationships that were the underpinnings of illegal immigration that followed.*

*From the book:*

**A**fter World War II, some realized that if the United States truly wanted to be the proverbial beacon of freedom to the people of the developing world, it probably should open its doors more widely to the people of said world. There was a collective guilt among elites about the Holocaust, and America's failure in the 1930s to take in more Jews. ...

President Kennedy proposed comprehensive immigration reform in 1963. He did not live to pass it, but Johnson, with his customary zeal and mastery of the legislative process, took up the cause. And in 1965, the Immigration and Naturalization Act (INA) was passed by overwhelming – and again, bipartisan – margins: The Senate passed it 76-18, with Democrats voting aye by 52-14 and Republicans

by 24-3; it sailed through the House 318-95, with roughly three-quarters of Democrats and four-fifths of Republicans in support.

There was no controversy. There had been no great outcry for the bill. No marches, no demonstrations, no acts of civil disobedience. Either pro or con. “It is a very minor issue,” said the lobbyist for the American Jewish Committee at the time. Liberal groups supported it – the American Civil Liberties Union, Americans for Democratic Action, a major player at the time, and others – but there was no great hue and cry. Indeed, if anything the opposite: A Harris poll in May 1965 found the public opposed to easing immigration restrictions by a margin of 58 to 24 percent. But they weren't so against it that they were moved to any big public act. Also, after the act's passage, Gallup found 70 percent saying they favored the new law. Seesawing numbers like these indicate a classic case of the public not knowing much, not giving the matter much thought, seeing Congress do something, and thinking, in those days of far greater trust in government, “Oh well, okay, they must know what they're doing.”

Few things as big as a major congressional overhaul of law can be put down to the efforts of one person, but if ever a case could be constructed along those lines, it can be made with respect to Congressman Emanuel Celler's efforts on immigration. Celler, a Jewish Brooklynite who grew up with his father's whiskey tank in his basement and who remains one of the longest-serving House members in history, was a freshman when Johnson-Reed passed, and it incensed him. He swore then that someday he'd have the power to undo it. He laid the paving stones in 1947, when he was the ranking Democrat on the Judiciary Committee -- during a reorganization of the House, he got immigration moved from the jurisdiction of the Labor and Commerce Committee to his own. The move, writes Margaret Sands Orchowski in her

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study of the 1965 act, “made the focus of immigration law one of justice—family unification and antidiscrimination—instead of about work, jobs, and labor development of the country”. So finally, forty-one years later, Celler, with a big assist on the Senate side from Ted Kennedy, managed to run his steamroller over the old law.

Kennedy made a famous (or infamous, depending on one’s point of view) assurance at the time that the law would not change the ethnic mix of the country. We’ll leave to the side for present purposes the debate over whether he was being dishonest or naive. But of course it did change the ethnic mix, chiefly through the family reunification provision, which allowed legal immigrants to petition to bring in not just spouses and children, but parents, adult siblings, some cousins. But again, as with 1924, the change was not dramatic and immediate. In the five years before the law’s passage, the number of new legal permanent residents in the United States per year was about 222,000; in the five years after the law, it went up, but only to about 360,000 per year.

The civil-rights and feminist revolutions happened quickly and dramatically; but if they were volcanic explosions, the immigration revolution was the lava rolling slowly down the hill, unfolding over a much longer period of time. The 1970s brought the advent of many new arrivals from Southeast Asia, as the Vietnam War ended, and a slow but steady increase in immigration from Mexico and Central America.

These were legal immigrants and refugees. But around the same time, illegal immigration started to increase. The roots of illegal immigration are several, including first of all the vast wage disparity between the United States and the countries people were (and are) fleeing. Political strife—indeed, terror—in Central America and southern Mexico has been another factor. But according to Doris Meissner, who headed the Immigration and Naturalization Service for eight years under Bill Clinton, the deep roots were to be found in the networks created under the bracero program, and the always lax enforcement of U.S. laws governing employers’ practices. She wrote in 2004: “... the lasting effect of the bracero program has been that it spawned and institutionalized networks and labor market relationships between Mexico and the United States. These ties continued and became the foundation for today’s illegal migration from Mexico. Thus, ending the agreement as a legal matter did not alter the migration behavior that had been established over the course of more than 20 years; the migrant flows simply adapted to new conditions.”

In 1982, the Supreme Court decided, in *Plyler v. Doe*, by a narrow 5-4 margin that had conservative Lewis Powell joining the Court’s four liberals, that children of what were then uncontroversially called illegal immigrants were entitled to the same education as native-born children (they were people “in any ordinary sense of the term”, the majority held). In 1986, Congress passed a new immigration law to deal with these undocumented arrivals, in part by granting legal status (“amnesty”, in other words) to all who’d arrived

illegally before 1982 provided they pay a fine and back taxes and admit guilt. Yes, 1986—which means Ronald Reagan signed it. We weren’t yet divided on immigration in those days that just barely, and not coincidentally, preceded the rise of rightwing talk radio. Three million undocumented aliens became legal in a matter of about three years. In exchange, sanctions were toughened (allegedly, anyway) on employers of undocumented workers. The rollcall votes, looked at from today’s vantage of strict party-line votes, are interesting. It passed both houses comfortably—230-166 in the House, 69-30 in the Senate—but the ideological divisions were striking. Latinos and Ted Kennedy-style liberals were against it because of the sanctions, while most conservative members opposed the amnesty. Senate Republicans supported the bill 41-11, but House Republicans opposed it, 62-105 (although “Gingrich, Newton” voted yea!). Right there, in that 105 number, we see the seeds of what became by 2016 thousands of people chanting “Build the wall!”

