

# PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

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January, 2020

*Book Now for the February 15 SHSNY 12th Annual Darwin Day Dinner - Page 7*

Happy New Year, and we lead with the (really) good news. Then we think about them, a universe of loops, and about lying to kids (*about um ... you know*). We reflect on abortion in America, consider religion and *mensch*-iness, compare Christians and Christianity, worry about “none” and, finally, take a caution from our first Honorary Member and just enough advice from our second. —JR

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**Good news for the New Year:**

**IT'S ALL GETTING BETTER ... REALLY.**

**Arthur C. Brooks**

(Excerpted from “The world is doing much better than the bad news makes us think”, *washingtonpost.com*, 12/2/2019)

Major portions of the world are in conflict and some, in fact, are going to hell,” President Trump said two years ago in a speech before the U.N. Most things the president says are controversial, but the only disagreement most Americans might have had with this statement was his use of “some”. As a rule, we tend to believe — mistakenly — that the world is getting worse.

There is a natural human bias toward bad news. The title of a 1998 article in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* sums it up: “Negative Information Weighs More Heavily on the Brain.” Negative stimuli get our attention much more than positive stimuli — which makes evolutionary sense for survival. Nice things are enjoyable; bad things can be deadly, so focus on them. And given that, in the news media, attention equals money, we can see the commercial reason for a lack of headlines such as “Millions not going to bed hungry tonight.”

Frequently, however, the bad-news bias gives us a highly inaccurate picture of the world. For example, according to a 2013 survey, 67 percent of Americans think global poverty is on the rise, and 68 percent believe it is impossible to solve extreme poverty in the foreseeable future. Meanwhile, starvation-level poverty has decreased by 80 percent since 1970, according to economists at Columbia and MIT.

The truth is that while there is plenty to worry about on any given day, the world is generally getting better. A few prominent voices are pointing this out. Take, for example, Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, who has said he believes that by 2035 there will be almost no poor countries in the

world. And it's not just income. In health, education, security and freedom, the world is improving, according to Steven Pinker in his best-selling 2018 book *Enlightenment Now*.

Fresh, comprehensive evidence of progress comes in the new Legatum Prosperity Index, based on data from 167 countries — with 99.4 percent of the world's population — on 300 social and economic indicators of well-being. ... Across those dimensions, from 2009 to 2019, 148 of the 167 countries have seen net progress — much of it dramatic, and especially so among the poorest countries in the world.

The natural tendency with an index is to look for the “best” country or region. According to the index's scoring, Denmark and the other Nordic countries come out on top, while the best-scoring region as a whole is North America. However, the real differences between the wealthy countries are differences not captured in the index, because they correspond to personal preferences. For example, Denmark is the “best”, assuming one wants to live in a secular, homogeneous culture with high income redistribution. Some want that; others don't. It is more good news that there are a lot of different “styles of prosperity” in the world today.

Greater insights from the report come from seeing the progress in the developing world. In the vast majority of countries, health, living conditions and education are advancing rapidly. Not long ago, the two most improved countries from 2009-2019, Myanmar and Togo, were considered by many to be lost causes. They have a long way to go but show nonetheless that progress is possible in a relatively short period of time.

Not all countries are improving, unfortunately, but here again there are important learning opportunities. In the past decade, 19 countries have deteriorated. The greatest declines came in Venezuela (the victim of incompetent and kleptocratic government), Syria and Yemen (which have

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suffered civil wars). In general, the index reveals that when countries fail to progress in the modern world, it is not due to region or any population-specific characteristics. No one is destined for poverty. The problem is generally war, tyranny and poor governance.

There is still a great deal of work to be done around the world, but the good news from the Prosperity Index and from people such as Gates and Pinker should be much more salient in our thinking. Bad news doesn't just hold our attention; it also demobilizes us because, particularly when it concerns people far away, it suggests that disaster is inevitable, when in fact it is not. Hope — the belief that something can be done, and we can do it — inspires action. Bad news, especially in world poverty, often stimulates hopelessness and, thus, inaction.

The world is not getting worse; it is getting indisputably better for most countries and most people. Billions are freer, healthier and more prosperous than they would ever have been in human history. We should be thankful for that this holiday season, and resolve to push even harder.

### THEY WORD OF THE YEAR

*(Excerpted from CFI's The Morning heresy, 12/12/2019)*

If the headline above is confusing, it's because Merriam-Webster, the dictionary people, announced last month that their 2019 Word of the Year was/is "they".

That reflects a surprising fact: even a basic term—a personal pronoun—can rise to the top of our data. Although our lookups are often driven by events in the news, the dictionary is also a primary resource for information about language itself, and the shifting use of they has been the subject of increasing study and commentary in recent years. Lookups for they increased by 313 percent in 2019 over the previous year.

English famously lacks a gender-neutral singular pronoun to correspond neatly with singular pronouns like everyone or someone, and as a consequence they has been used for this purpose for over 600 years.

More recently, though, they has also been used to refer to one person whose gender identity is nonbinary, a sense that is increasingly common in published, edited text, as well as social media and in daily personal interactions between English speakers. There's no doubt that its use is established in the English language, which is why it was added to the Merriam-Webster.com dictionary this past September.

I think it's a really cool choice. Right-wing groups of course hate it, which makes it all the sweeter.