It wasn’t until the early 1990s—concurrent with the dawn of the broader culture war and the maturation of ethnic identity movements and a nascent but growing academic literature on multiculturalism—that immigration became a first-rank issue. Mind you, the broader public never supported liberal immigration flows. Gallup keeps data going back to 1965, asking respondents whether they supported immigration that was increased, decreased, or at current levels. In 1965, those numbers respectively were: 7 percent, 33 percent, and 39 percent. In 1972, “decreased” passed “current levels”. By the mid-eighties, “decrease” held a solid lead. Then in the early 1990s the backlash kicked into gear: 65 percent supported a decrease, 27 percent said keep the status quo, and just 6 percent said increase. And then we saw California’s Proposition 187, which prohibited illegal entrants from accessing many of the state’s social services (the voters passed it 59-41 percent), and other concrete manifestations of the backlash.

So again, a controversy that hadn’t even existed in 1965 became, in this case not five but twenty and twenty-five years later, a stick of dynamite.

**W**e have a moral obligation to admit the world’s poor, [our leaders] tell us, even if it makes our own country poor and dirtier and more divided.”

— Fox News host Tucker Carlson

**A**s more illegal immigrants are rushing the border, more kids are being separated from their parents. And temporarily housed at what are essentially summer camps.”

— Fox News host Laura Ingraham

**W**hen Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.”

— Then-presidential-candidate Donald Trump, 2016

**F**or the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” — Galatians 5:14

## WHY FOX NEWS IS NO. 1

**Eric Wemple**

*(Excerpted from “Why Fox News is No. 1” in The Washington Post Opinion pages, and from Eric Wemple Blog, 5/15/19)*

**F**ox News announced in late April that it would hold an “inaugural summit” for subscribers of its streaming service, Fox Nation, in Maricopa County, home to a majority of Arizona’s Republicans. ...

An hour before [the] fete, hundreds of Fox News/Fox Nation devotees were bunched in a queue alongside the W Hotel in Scottsdale ... . Not all attendees were local, either. Bill and Donna Cherry of Plainfield, Ind., drove across the country “mainly” to check in with their No. 1 cable-news network. “We like ‘em all,” said Bill Cherry, referring to the prime-time lineup on Fox News.

People don’t drive more than 1,600 miles—or even a few hours—to wait in 90-plus-degree heat to commune with a brand about which they feel ambivalent. ... Hal Netkin, 83, recited almost verbatim a monologue presented the previous night by Carlson on Democratic policy regarding the extension of health care to illegal immigrants. “The Democratic Party has abandoned any pretense that America exists to benefit Americans. They tell us our country is innately evil, that it was conceived in racism for the purpose of oppression, we are a sinful nation. And to redeem ourselves, we must sacrifice for the world’s poor, among many, many, many other things. This means paying the health-care bills of foreign nationals who have no right to be here in the first place,” said Netkin.

“Absolutely the greatest,” said Netkin of Carlson. “I thought that when [Bill] O’Reilly was put out, that was going to be the end of Fox News.” There was a great deal of such sentiment in the Fox Nation queue, not to mention resentment that O’Reilly was fired in April 2017 after the *New York Times* reported on his multiple settlements with female colleagues for allegations of abuse and sexual harassment. “You know, who cares?” said 63-year-old Linda Gerchick, a commercial real estate broker in Arizona. “Everybody can say somebody got touched wrong or something ... and immediately their lives are ruined.”

Even as they rued O’Reilly’s departure, many fans extolled Carlson as a genuine, authentic and funny replacement. The comments square with this blog’s diagnosis of Fox News as the plug-in network, where loyalty to the banner is so strong that the leadership can swap personnel without missing a beat.

One fan referred to Carlson as a “madman” — and not in a disparaging way. “He’s so authentic; you don’t have to worry about what he’s saying ‘cause it’s from the heart. He’s not acting,” said the man. A woman nearby said of the host: “I love Tucker ... because he is genuine and he laughs like a girl. I like that.”

Fox Nation represents the company’s attempt to extend its reach into the bottomless world of Internet video streaming. It’s built on the premise that Fox News viewers adore the opinion hosts on the network, a phenomenon for which there is plenty of supportive data: The prime-time

shows of Carlson, Sean Hannity and Laura Ingraham are the network’s top-rated offerings. The promotional tagline for Fox Nation is “opinion done right”.

To judge from Fox Nation fan commentary, the network is correct to bet that people will consume more. It’s “on from the time we wake up in the morning till we go to bed at night,” said one attendee of Fox News. Gerchick said, “I keep Fox News on my office all day long.” Yet another: “It’s on 24/7,” said the fan. “What else is there?”

Fox News’s iconic branding statement “fair and balanced” surfaces repeatedly in conversations with the network’s devotees. Many, however, don’t care much for the crew that attempts, often with little success, at actually injecting some balance into the proceedings. “His voice is so irritating, I have to turn it off,” said 53-year-old Anita Thomas of Tucson, referring to the afternoon host Shepard Smith, an anchor who has counterprogrammed a lot of the Trump propaganda on the opinion hours.

Another voice from the crowd said he liked Fox Nation because it allowed him to sidestep voices like Smith’s and liberal Juan Williams. “I’ll tell you right off the bat: There’s no ... what’s her name from the Democratic Party? There are no liberals. We don’t have the ‘equal balanced’ stuff.”

*Comment: One of my mentors in the three-year Humanist Institute leadership course I took, a psychiatrist and UU leader, told of visiting his elderly and conservative parents over the years and always finding the TV on, always tuned to Fox – even when Mom and Dad were in different rooms and couldn’t hear it, or were out in the backyard garden. He said it took him a while, but he finally understood why: Fox represented a small corner of the world that for them was forever 1955. – JR*

## ANOTHER HISTORY LESSON ON “FOX & FRIENDS”

*(Larry, Curly and Moe — aka Steve, Ainsley and Brian — are sitting on the couch, discussing religious relics rescued from the Notre Dame fire.)*

*Steve:* They are currently at the Paris City Hall, safe.

*Ainsley:* Brought to Paris ... the Crown of Thorns ... brought to Paris by Mary Magdalene!

*Brian:* Yeah.

*Fact:* The certainly bogus “crown” was brought to Paris in 1238, also certainly more than 1100 years after the death of the possibly-real apostle Mary of Magdala.