The Christian hate group Liberty Counsel is using its latest fundraising pitch to wage an all-out war against ... the word "they".

"Nonbinary" is the headache-inducing term for someone who insists that he or she "is neither entirely male nor entirely female", as Merriam-Webster puts it.

Conservative Christianity: Where God poofing everything into existence is totally normal but seeing the word "nonbinary" gives you a headache.

### YOUR NEW YEAR RESOLUTION: UNDERSTAND LOOP QUANTUM GRAVITY

Carlo Rovelli

*(Excerpted from Seven Brief Lessons on Physics, on delanceyplace.com, 12/11/2019)*

Loop quantum gravity endeavors to combine general relativity and quantum mechanics. It is a cautious attempt because it uses only hypotheses already contained within these theories, rewritten to make them compatible. But its consequences are radical: a further profound modification of the way we look at reality.

The idea is simple. General relativity has taught us that space is not an inert box but rather something dynamic: a kind of immense, mobile snail shell in which we are contained — one that can be compressed and twisted. Quantum mechanics, on the other hand, has taught us that every field of this kind is "made of quanta" and has a fine, granular structure. Physical space is also "made of quanta".

The central result of loop quantum gravity is indeed that space is not continuous, that it is not infinitely divisible but made up of grains, or "atoms of space". These are extremely minute: a billion billion times smaller than the smallest atomic nuclei. The theory describes these "atoms of space" in mathematical form and provides equations that determine their evolution. They are called "loops", and are linked to one another, forming a network that weaves the texture of space, like the rings of an immense chain mail.

Where are these quanta of space? Nowhere. They are not in space because they are themselves the space. Space is created by the linking of these individual quanta of gravity.

But it's the second consequence of the theory that is the most extreme. Just as the idea of a continuous space that contains things disappears, so the idea of an elementary and primal "time" flowing regardless of things also vanishes. The equations describing grains of space and matter no longer contain the variable "time". This doesn't mean that everything is stationary and unchanging. On the contrary, it means that change is ubiquitous — but elementary processes cannot be ordered in a common succession of "instants". At the minute scale of the grains of space, the dance of nature does not take place to the rhythm of the baton of a single orchestral conductor, at a single tempo: every process dances independently with its neighbors, to its own rhythm. The passage of time is internal to the world, is born in the world itself in the relationship between quantum events that comprise the world and are themselves the source of time.

The world described by the theory is thus further distanced from the one with which we are familiar. There is no longer space that "contains" the world, and there is no longer time "in which" events occur. There are only elementary processes wherein quanta of space and matter continually interact with one another. The illusion of space and time that continues around us is a blurred vision of this swarming of elementary processes, just as a calm, clear Alpine lake consists in reality of a rapid dance of myriads of minuscule water molecules.

## DEAD IS DEAD, DON'T LIE TO YOUR KIDS

Tom Krattenmaker

(Excerpted from “No, We Shouldn’t Lie to Our Children about God and Death”, *thehumanist.com*, 12/2/2019)

**T**he *Wall Street Journal* opinion page has advice for nontheist parents: tell your kids God and heaven are real even if you don’t believe it.

Writing on December 5, therapist Erica Komisar notes that she’s often asked by parents, “How do I talk to my child about death if I don’t believe in God or heaven?” Komisar says she has a simple answer for them: “Lie.”

“The idea that you simply die and turn to dust may work for some adults,” Komisar writes, “but it doesn’t help children. Belief in heaven helps them grapple with this tremendous and incomprehensible loss.”

Unfortunately, this harmful nonsense is no isolated case. In fact, as one of the nation’s largest and most influential newspapers was featuring Komisar’s irresponsible advice, rhetoric continued flying across the culture blaming the country’s growing secularism for moral decay, nihilism, and despair.

In now-infamous remarks at Notre Dame earlier this fall—described by legal affairs writer Jeffrey Toobin as the worst speech ever given by someone in his lofty position—Attorney General William Barr charged that “the campaign to destroy the traditional moral order has ... brought with it immense suffering and misery. And yet the forces of secularism, ignoring these tragic results, press on with even greater militancy.”

There you have it, secular America: godlessness is destroying all that is good and moral. Not to mention damaging our children.

All this would be cause for great alarm and tidal waves of parental guilt if any of it were valid. It’s not. This we know from sociological research, from our own and other people’s experiences, and from simple logic. The growing ranks of the nonreligious are living ethical and meaningful lives, by and large, and doing an admirable job of raising their children despite hazards, from toxic Internet culture to the anxiety over climate change.

In her *Journal* article, Komisar cites a 2018 Harvard study finding that youths growing up in religious or spiritual families enjoy better outcomes than those from nonreligious families: greater mental health, higher rates of volunteering, and lower likelihood of drug use and early sexual activity, among other metrics.

It’s almost enough to make a nontheist parent rush out and find a church or synagogue to join. Until you realize that it’s not the theism that produces better outcomes. It’s the communal aspect of religion, which can be, should be—and frequently is—replicated in secular ways.

Wendy Thomas Russell, a journalist and author who specializes in parenting issues, told me in an email exchange that she finds Komisar’s “lie to your children” advice as ill-informed as it is ethically challenged.