## TAKE HEART: BRITS CAN BE JUST AS STUPID AS WE ARE

*(From CFI Morning Heresy, 4/26/19)*

**D**on’t get taken in by the posh accents, America; Brits can be stupid, too.

A Yahoo/YouGov survey shows that 23 percent of Britons think climate change has been exaggerated, 20 percent think vaccines aren’t safe, 16 percent say the Moon landing was either probably or definitely faked, and 3 percent think Earth is flat.

It’s nice to know we’re not alone.

## OATH OR AFFIRMATION

Jonathan Engel

A recent article in *The New York Times* by Catie Edmondson (“Democrats Use Gavel to Resculpt Traditional Oath”, May 12, 2019), reported that some Democrats in the House of Representatives have started using affirmations instead of oaths to swear in witnesses. What’s the difference? In an oath a person swears to a deity that s/he will tell the truth. In an affirmation, s/he simply promises to tell the truth. The use of an affirmation instead of an oath has put some Republican noses out of joint, including that of Rep. Mike Johnson (R, La.), who believes that the oath was important to “many of our founders”, because an oath “would go on to eternity, and someone was watching and would be our judge”. This is utter nonsense, both legally and historically.

Let’s start with a little history. Since 1695 Great Britain has allowed its citizens to use either an affirmation or an oath when promising to tell the truth in front of a tribunal. This concept is mirrored in the United States Constitution, as Article VI, Paragraph 3 states:

*“The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the Members of the several State Legislatures, and all executive or judicial Officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation to support this Constitution; but no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or Public Trust under the United States.”*

It is curious, to say the least, that Rep. Johnson states that having an oath (swearing to a deity) was so important to “many of our founders”. Sorry to bring logic into this, Congressman, but it couldn’t have been that important to a majority of delegates at the Constitutional Convention or they wouldn’t have included Article VI, Paragraph 3 in the Constitution. And while it is true that Article VI speaks only of oaths/affirmations of office, there is every reason to believe that it applies to oaths/affirmations regarding testimony as well. The purpose is the same: to elicit a solemn promise, in one case to defend the Constitution and in the other to tell the truth.

So why are Rep. Johnson and his Republican colleagues so bent out of shape about Democratic chairs of House committees using affirmations instead of oaths?

As Johnson indicated in his statement, he and his cohort will tell you that an oath to a deity will persuade more people to tell that truth (under penalty of eternal damnation) than would an affirmation. The problem with this argument is that it has absolutely no evidence to back it up. Not that Republicans require any evidence for their beliefs these days. Remember that just a few weeks ago we were treated to the spectacle of Attorney General William Barr, a good Catholic, promising to tell the Senate Judiciary Committee the truth “so help me God”, and then proceeding to lie like a cheap rug.

So what is Johnson really looking for? As with so many other Republican initiatives, he’s trying to inject mandatory religious practices into the public sphere where they don’t

belong. Clearly, a religious person’s right to freedom of conscience is not infringed if that person is simply asked to promise to tell the truth before testifying, without any allusion to a deity. But when a non-believer is asked to take an oath to a god, that person is being forced to conform to a religious doctrine which s/he doesn’t believe in, which is a violation of not only Article VI, but of the First Amendment (no establishment of religion) as well.

So please remember, Rep. Johnson, it’s oath OR affirmation, and unless you’re the one testifying, you’re not the one who gets to make that choice.

### However ...

I think it’s interesting in a profession [the law] where we all take an oath, that they would look at people who have strong faith as somehow not good people, when, if you’re an atheist, what does an oath mean?

– Associate Justice of the Supreme Court Clarence Thomas

## DON’T EQUATE RELIGION WITH MORALITY

Kate Cohen

*(Reprinted from The Washington Post 5/2/2019, and forwarded to us by Washingtonians Giles and Ann Kelly, who asked for my opinion, which follows.)*

I’m not necessarily going to vote for him,” I told my husband a week ago when he found me furtively watching yet another interview with presidential hopeful Pete Buttigieg. “I just like listening to him.” It was like any YouTube obsession: One video naturally led to the next. I kept clicking, and Buttigieg kept calmly answering questions exactly the way I would if I were a more hopeful, smarter person, which suddenly I wanted to be. There was just one thing that bothered me: the religion.

I’m an atheist. I have bemoaned the fact that my country’s motto is “In God We Trust”, that elected officials are sworn in on holy books, legislative sessions begin in prayer, and big political speeches seem predestined to end with the phrase “God Bless America”. I think religion and government should be kept far apart. But if I ruled out all the self-proclaimed Christians in the race, I would lose a lot of great candidates. Cory Booker told a CNN town hall that “Christ is the center of my life”; Kamala D. Harris announced her candidacy “with faith in God”; Elizabeth Warren taught Sunday school and quotes the Gospel of Matthew.

That Buttigieg is a Christian doesn’t concern me. But he’s not just a Christian; he also publicly advocates a reemergence of a “religious left”. He argues that Democrats should not be afraid to use religious traditions “as a way of calling us to higher values”. As he told Bill Maher, “When I go to church, what I hear a lot about is protecting the downtrodden, and standing up for the immigrant and being skeptical of authority sometimes and making sure you look after the poor and the prisoner.”

He told *The Post* that he wants to “remind people of faith why the same things that are being preached on Sunday apply to the policies that we’re making on Monday

morning.” In other words, use religion as a tool for political persuasion. I can appreciate the power of that tool.

In June, when then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions tried to justify separating refugee families at the border with a quotation from Romans 13:1 (“Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established”), I was thrilled when people shot back with their Bible quotations. Stephen Colbert quoted Romans 13:10, “Love thy neighbor as thyself. Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.” When rightwingers weaponize the Bible, it’s hard not to cheer when that weapon is turned back on them. It’s just like they say: The only thing that stops a bad guy with a god is a good guy with a god.

But let’s not kid ourselves. We’re still picking and choosing among Bible verses. I just happen to believe one is wrong and the other is right.

You can read the Bible and fixate on the rules dividing the sexes, submitting to authorities, elevating the male and policing sexual ethics. Or you can read the very same book, accept the same personal savior and focus on verses concerned with “teachings about inclusion and love” (as Buttigieg told *The Post*). Obviously, much better values!

Yet — “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” is in there, too. Buttigieg may dismiss objectionable verses as no more than reflections of “the moral expectations of the era in which they were recorded”, but that’s because it suits his value system to do so.

Here’s the thing: People bring their morality to their religious texts; they don’t get their morality from them. After all, how does Buttigieg decide what’s important in the Bible and what should be ignored, underplayed or dismissed as vestiges from another era? What does he measure each message against? His own innate sense of morality.

When Buttigieg argues that Democrats should be able to use religious traditions “as a way of calling us to higher values,” he means “higher” as in lofty. He’s not saying those values — compassion, justice, humility — are higher than the traditions themselves. But they are. Because those religious traditions also include the “values” of exclusion, patriarchy and tribalism. And, yes, even the “value” of homophobia.

The higher values that Buttigieg embraces — values I, an atheist, share — exist not because of religion but independent of it. Can he find Christian tenets to express those values? Sure. Could that help him urge “people of faith” to move their politics “in a certain direction”? Maybe.

Does he risk equating religion with morality in the process? Definitely. Buttigieg told Ellen DeGeneres, “I have a problem with religion being used as a justification to harm people.” Me, too. I also have a problem with using religion as a justification to help people, though. It’s better, of course, but it still validates the idea that religion can be used to justify government action.

So far, Buttigieg hasn’t done that in the interviews I’ve heard. As long as he continues to make it clear that morality and religion aren’t one and the same, I’ll keep listening.

## WE ARE THE MORALISTS, NOT A GOD

John Rafferty

(Per the Kellys’ request for my opinion of the WaPo OpEd ...)

Dear Giles & Ann:

The crux of Ms. Cohen’s piece for me was this paragraph:

*Here’s the thing: People bring their morality to their religious texts; they don’t get their morality from them. After all, how does Buttigieg decide what’s important in the Bible and what should be ignored, underplayed or dismissed as vestiges from another era? What does he measure each message against? His own innate sense of morality.*

Exactly right. Otherwise, how could different religions with different mythologies in all times and all places come up with essentially the same prohibitions — against murder, lying, theft, adultery (although I can’t think of a single formal proscription of rape) — if people in almost all times and all places didn’t have pretty much the same moral values to begin with?

What’s more, behavioral scientists have fairly well proven that “lesser” animals than humans have standards of right and wrong, too. Chimps, orangutans and dogs have quit playing in performance-and-rewards lab exercises when they detect unfairness. (One of the best-known examples: two chimps in separate cages performing simple tasks and getting sweet grapes for success, until the lab techie stops rewarding Chimp B, even though B continues to perform. Chimp A notices, exhibits confusion and then anger, and soon quits the game, forfeiting the rewards.)

Altruism, which is simply what we call “good” behavior toward others, is a product of evolution. At its bedrock, our genes “demand” replication, so the mother who/that “loves” (i.e.: protects, nurtures) her child — however biologically unwittingly, she’s not thinking about her genes — ensures that her genes are carried forward to the next generation. So do we all love/protect/nurture those closest to us genetically, from children outward to siblings, cousins, clan members, and, eventually fellow citizens of the city-state/nation/empire. Our morality is simply the codification of our protecting and nurturing.

What about selfishness? It’s protecting and projecting one’s own genes “on steroids”. And though it can work for the individual (or the society) in the short run, history shows that the longest-lived and most successful groups are those that cooperate, who function “morally”.

Evolution has given us what Ms. Cohen calls an “innate sense of morality”, and science is showing, ever more clearly, that that sense, that morality, is the foundation; religion is an afterthought.

Much love to you both — who I hope are happy and healthy. — John

## NEW DAY/TIME FOR ‘GREAT LECTURES ON DVD’

We’re moving Great Lectures from fourth Wednesdays to the more popular Sunday brunch time, last Sunday of every month — see page 7.

# SHSNY CALENDAR: JUNE - AUGUST 2019

**SHSNY BOOK CLUB**  
**THURS, JUNE 6, 7-8:30 pm**  
**THE COMMUNITY CHURCH**  
**OF NEW YORK**

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

**WHEN CHINA RULED THE SEAS: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne, 1405-33**  
**Louise Levathes**

A hundred years before Columbus and his fellow Europeans began making their way to the New World, fleets of giant Chinese junks commanded by the eunuch admiral Zheng He and filled with the empire's finest porcelains, lacquerware, and silk ventured to the edge of the world's "four corners".

It was a time of exploration and conquest, but it ended in a retrenchment so complete that less than a century later, it was a crime to go to sea in a multimasted ship.

Levathes brings readers inside China's most illustrious scientific and technological era, focusing on the country's rise as a naval power that briefly brought half the world under its nominal authority.

Earle Bowers will lead.

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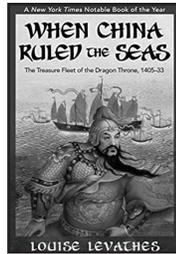
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**SHSNY BOOK CLUB**  
**THURS, JULY 11, 7-8:30 pm**  
**Community Church of New York**  
**SECULAR BUDDHISM**  
**Imagining the Dharma in an Uncertain World**  
**Stephen Batchelor**

As the practice of mindfulness permeates mainstream Western culture, more and more people are engaging in a traditional form of Buddhist meditation. However, many of them have little interest in the religious aspects of Buddhism.

Is it possible to recover from the Buddhist teachings a vision of human flourishing that is secular rather than religious without compromising the integrity of the tradition? Is there an ethical framework that can contextualize these practices in a rapidly changing world? Batchelor offers a detailed picture of contemporary Buddhism and its attempt to find a voice in the modern world.

– *Paperback and Kindle available.*

**SHSNY BOOK CLUB**  
**THURS, AUGUST 1, 7-8:30 pm**  
**Community Church of New York**  
**TO BE ANNOUNCED**

## PLANNING AHEAD

The usual SHSNY schedule (barring blizzards, holidays and schedule conflicts/screwups) is ...