“Dig deeper into such studies and you will find that the underlying reason for the boosts in well-being are often linked to the social aspect of religious services—not the belief systems,” says Russell, author of the book *Relax, It’s Just God: How and Why to Talk to Kids About Religion When You’re Not Religious*. “Having a community of like-minded people who care about you and look out for you is truly a life-enhancer for anyone, young or old.”

And what of lying to one’s children to spare them the discomfort of knowing they will die one day?

“I’m not suggesting that some people don’t find comfort in their religious beliefs,” Russell told me.

But that alone does not justify lying to children. Children are people. They deserve respect. And contrary to popular belief, the ethic of reciprocity still applies to them. If I don’t want my child to lie to me about tough subjects, then I can’t lie to her about tough subjects. ...When lying becomes an important part of child-rearing, something is seriously amiss.

Indeed, there are ways to help children face their mortality without dooming them to nihilism and despair. As a small boy, I cried when I learned that I, like everyone, would die. I don’t recall receiving any comfort from notions of heaven (even though my family was religious-ish). But talking with my mother helped me realize that death was probably so far off that it was almost as if I would “live forever”. I stopped dwelling on it. Most kids do.

Although secular parents can’t comfort their kids with talk of God and heaven—at least not with straight faces and ethics intact—there is much they can give them, Russell points out. They can give them children’s literature that explains death in soft, warm terms without invoking religion. They can give them a basic scientific understanding of what it means to die and be dead.

“We can talk about how being dead is not painful,” Russell says. “People who die don’t get hungry or scared. These are things that are important for small children to know.”

We can help kids understand the very real ways in which our loved ones—and we ourselves—live on after death: through cherished memories, through the continuation of the projects to which we contributed, to the advancement of principles and values we lived out and promoted.

Secular parents can fill their kids’ lives with love and learning and the kinds of communal experiences that yield the positive aspects of religion without the theistic trappings: through clubs and teams, through meaningful family rituals and shared experiences.

A heads-up for Erica Komisar and the *Wall Street Journal*: secular parents aren’t condemned to an impossible choice between lying about God or telling their kids they’re “going to die and turn to dust”, as claimed by the *Journal* headline. We don’t have to choose between theism and nihilism. Not for our children. Not for ourselves.

*Comment: I know anecdotal evidence is suspect, but in my own family’s case my four kids, and their eight kids, all survived hearing the truth – imagination and intelligence intact. – JR*

## FICTION, LIES, AND THE BIBLE

(Editor: Readers of “How To Read the Bible. Really? How To Read the Bible?” in December PIQUE, will be interested in the following letter to The New York Times, published 12/13/2019.)

*To the Editor:* In his review of Karen Armstrong’s *The Lost Art of Scripture: Rescuing the Sacred Texts* (Dec. 1), Nicholas Kristof includes a quote from Armstrong: “Because its creation myths do not concur with recent scientific discoveries, militant atheists have condemned the Bible as a pack of lies, while Christian fundamentalists have developed a ‘Creation science’ claiming that the Book of Genesis is scientifically sound.”

As an atheist who dealt repeatedly with creationists as they attempted to force their myth into the science curriculum, I can attest that I have never viewed Genesis as “a pack of lies”. Rather, I view it as ancient fiction.

*The Oxford English Dictionary* defines a lie as “a false statement made with intent to deceive”. Those who constructed the Genesis account of creation could not have known that their story was false by the scientific standards we now hold. Modern religious zealots who still promulgate scriptural creation myths as true when they know better are, however, a different matter. They, indeed, are guilty of lying. — *Joseph D. McInerney, Lutherville, Md.*

*The writer is a past president of the National Association of Biology Teachers and a former director of the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study.*

## THE FIREHOSE OF FALSEHOOD, THE SQUIRT GUN OF TRUTH

Lucky Tran

(Excerpted from “Firehosing”, *The Guardian.com*, 11/7/2019)

**E**ver heard of “firehosing”? It’s a relatively new term coined by Rand researchers Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews in 2016 to describe the propaganda tactics Russian authorities use to quell dissent and control the political landscape. The term has since been applied to the authoritarian behavior of leaders in the US, Brazil and the Philippines.

What does this have to do with anti-science talkshows? So far, the concept of firehosing has only been applied to political propaganda. But I think there are many lessons here for those tracking areas of science denial such as vaccines and climate crisis.

Firehosing relies on pushing out as many lies as possible as frequently as possible. That’s typical for propaganda, but the aspect that makes firehosing a unique strategy is that it doesn’t require the propagandist to make the lies believable. That seems counterintuitive, but as Carlos Maza of Vox explains, firehosing is effective because its goal isn’t to persuade. It’s to rob facts of their power. Firehosing inundates us with so many wild opinions that it becomes exhausting to continually disprove them. In this scenario, reality is reduced to positioning and who can sell their position best. ...

How do we combat firehosing? There is no silver bullet, and we are still learning, but the researchers at Rand do make several suggestions. They emphasize that factchecking alone is ineffective: “Don’t expect to counter the firehose of falsehood with the squirt gun of truth.” Instead, it is better to forewarn audiences about the methods that propagandists use to manipulate public opinion.