**Book Club: First Thursday**  
at the Community Church of NY  
**Fiction Book Club: 2nd Tuesday**  
at Nancy Adelman's apartment

**Brunch: Third Sunday**  
at Stone Creek Lounge  
**Drinking Reasonably**

**Third Wednesday**  
at Vino Levantino Wine Bar

**Great Lectures on DVD**  
**Last Sunday**

at Stone Creek Lounge.

**BRUNCH & CONVERSATION**  
**SUN, JUNE 16, 11:30 am**  
**Stone Creek Bar & Lounge**  
**140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)**

We gather in the saloon's back room, where the pub-grub menu includes a \$15 breakfast special, the Bloody Marys are hot, the beer is cold, and conversation sparkles.

Come join fellow freethinkers for food, fun and conversation, including the Dorothy Kahn-led ...

**After-Brunch Discussion:**

*How and why do we treat poor people as criminals?*

**DRINKING REASONABLY**  
**WED, JUNE 19, 6-10:00 pm**  
**Vino Levantino Wine Bar**  
**210 West 94 Street**  
**(Broadway - Amsterdam Aves)**



Get together with other NYC freethinkers in the various groups of the Reasonable New York coalition (including SHSNY) for fellowship, networking, pub grub and reasonable imbibing.

We – humanists, skeptics, rationalists, atheists, agnostics, freethinkers of every stripe – meet and mingle, discuss the issues of the day and whatever else is on our minds.

And just have fun.

Come anytime for any length of time 6-10, or come at 6:00 and enjoy Happy Hour prices until 7:00.

Don't drink alcohol? Don't let that stop you from joining in the conversation and the fun.



## SHSNY CALENDAR: JUNE - AUGUST 2019

### SHSNY FICTION BOOK CLUB

TUES, JUNE 11, 7:00 pm

Karen Engel's apartment

201 East 17 St. (18B)

Come for wine, cheese, and sparkling conversation about

**THE JUDGES OF THE SECRET COURT**

David Stacton

A historical novel about John Wilkes Booth and the aftermath of the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln in 1865, the book vividly portrays the setting and sentiments of the time, as well as Wilkes' befuddled thinking and his short-lived escape from justice, followed by the trial.

To reserve your seat on the sofa, and/or to nominate the next book for us to read, contact: [editor@shsny.org](mailto:editor@shsny.org)

*Advance-Reading Notice:*

July 9 - *The Milagro Beanfield War*, by John Nichols

August 13 - *The Poisonwood Bible*, by Barbara Kingsolver

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Dr. Andy Thomson

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## THE ALABAMA ABORTION LAW COULD TIE THE CONSTITUTION IN KNOTS

Carliss Chatman

(Reprinted from “If a fetus is a person, it should get child support, due process and citizenship” at [washingtonpost.com/outlook/](http://washingtonpost.com/outlook/) May 17, 2019)

Alabama has joined the growing number of states determined to overturn *Roe v. Wade* by banning abortion from conception forward. The Alabama Human Life Protection Act, as the new statute is called, subjects a doctor who performs an abortion to as many as 99 years in prison. The law ... has no exceptions for rape or incest. It redefines an “unborn child, child or person” as “a human being, specifically including an unborn child in utero at any stage of development, regardless of viability”.

We ought to take our laws seriously. Under the laws, people have all sorts of rights and protections. When a state grants full personhood to a fetus, should they not apply equally?

For example, should child support start at conception? Every state permits the custodial parent — who has primary physical custody of the child and is primarily responsible for his or her day-to-day care — to receive child support from the noncustodial parent. Since a fetus resides in its mother, and receives all nutrition and care from its mother’s body, the mother should be eligible for child support as soon as the fetus is declared a person — at conception in Alabama, at six weeks in states that declare personhood at a fetal heartbeat, at eight weeks in Missouri, which was on the way to passing its law on Friday, but at birth in states that have not banned abortion.

And what about deportation? Can a pregnant immigrant who conceived her child in the United States be expelled? Because doing so would require deporting a U.S. citizen. To determine the citizenship of a fetal person requires examination of Section 1 of the 14th Amendment, which declares, “All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.” The word “born” was not defined by the drafters.

Presumably, they intended the standard dictionary definition: brought forth by birth. Our dates of birth are traditionally when our lives begin; we do not celebrate our dates of conception or the date of our sixth week in utero.

But in states with abortion bans, “born” takes on new meaning. Now legislatures assign an arbitrary time during gestation to indicate when life, personhood and, presumably, the rights that accompany these statuses take hold. This grant of natural personhood at a point before birth brings application of the 14th Amendment into question and may thus give a fetus citizenship rights — but only in those states. There are no laws that allow the United States to deny citizenship rights to a natural-born citizen merely because they reside with, or in, a noncitizen.

Detaining any person without arraignment or trial violates the Constitution and international human rights

laws. A fetus has not committed a crime, not been arraigned or charged, not weathered a trial by a jury of its peers, not had the opportunity to confront its accuser. These laws redefining personhood surely mean that a pregnant woman cannot be incarcerated, as doing so requires confining a second person without due process.

If personhood begins in utero, a fetus will need a name and a Social Security number to begin exercising private rights and using public resources. A Social Security number is necessary to claim a child on taxes. It is also a requirement to act on behalf of a child privately, like opening a bank account, buying savings bonds or obtaining insurance coverage. Typically, parents apply for a Social Security number when they obtain a birth certificate, but if states declare that personhood begins at some earlier arbitrary point in time, they will need to provide evidence, perhaps through a life certificate, that this new person exists and resides in their state. Once the life is established, can a mother insure a six-week fetus and collect if she miscarries? Will the tax code be adjusted in these states to allow parents to claim their unborn children as dependents at conception?

If so, can a woman who suffers more than one miscarriage in a fiscal year claim all of her children?

Article I, Section 2 of the Constitution requires a census every 10 years to count all persons residing within the United States. If a fetus is granted personhood, it should be included in the count. The census currently asks about the age and date of birth of each household resident. Will it now include the date of conception in select states so that fetuses may be counted? There is the potential to unfairly skew census data and disproportionately apportion representatives and resources to those states.