Another counter-strategy is to disrupt the flow of disinformation. For instance, public pressure earlier this year prompted tech companies like Facebook and YouTube to remove false anti-vaccine content from their platforms. For more traditional platforms like TV, audiences can similarly push networks to withdraw their support and talkshow guests to withdraw their participation. The media community could also create accountability and self-regulation systems, a practice proven effective in Finland.

Steve Novella, author of *The Skeptic’s Guide to the Universe*, posted at Neurologica on theness.com ...

*“The relatively innocent firehoser is just naïve, and perhaps intellectually lazy. They accept the volume of evidence offered without evaluating any single piece in detail, and without considering alternative explanations. Essentially theirs is a sincere failure of critical thinking. But this end of the spectrum also blends into the more sinister end, where firehosing is used as a deliberate propaganda strategy.*

*At this end the firehoser knows what they are doing. They are not intellectually lazy, they are intellectually dishonest. They know they are spouting falsehoods, or are indifferent to their truth status. The purpose of their communication is not to persuade, but to confuse and befuddle, even to distract. Go ahead, deal with all these lies. I can pile them on endlessly. While you’re busy doing that, I will make my emotional and ideological appeals. I will build a compelling narrative, and you will lose before you even realize you are playing the wrong game.”*

## JESUS AND MO DISCOVER TRIBAL EPISTEMOLOGY

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

*Jesus:* Have you heard of “Tribal Epistemology”?

*Mohammed:* No, what is it?

*Jesus:* It’s a way of evaluating the truth or falsity of a statement based on whether the person making it is a member of your ideological tribe or someone from the other side. So although the statement may be supported by empirical evidence, it is rejected if it doesn’t support the values or goals of the tribe.

*Mo:* Sounds like the kind of bullshit those godless liberals would come up with.

*Jesus:* Yeah, they’re so full of it.

**O**ne must choose between God and Man, and all “radicals” and “progressives”, from the mildest liberal to the most extreme anarchist, have in effect chosen Man.

— *George Orwell*

## NONE? A QUESTION FOR SECULAR HUMANISTS

Joel Galker

*“Do secularists amount to anything more than a subculture or variety of Nones, as in “None of the above?”*

I don't like or agree with the label bestowed on secularists, me most particularly, as “Nones”. No, “I am not *just* a None”, as a secular humanist told me a year or two ago, and who only a month ago asked in a roundabout way if the remark had been offensive to me.

The subject might make a good feature in PIQUE, asking readers about their understanding of secularism under the U.S. Constitution, about being nonbelievers as opposed to believers. Secularism might be something more than the “None of the above” suggested on surveys and government forms, sometimes a way of slotting those who oppose the mingling, classifying, and privileging the major establishment religions that undermine American secular democracy. And raising the possibility of equal treatment under the law absent the virtual federal franchise of certain “major” religions.

It's not like asking whether you prefer Coke to Pepsi. Slotting oneself as a None implies to me a capitulation to the political project of the aggressive varieties of religion. I remind you of the phrase “self-hating Jew”.

I think it's possible to be both secularist and a believer – and many other things, too. It seems akin to being at least thoughtful about the proposed questions regarding citizenship on the next census. I'm not interested here in statistics on government surveys, but about understanding secularism in the politics of the culture war. Being “None of the above” in regard to religion doesn't make me a None – I'm not that agreeable.

There are a lot of gray areas in this subject, but I think it's worthwhile to at least know who I think I am.

*Comment: How about it, readers? Does “None” define you? Does it even fit you? As Judas asks Jesus in “Jesus Christ, Superstar”: Who do you think you are?*

*Your opinions to editor@shsny.org, please. – JR*

## YOU DON'T NEED RELIGION TO BE A MENSCH

Jonathan Engel

The religious right, never a paragon of reason and rationality, has gone nuts. Recently, both pastors and politicians have taken to declaring that Donald Trump was picked by their god to be president. Examples abound.

In November of 2019 then Secretary of Energy Rick Perry referred to Trump as “God's chosen one to be President of the United States”. This sentiment was echoed by former Rep. Michelle Bachmann (R-MN) and former White House spokesperson Sarah Huckabee Sanders. The Rev. Franklin Graham recently stated “I think God was behind the last election.” (Did he mean the 2016 presidential election, or the more recent 2018 Congressional “Blue Wave” election? I'm just wondering.) If I believed in their god, I would be

offended by this. Donald Trump appointed and anointed by the god I believe in? God would have to be a malevolent moron to have arranged for Trump to be president.

Be that as it may, some liberals have taken to responding to this nonsense with theological arguments of their own. As misguided as it is, I can understand the inclination to do so. Religious right fanatics are taking positions that are the opposite of what the Christian Bible purports that Jesus preached, such as caring for the poor, welcoming immigrants, turning the other cheek, etc. So pointing out their faith-based hypocrisy seems like something that should be done. But we certainly don't want to be debating religion while we should be discussing public policy. And we certainly don't want any religious litmus test for liberals.

For example, in November, *The New York Times* ran an opinion piece by Bianca Vivion Brooks called “We Need a Religious Left”, in which she wrote, “My faith shapes my progressive values. I wish that were true of more liberals.” Why? Are my values any less liberal because they're based on humanism, and not on the belief in a non-existent supernatural being? To believe so is arrogant, non-sensical and self-defeating.

And then we have Nancy Pelosi invoking her Catholic upbringing to upbraid a snotty reporter about whether or not she “hates” Trump. Because Catholics never hate. Except when they do. Pelosi also took the opportunity to inform us that she regularly prays for our president.

This is a road we should not go down. Nobody needs religion to know right from wrong and to act on that knowledge. Scripture is famously malleable. Before and during the Civil War, preachers on both sides of the slavery issue used Bible passages to justify their positions.

Take a step back and think about that for a moment: *Both sides of the slavery issue?! The mind boggles.*

The Bible says (accurately or inaccurately, no one really knows for sure) that Jesus said some good things on social issues. But why should that matter to me, or influence arguments over policy? I have my own ethical and moral beliefs, and arguing over what people meant in a book written thousands of years ago is pointless, and to me, meaningless. What Jesus would say or do about anything is both unknowable and irrelevant. The salient question is, what do we do in the here and now to fight climate change, ensure freedom and justice, eliminate poverty, protect human rights, and so forth.

And memo to Speaker Pelosi: your praying for Trump is obviously doing no good whatsoever. Time to give it up.

*Dumpiphany* (n.): The realization that the entire conversation you've been having is so difficult to follow is that you're talking to an idiot.

Example:

*She:* Of course, much of Kierkegaard's religious philosophy can be traced back to his being a Taurus.

*You:* Possibly, but ... wait ... *what?* You ...

– Zach Weinersmith, *Saturday Morning Breakfast Cereal*

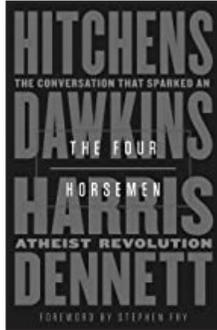
# SHSNY CALENDAR: JANUARY – MARCH 2020

## SHSNY BOOK CLUB THURS, JAN 2, 7-8:30 pm THE COMMUNITY CHURCH OF NEW YORK

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

### THE FOUR HORSEMEN: The Conversation That Sparked an Atheist Revolution

In 2007, At the dawn of the new atheist movement, the thinkers who became known as “the four horsemen,” the heralds of religion’s unraveling – Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett – sat down together over cocktails.



What followed was a rigorous, pathbreaking, and enthralling exchange, which has been viewed millions of times since it was first posted on YouTube. This is intellectual inquiry at its best: exhilarating, funny, and unpredictable, sincere and probing, reminding us just how varied and colorful the threads of modern atheism are.

Here is the transcript of that conversation, in print for the first time, augmented by material from the living participants: Dawkins, Harris, and Dennett. These new essays, introduced by Stephen Fry, mark the evolution of their thinking and highlight particularly resonant aspects of this epic exchange.

John Rafferty will lead.

– Hardcover 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, FEB 6, 7-8:30 pm Community Church of New York GODS, GRAVES, AND

### SCHOLARS: The Story of Archaeology C.W. Ceram

C.W. Ceram visualized archeology as a wonderful combination of high adventure, romance, history and scholarship, and this book, a chronicle of man's search for his past, reads like a dramatic narrative. Here is much of the history of civilization and the stories of the men who rediscovered it.

Dorothy Kahn will lead.

– Paperback(s) and Kindle available

## SHSNY BOOK CLUB THURS, MAR 5, 7-8:30 pm Community Church of New York THREE ROADS TO QUANTUM GRAVITY

Lee Smolin

An accessible overview of the attempts to build a final “theory of everything”. Smolin explains in simple terms what scientists are talking about when they say the world is made from exotic entities such as loops, strings, and black holes and tells the fascinating stories behind the discoveries.

“A mix of science, philosophy and science fiction at once entertaining, thought-provoking, fabulously ambitious and fabulously speculative.” – *The New York Times*

Earle Bowers will lead.

– Paperback(s) and Kindle available

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## BRUNCH & CONVERSATION SUN, Jan 19, 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 \$16 breakfast special, the Bloody Marys are hot, the beer is cold, and conversation sparkles.



Come join 15 or 20 fellow free-thinkers for food, fun and lively conversation, including the Dorothy Kahn-led ...

*After-Brunch Discussion:*

*Is cynicism about our corrupt politics the problem, or the corruption?*

## GREAT LECTURES ON DVD THURS, JAN 24, 7:00 pm

Nancy Adelman’s apartment  
205 Third Ave. (6H)

### AN ESSENTIALLY UNREPRESENTATIVE REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

Lawrence Lessig

Lawrence Lessig is the Roy L. Furman Professor of Law at Harvard Law School, and one of Scientific American’s “Top 50 Visionaries”. His mission, the focus of his activism, is to get money out of politics.

This presentation, made at a 2018 Harvard reunion, warns of the divide – in “democracies” the world over – between the people whom democracies are supposed to represent, and the elites who actually run the shows. Even worse, he posits, is a growing “skepticism about the very idea of democracy”.

# SHSNY CALENDAR: JANUARY – MARCH 2020

## SHSNY FICTION BOOK CLUB

**TUES, JAN 14, 7:00 pm**  
**Nancy Adelman's apartment**  
**205 Third Ave. (6H)**

Come for wine, cheese, and sparkling conversation about

### **A CONFEDERACY OF DUNCES**

**John Kennedy Toole**

**A** Pulitzer Prize-winning comic masterpiece that outswifts Swift, whose poem gives the book its title. Toole's hero, one Ignatius J. Reilly, is "huge, obese, fractious, fastidious, a latter-day Gargantua, a Don Quixote of the New Orleans French Quarter."