These questions highlight the unintended and potentially absurd consequences of sweeping abortion bans. At the heart of the issue is how the 14th Amendment’s definitions of personhood and citizenship should be applied. States have been allowed to define the personhood of unnatural creatures — such as corporations — since very early in our nation’s history. In exchange for this freedom, states are not permitted to go back on their deal. In other words, once personhood rights are granted, a state may not deny life, liberty or property without due process, nor may a state deny equal protection under the law. States have never had the right to define the personhood of people. This was a subject — influenced either by place of birth or by complying with immigration and naturalization requirements — for the Constitution and federal law. State grants of natural personhood challenge this norm.

When states define natural personhood with the goal of overturning *Roe v. Wade*, they are inadvertently creating a system with two-tiered fetal citizenship. This is because *Roe* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* create a federal floor for access to the right to choose — a rule that some ability to abort a fetus exists in the United States. If these cases are overturned, that eliminates only the federal right to abortion access. Overturning *Roe* would not prohibit a state from continuing to allow access. In a post-*Roe* world, in states

like New York that ensure the right to choose ... citizenship will begin at birth. In states that move the line to define life as beginning [at] conception, personhood and citizenship will begin as soon as a woman knows she is pregnant.

Trying to define citizenship and personhood based on the laws of each state creates some far-fetched and even ridiculous scenarios. If we follow that logic, we'll tie our Constitution into a knot no court can untangle.

### WHAT IF THE VICTIM JUST SAYS "NO"?

**John Rafferty**

**W**hat happens when a fourteen-year-old rape victim, who is denied an abortion under Alabama's new no-exceptions law, refuses to accept or even touch or look at the baby when it is born?

What if she, mother or not still legally a child, refuses to cooperate in any way with hospital or state authorities?

What if her own parents, supporting her, refuse to pay for any hospital costs related to the birth or the subsequent custodial care and feeding of the infant?

What if the two-time victim of rape – once by a vicious single predator, and once by the sovereign state of Alabama in all its majesty – just says No?

### HEY DEMOCRATS:

#### THIS IS WHAT TO EXPECT EVERY DAY BETWEEN NOW AND NOVEMBER 3, 2020.

**John Rafferty**

**I** read about "moderate" Joe Biden referring to "my Republican colleagues" – as if we were still living in the 1970s – on the same day I read that Fox News' Fox & Friends co-host Ainsley Earhardt claimed for the second time that Democrats want to kill babies.

During an interview May 13 with Georgia Senator David Perdue concerning the new law in Georgia making abortion a crime punishable by death or life in prison, Earhardt, with a straight face, told a national audience:

*"It backfired on those Democrats when they all said you can have an abortion even after the baby's born, or kill the baby after it's born."*

Got it? All. Democrats. Kill. Babies.

And some of you are worried about "seeming extreme" for pursuing every constitutional means available to turn out of office a lying, racist, misogynist thief?

Get real, you're in a knife fight.

### WAIT, WAIT ... IT GETS WORSE

**A**t a rally of the faithful in Pennsylvania May 20, the lying, racist, misogynist thief ratcheted up the hate another notch, calling the legal FBI and DOJ investigations into the 2016 campaign "spying" and "treason".

*Treason! ... by "the other side", meaning us.*

*And the crowd chanted "Lock them up!"*

*Us. The "them" are us ... traitors.*

One online commentator wrote: "It could have been a rally in Nuremberg."

### THE OF-THE-MONTH AWARDS

**S**tupid is as stupid does, Forrest Gump's mama taught him, and maybe some of our public figures should have learned that same lesson in childhood ... before they grew up and opened their mouths in full view of the rest of us.

Here are a few of the latest idiots.

#### *Constitutional-Gourmet-Of-the-Month*

The San Antonio city council approved a new concessions contract for their airport – on the condition that anti-LGBT Chick-fil-A be excluded.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton exploded, howling that the decision was "inconsistent with the Constitution and Texas law", then heaped praise on our founding document that would have made the founders proud:

*"The Constitution's protection of religious liberty is somehow even better than Chick-fil-A's chicken."*

#### *Biblical-Scholar-Of-the-Month*

Ex-Congresswoman and still stupid Michele Bachmann has never seen "a more biblical president" than serial adulterer, pathological liar and scam artist Donald J. Trump:

*"We will, in all likelihood, never see a more godly, biblical president again in our lifetimes."*

#### *Economist-Of-the-Month*

Putting his best Fox News spin on the news that "brilliant businessman" Donald Trump had lost over a billion dollars in the 1980s (when everyone else was making fortunes), Brian Kilmeade told Fox News viewers that the *New York Times* article "shows that he lost a lot of money ...

*"... if you consider a billion dollars a lot of money."*

#### *Critical-Thinker-Of-the-Month*

Fellow Fox & Friends co-host Ainsley Earhardt claimed the billion-dollar loss actually proved Trump's brilliance:

*"Wow, it's pretty impressive all the things that he's done in his life. It's beyond what most of us could ever achieve."*

#### *Exorcist-Of-the-Month*

Making an argument not heard since the 17th century, anti-vaxxer Texas lawmaker Jonathan Strickland called vaccines "sorcery". While attacking a prominent vaccinologist and insisting "only the lord God almighty is in control", he said:

*"Parental rights mean more to us than your self-enriching 'science'."*

#### *White-House-Historian-Of-the-Month*

Ignoring Abigail Adams, Dolley Madison, Eleanor Roosevelt, Jacqueline Kennedy, Betty Ford and Michelle Obama, hate-mongering Christian Franklin Graham sent Melania Trump birthday wishes via Twitter.

He called the often-naked softcore porn model and probably "illegal" immigrant ...

*"... the classiest first lady our country has ever had."*

#### *Medical-Historian-Of-the-Month*

Louisiana state Senator John Milkovich trotted out the lie that vaccines cause autism (and that "tissue from aborted babies is now used in vaccines"), and raised the idiocy to new heights, claiming that when he was growing up ...