Filled with unforgettable characters and unbelievable plot twists, shimmering with intelligence, and dazzling in its originality, Toole's brilliantly zany comic classic just keeps getting better year after year.

– *Paperback and Kindle available.*

**To reserve your seat on the sofa,  
contact: [editor@shsny.org](mailto:editor@shsny.org)**

### *Advance-Reading Notice:*

**Feb 11: *Stay With Me***

**Ayobami Adebayo**

**T**his celebrated, unforgettable first novel ("A bright, big-hearted demonstration of female spirit." –*The Guardian*), shortlisted for the prestigious Women's Prize for Fiction and set in Nigeria, gives voice to both husband and wife as they tell the story of their marriage – and the forces that threaten to tear it apart.

**Mar 10: *Freaky Deaky***

**Elmore Leonard**

**O**ver-the-hill former counter-culture revolutionaries decide to turn bomb-making from political statement to a profitable enterprise, in an explosively funny thriller by "the world's greatest cops 'n' robbers novelist".

*Book Now for the:*

## **12th Annual SHSNY Darwin Day Celebration**

**Saturday, February 15, 6:30 – 9:30 pm, at**

**Pete's Tavern**

*("The Tavern O. Henry Made Famous")*

**129 East 18 Street**

(in the upstairs Speakeasy Room), with

**Dr. Isabel Behncke**

**"Primate Journeys:**

***Darwin's influence in Understanding our Primate Origins"***



Isabel Behncke is a primatologist, professor, member of the Leakey Foundation, a pioneer adventurer-scientist, and the first South American (originally from Chile) to follow great apes in the wild (trekking more than 3000km in the jungles of Congo to study bonobos). For our Darwin Day gathering, Professor Behncke will talk about her

work within the context of Darwin's own writings regarding natural selection.

Just for fun, Google "Isabel Behncke", then watch one or more of her insightful and entertaining videos; one's a TED Talk.

**Darwin Day Dinner is just \$65 per person (tax & tip included)**

*(or \$70pp after Saturday, February 8)*

*(There will be a full cash bar.)*

### *Appetizers:*

Penne a la Vodka or Fried Calamari

### *Salad:*

House Mesclun Salad with Balsamic Vinaigrette

### *Entrees:*

Chicken Breast du Jour with Potato Puree & Vegetables

Seared Shell Steak with Wine Sauce with Potato Puree & Vegetables

Roast Filet of Salmon with Potato Puree & Vegetables

Eggplant Parmigiana with Pasta

### *Desserts:*

Tortoni, Spumoni or Homemade Tiramisu

Coffee or Tea

### **Book Now! Save \$5 per person!**

Space in Pete's Speakeasy Room is limited, and both their staff and our volunteers need advance time to plan. So please book by Saturday, February 8 – preferably now, please! – to save \$5 and pay just \$65 per person. After Feb 8, Dinner will cost \$70 pp. Pay by credit card or PayPal at [www.shsny.org](http://www.shsny.org), or by check made out and mailed to SHSNY, P.O. Box 7661, New York, NY 10150-7661. Questions? Email [editor@shsny.org](mailto:editor@shsny.org).



## WOMEN HAVE ALWAYS HAD ABORTIONS

Lauren MacIvor Thompson

(Reprinted from *newyorktimes.com*, 12/13/2019)

Over the course of American history, women of all classes, races, ages and statuses have ended their pregnancies, both before there were any laws about abortion and after a raft of 19th-century laws restricted it. Our ignorance of this history, however, equips those in the anti-abortion movement with the power to create dangerous narratives. They peddle myths about the past where wayward women sought abortions out of desperation, pathetic victims of predatory abortionists. They wrongly argue that we have long thought about fetuses as people with rights. And they improperly frame *Roe v. Wade* as an anomaly, saying it liberalized a practice that Americans had always opposed.

But the historical record shows a far different set of conclusions.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, abortion was legal under common law before “quickening,” or when the pregnant woman could feel the fetus move, beginning around 16 weeks. The birth rate steadily dropped in the decades after the American Revolution, as couples sought to control the size of their families for a variety of reasons.

Abortion in the early stages of a pregnancy was common and generally not considered immoral or murderous. Along with breastfeeding, abstinence, the use of the rhythm method, vaginal douching and the use of herbs like pennyroyal or savin, which were believed to stimulate menstruation, abortion was considered part of the universe of what we now call “birth control”. By the 1820s, abortion services and contraceptive devices were advertised in newspapers with coded language.

Although 19th-century contraceptive and abortion practices were largely unregulated and often dangerous, the ubiquity of the advertisements indicates just how necessary women found them. They also talked about family planning in private diaries and letters, as well as in public lectures and tracts, using different words, of course. But the conversations were omnipresent.

Most women’s rights activists in the 1800s did not openly embrace contraceptives or abortion as part of their national platform. They knew that doing so would have increased men’s sexual access to women, while allowing them to escape responsibility for any consequences. Instead, reformers promoted “voluntary motherhood”, the right of women to refuse their husbands’ sexual demands and the right to bear children only when they felt ready. Reformers knew that women’s right to bodily integrity, above even the right to vote, was the key to truly becoming full citizens.

Beginning in the 1850s, however, the crusade against abortion began in earnest. Physicians, in trying to persuade legislators to criminalize abortion and birth control, sought to solidify their professional expertise. In an era where American medicine was rife with “irregular” and untrained practitioners, many viewed anti-abortion reform as the key to improving the public’s perceptions of physicians and

establishing their place as respected members of society.

Some of their arguments focused on the “rights of the unborn”, a view at odds with much of public sentiment at the time, and also with the Supreme Court. It ruled in *Dietrich v. Northampton* that fetuses who died before they could live separate from their mother were not persons as recognized by the courts. Additionally, physicians were worried about the threat of “race suicide” if white, native-born women continued to shirk their motherly duties.

Even the *Journal of the American Medical Association* noted, “the means employed to prevent conception, and the practice of criminal abortion, are not committed by the Jews and Catholics to anything like the degree that they obtain among the Protestants.” American physicians drew on nativist and anti-immigrant fears to argue that the “ignorant, the low-lived and the alien” would outbreed good, Protestant Americans and destroy the nation.

By 1900 most states had passed laws restricting abortion or contraception. The Comstock law, passed in 1873, had also classified contraception and abortion information and advertising as legal obscenity for much of the next century. This law banned the mailing of “obscene, lewd, lascivious or filthy” material through the Postal Service. That meant that advertising abortifacients, abortion services or contraceptives could land people in prison or saddle them with high fines. Of course, women still sought to control their fertility. Information and devices to control reproduction simply became harder to obtain and were shrouded in shame and secrecy, increasing the danger to women who sought underground methods.

And seek underground methods they did. Medical journals during this era were full of carefully recorded cases involving descriptions of women’s perforated and infected uteruses, and the grim and often fatal consequences of chemical douches and injections.

In the late 1920s, the Children’s Bureau found that illegal abortions accounted for at least 11 percent of all maternal deaths. By the 1930s, one physician estimated that there were at least 681,000 abortions per year in the United States, resulting in the deaths of 8,000 to 10,000 women.

The Supreme Court’s 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade* allowed women to choose to have an abortion under some circumstances. The decision stated that during the first trimester of pregnancy, a state could not restrict abortion access, merely legalizing what had been happening all along. In the years after the ruling, the number of legal abortions increased to over one million procedures per year. The mortality rate dropped significantly, from about 70 patient deaths per 100,000 cases before the ruling to 1.3 after the decision. It has now become statistically safer to obtain an abortion in the United States than it is to undergo pregnancy or give birth.

Scholars have worked tirelessly to uncover this long history and make sense of it. Nevertheless, false histories of abortion dominate contemporary politics, selling Americans on a past that never existed and creating the possibility of a future that has no precedent. It is a world where somehow

no one will ever try to end her pregnancy. But it's worth taking a close look at the historical record because it tells us one thing over and over and over. Regardless of whether abortion was legal, or how many people believed fetuses had rights or what physicians thought or anything else really, women have always had abortions.

## **MOST CHRISTIANS ARE BETTER THAN CHRISTIANITY**

**Hemant Mehta**

*(Excerpted from "Most Christians are Better than Christianity: A Response to Nicholas Kristof" at Friendlyatheist at patheos.com, 10/29/2019)*

In *The New York Times* op-ed pages, Nicholas Kristof argued that Jesus Christ's "brand" had been tarnished by bigots and opportunist politicians who employ it for immoral ends. It's this perversion of Christianity, Kristof asserted, that's driving young people away from the church.

I agree that "bigotry, sexism, homophobia and xenophobia" are driving enlightened people away from Christianity. But Kristof assumes that those odious characteristics are not tied up in Christianity. Like many Christians, Kristof believes his religion to be one of love. But history shows something very different.

When it comes to progress, religion doesn't lead, it follows. Historically, secular movements and ideals drag religion into modernity. Religion later claims credit for the progress it has opposed. The tail wags the dog.

The stronger religious, theological, and biblical arguments are on the wrong side of history for all of our important debates: women's and LGBTQ rights, abolition, desegregation, and civil rights. In many cases, the opposition has been almost exclusively religious. Sure, some religious groups were on the right side – the Quakers, themselves branded as infidels and heretics, were early opponents of slavery – but the dominant biblical and religious arguments have always been on the wrong side. And when the less rigid, less orthodox religions have fought for progress, it was because secular ideals and values liberalized the congregations, and the churches then shifted and adapted their theological emphasis to catch up.

For instance, the Ten Commandments sanction slavery. Twice. Jesus recites a parable relating how hard to "beat" one's slave, without ever condemning the repulsive concept of owning another human. Paul tells slaves to "obey your earthly masters with respect and fear".