*"... autism did not exist."*

## WHAT'S A HUMANIST TO DO? WHEN BAD PEOPLE CREATE GREAT ART

Jonathan Engel

**H**BO recently aired a documentary called “Leaving Neverland” that delved into child sexual abuse allegations that were made a number of years ago against Michael Jackson. As we’ll recall either from contemporary accounts of the matter or the brouhaha engendered by the documentary itself, in 2004 “The King of Pop” was indicted, tried and acquitted of underage sex charges. Two men who had testified in Jackson’s defense at the trial were featured prominently in the documentary, wherein they recanted their previous testimony and stated that they had been molested by the musical mega-star.

I was never a big Michael Jackson fan, and so while I noted this story, I didn’t delve too deeply into it (I haven’t actually seen the HBO documentary). But one night while the uproar caused by the documentary was still in the news, something happened that caused me to think more deeply about the Jackson case and to ponder some deep questions that the case brings up.

I love 1960s soul music, and that night I was listening to one of my soul music mixes when the Jackson 5 song “I Want You Back” came on. As I mentioned I was never a big Jacksons fan (my taste runs more to The Temptations, The Four Tops and Marvin Gaye), but this song was on the mix. And so I thought: “Should I be listening to this?” In this #MeToo era, we have learned about quite a few artists who have been accused of behavior ranging from creepy and unsettling to criminal and abhorrent. The question is, as consumers/fans of the art created by these people, how do we respond?

As a humanist, I am inclined to believe that we should have some sort of objective criteria for deciding when we should or shouldn’t shun certain art because of the words/acts/beliefs of the artist. Should it depend on whether or not the artist in question was convicted of a crime? That at least would give us some kind of objective criteria, but it doesn’t feel like that’s enough. Michael Jackson was acquitted, but now two of his defense witnesses have recanted their testimony. Clearly a sticky wicket. What about the fact that Jackson was only about 10 years old when he recorded the song that I was listening to? Does that matter? Does it matter that Jackson is no longer alive, and therefore unable to defend himself (although he does still have plenty of defenders)? How about the nature of the offensive words or activities? And perhaps most importantly, should it matter to what extent we appreciate the art work in question?

As I stated earlier, I’m not that big a Michael Jackson fan, so it wouldn’t be difficult for me to refrain from listening to his music. But I am a big fan of Woody Allen’s movies. Like Jackson, Allen has been accused of child sexual abuse, but has never been convicted or, in Allen’s case, indicted. But while giving up Michael Jackson’s music wouldn’t be a problem for me, giving up Woody Allen’s movies would be. I love those movies (well, a lot of them, anyway). But I

don’t think this should matter. If you take the position that we should shun art made by people of questionable (or just plain bad) morals/ethics, I think it would be fundamentally dishonest to hedge our bets depending on how much the works of any particular artist mean to us. If we believe that we should refuse to view art created by bad people, then it must include our favorite artists and works, or the whole exercise would be a farce.

So maybe we shouldn’t be doing this at all. A reasonable argument can be made that figuring this all out is so tricky that we shouldn’t bother trying, and instead simply separate the artist from the art. That way we get the art we want without having to agonize over the righteousness of the artist. No muss, no fuss.

*But ... for me, this just doesn’t quite feel right.* For example, I always loved Bill Cosby. His stand-up movie, “Bill Cosby Himself”, is one of the funniest things I’ve ever seen. But now, I just can’t look at him, and I felt this way before he was a convicted criminal. But I still watch Woody Allen movies. What’s the difference? Delving into the details, I can say that Cosby was convicted, while Allen wasn’t, and also that Cosby has scores of accusers, while Allen has only one. But does that matter, and am I allowing my love of Allen’s art to overcome my suspicion of his actions? All I can say is that I hope not. So what am I left with? As unsatisfactory as it feels, I can come up with nothing better than to take this issue on a case-by-case basis, and try to “do the right thing” within that framework, keeping a close eye on my ingrained biases. It doesn’t feel like a complete solution, but it’s the best I can do.

*Comment: And I will continue to enjoy the poetry of anti-Semite T.S. Eliot and the music of Richard Wagner, while celebrating in these pages the racists and slavers Jefferson and Washington.– JR*

## #7 AND #8 OF THE TOP 10 REASONS I DON’T BELIEVE IN GOD

Greta Christina

*(Editor: Ms. Christina’s new book is Why Are You Atheists So Angry? 99 Things That Piss Off the Godless. We’re excerpting her “Top 10” in these pages – from her post on AlterNet 12/14/2018, one or two at a time.)*

*7: The complete failure of any sort of supernatural phenomenon to stand up to rigorous testing.*

**N**ot all religious and spiritual beliefs make testable claims. But some of them do. And in the face of actual testing, every one of those claims falls apart like Kleenex in a hurricane.

Whether it’s the power of prayer, or faith healing, or astrology, or life after death: the same pattern is seen. Whenever religious and supernatural beliefs have made testable claims, and those claims have been tested – not half-assedly tested, but really tested, using careful, rigorous, double-blind, placebo-controlled, replicated, etc. etc. testing methods – the claims have consistently fallen apart. Occasionally a scientific study has appeared that claimed to support something supernatural ... but more thorough

studies have always refuted them. Every time.

I'm not going to cite each one of these tests, or even most of them. ... Instead, I'll encourage you to spend a little time on the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry and Skeptical Inquirer websites. You'll see a pattern so consistent it boggles the mind: Claimants insist that Supernatural Claim X is real. Supernatural Claim X is subjected to careful testing, applying the standard scientific methods used in research to screen out bias and fraud. Supernatural Claim X is found to hold about as much water as a sieve. (And claimants, having agreed beforehand that the testing method is valid, afterwards insist that it wasn't fair.)

And don't say, "Oh, the testers were biased." That's the great thing about the scientific method. It's designed to screen out bias, as much as is humanly possible. When done right, it will give you the right answer, regardless of the bias of the people doing the testing.

And I want to repeat an important point about the supposed anti-religion bias in science. In the early days of science and the scientific method, most scientists did believe in God, and the soul, and the metaphysical. In fact, many early science experiments were attempts to prove the existence of these things, and discover their true natures, and resolve the squabbles about them once and for all. It was only after decades of these experiments failing to turn up anything at all that the scientific community began — gradually, and very reluctantly — to give up on the idea.

Supernatural claims only hold up under careless, casual examination. They are supported by wishful thinking, and confirmation bias (i.e., our tendency to overemphasize evidence that supports what we believe and to discard evidence that contradicts it), and our poor understanding and instincts when it comes to probability, and our tendency to see pattern and intention even when none exists, and a dozen other forms of cognitive bias and weird human brain wiring. When studied carefully, under conditions specifically designed to screen these things out, the claims vanish like the insubstantial imaginings they are.

#### **8: *The slipperiness of religious and spiritual beliefs.***

Not all religious and spiritual beliefs make testable claims. Many of them have a more "saved if we do, saved if we don't" quality. If things go the believer's way, it's a sign of God's grace and intervention; if they don't, then God moves in mysterious ways, and maybe he has a lesson to teach that we don't understand, and it's not up to us to question his will. No matter what happens, it can be twisted to prove that the belief is right.

That is a sure sign of a bad argument.

Here's the thing. It is a well-established principle in the philosophy of science that, if a theory can be supported no matter what possible evidence comes down the pike, it is useless. It has no power to explain what's already happened, or to predict what will happen in the future. The theory of gravity, for instance, could be disproven by things suddenly falling up; the theory of evolution could be disproven by finding rabbits in the pre-Cambrian fossil layer. These theories predict that those things won't happen; if they do,

the theories go poof. But if your theory of God's existence holds up no matter what happens — whether your friend with cancer gets better or dies, whether natural disasters strike big sinful cities or small God-fearing towns — then it's a useless theory, with no power to predict or explain anything.

What's more, when atheists challenge theists on their beliefs, the theists' arguments shift and slip around in an annoying "moving the goalposts" way. Hard-line fundamentalists, for instance, will insist on the unchangeable perfect truth of the Bible; but when challenged on its specific historical or scientific errors, they insist that you're not interpreting those passages correctly. (If the book needs interpreting, then how perfect can it be?)

And progressive ecumenical believers can be unbelievably slippery about what they do and don't believe. Is God real, or a metaphor? Does God intervene in the world, or doesn't he? Do they even believe in God, or do they just choose to act as if they believe because they find it useful? Debating with a progressive believer is like wrestling with a fish: the arguments aren't very powerful, but they're slippery, and they don't give you anything firm to grab onto.

Once again, that's a sure sign of a bad argument. If you can't make your case and then stick by it, or modify it, or let it go ... then you don't have a good case.

(And if you're making any version of the "Shut up, that's why" argument — arguing that it's intolerant to question religious beliefs, or that letting go of doubts about faith makes you a better person, or that doubting faith will get you tortured in Hell, or any of the other classic arguments intended to quash debate rather than address it — that's a sure sign that your argument is in the toilet.)

### **READERS RESPOND**

*To the Editor:* Re: "Is the Universe Real?" (PIQUE, April), Occam's razor, also known as the law of parsimony, is the principle that simpler solutions are more likely to be correct than complex ones. When there are competing solutions to a problem, we should select the one with the fewest parts.

The notion that our reality *is* a simulation is much, much more complicated than the notion that it *is not* a simulation. So, by Occam's Razor, it should be rejected.

For me, the notion that our reality *could be* a simulation is not even conceivable. And there's another problem. To have a simulation you need to have a simulator ...

God? Again! Really?

One more thing:

I see no reason for attempts to combine the sub-atomic domain governed by quantum mechanics, etc., with the macro domain governed by gravity. There is no evidence that these domains interact or influence each other in any way. Gravity has no effect on sub-atomic particles, it does not reach into atoms. And sub-atomic particles, if there are any outside of atoms, have no effect on the cosmos because their mass is so tiny. — *Giddian Beer*

## JESUS COMPLAINS, MO EXPLAINS

(Transcribed from [www.jesusandmo.net/comic/gone](http://www.jesusandmo.net/comic/gone))

(The boys are in their favorite pub, nursing their lagers.)

**Jesus:** God bless those brave, principled men of Alabama who passed the bill banning abortions even when the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest.

**Barmaid:** Those men will never get pregnant.

**Jesus:** That doesn't mean they shouldn't stand up for the rights of the unborn child.

**Barmaid:** To force a woman or girl to carry to term against her will is unconscionable, but in the case of familial rape, it is downright barbaric.

(Jesus leaves abruptly, his pint unfinished.)

**Barmaid:** Where's he gone?

**Mohammed:** The circumstances of his conception mean he takes this issue very personally.

## UM ... IS THIS GOOD NEWS?

Researchers at the Medical Research Council Laboratory of Molecular Biology in Britain have rewritten the DNA of the bacteria *Escherichia coli*, fashioning a synthetic genome four times larger and far more complex than any previously created — in other words, a living organism whose DNA is entirely human-made.

## BILL NYE, THE SCIENCE GUY, IS THROUGH BEING A NICE GUY

Bill Nye is sick of explaining climate change to idiots. The well-known science commentator appeared on HBO's "Last Week Tonight with John Oliver" on May 12 and put things bluntly while talking about the Green New Deal. To see the whole funny and potty-mouthed segment, go to ...

[www.cnn.com/2019/05/13/entertainment/bill-nye-global-warming-video/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2019/05/13/entertainment/bill-nye-global-warming-video/index.html)

Meanwhile, here's the meat of what "nice guy" Nye had to say:

*"By the end of this century, if emissions keep rising, the average temperature on Earth could go up another four to eight degrees. What I'm saying is the planet's on fucking fire. There are a lot of things we could do to put it out — are any of them free? No, of course not. Nothing's free, you idiots.*

*"Grow the fuck up. You're not children anymore. I didn't mind explaining photosynthesis to you when you were 12. But you're adults now, and this is an actual crisis, got it?"*

*"Safety glasses off, motherfuckers."*

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