The bible is pro-slavery. So was Christianity. Frederick Douglass spoke of Christianity's complicity in 1846:

*"Revolutions in religion, and revolutions in the slave trade, go hand in hand together. (Cheers.) The church and the slave prison stand next to each other; the groans and cries of the heartbroken slave are often drowned in the pious devotions of his religious master. (Hear, hear.) The church-going bell and the auctioneer's bell chime in with each other; the pulpit and the auctioneer's block stand in the same neighbourhood; while the blood-stained gold goes to support the pulpit, the pulpit covers the infernal*

*business with the garb of Christianity. We have men sold to build churches, women sold to support missionaries, and babies sold to buy Bibles and communion services for the churches. (Loud cheers.)"*

Secular values drove religion to abolition, forcing churches to examine their collective consciences.

Kristof cites Martin Luther King, Jr. in his defense of religion, apparently failing to realize that King strongly criticized the church. King's "Letter from the Birmingham Jail" was addressed to his "fellow clergymen" and in it, he criticized the "religious community" as a tail-light "rather than a headlight leading men to higher levels of justice".

That religion is retrogressive only seems counterintuitive because religion later claims that it was responsible for progress it did not accomplish. You can see this happening right now with marriage equality if you pay close attention. The opposition to equal marriage is almost exclusively religious, but already, one can see religion beginning to claim credit for this moral victory. If history repeats itself, I predict that in a few decades many people will believe that the progress made by LGBTQ is because of religion, not in spite of it.

Kristof seems genuinely distraught by the mass exodus. He even takes a little dig at Secular Americans, writing, "Surveys find that religious Americans donate more to charity than secular Americans and are substantially more likely to volunteer." But those same surveys consider houses of worship – including those with mandatory tithing – to be charities, whether they use the money to feed the homeless or gild the domes of their houses of worship. When this data quirk was studied, it turns out that 75 percent of this generosity goes to the churches themselves, not charitable work. The authors summed it up: "Religion causes people to give more – to religion itself."

Without that skew, numbers can change. For instance, as Phil Zuckerman has noted, studies of heroic altruism during the Holocaust showed that the more secular were more likely they were to aid and rescue persecuted Jews.

What Kristof fails to understand is that most Christians are better than Christianity. They shouldn't – indeed, they don't – need the Bible or even Jesus to instruct them on moral behavior. Kristof has assumed that Christianity is good simply because it's a religion. And that assumption cannot withstand scrutiny. The physicist Steven Weinberg devastated this assumption:

*"With or without religion, good people can behave well and bad people can do evil; but for good people to do evil – that takes religion."*

Now at least, in our immediate day [1900-ish – Ed.], we hear a Pope saying slave trading is wrong, and see him sending an expedition to Africa to stop it. The texts remain; it is the practice that has changed. Why? Because the world has corrected the Bible. The Church never corrects it; and also never fails to drop in at the tail of the procession – and take the credit of the correction. As she will presently do in this instance. – *Mark Twain*

## MORE HARM THAN GOOD

James A. Haught

(Excerpted from *patheos daylight atheism*, 11/25/19)

Surprisingly, an important theologian and Catholic scholar says all religions do more harm than good. Writing in the *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* (spring-summer 2019), Dr. Robert Orsi of Northwestern University delivers a blistering indictment titled *The Study of Religion on the Other Side of Disgust*.

He says that, “on balance, in the long perspective of human history, religions have done more harm than good.” He repeats that all scholars of faith should “pause to stare into the depths of the truth that religions have, over time, done more harm than good”.

Dr. Orsi describes how he grew up in a devout Italian-American Catholic family, went to mass several times weekly, and devoted his life to faith as chairman of Catholic studies in the Religion Department at Northwestern. He has written several religious books.

He focuses most of his disgust on the Catholic pedophile scandal and on bishops who tried to hide the sordid abuse of thousands of children. In fact, he says he’s writing a new book “about the role of Catholic sexuality and sexual abuse in the formation of boys at a Jesuit high school in New York City in 1967-71”.

But he also lashes Protestants. “I say on this day that I am disgusted with Catholicism and, by extension, with all religion.” Addressing fellow religion scholars, he wrote: “Perhaps some of you are disgusted, for instance, by how cravenly evangelicals have embraced political corruption in the United States today in order to advance the allegedly Christian agenda of ostracizing and harassing young LGBTQ people, curtailing women’s reproductive rights and basic health care, and reviving a toxic white Christian nationalism.”

He quotes psychologist Richard Sipe, a former Benedictine priest, who estimates that half of Catholic clergy violate their vows of celibacy. Dr. Orsi gives a long account of repulsive sexual aggression forced onto Catholic youths.

“Church authorities are generally without concern for the children, sometimes very young children, for the teenagers, or for the men and women of whatever ages with whom priests are having sex. Their primary concern has been the protection of the church’s prerogatives, above all its political influence, property and finances.”

He adds: “Please make no mistake about this: It is impossible to separate ‘religion’ here from the rape of children, young people, women, seminarians and novices. ... Disgust teaches me that the history of religion is always also a history of perversions. ... Disgust reminds me of the sexual abuse of indigenous people at the hands of Catholic missionaries ... and of the sexual abuse of orphans, of children with disabilities, of drug-addicted teenagers.”

Dr. Orsi wrote that it’s difficult for him to voice contempt for the church that has engulfed his entire life. “Do you think this is easy for me? I needed to tell you what has brought me to this horrible place.”

He concludes: “Disgust is the final step in the explication of the idea of lived religion. On the other side of disgust is a clearer vision of how religion is actually lived in everyday life, with its intimate cruelties, its petty as well as profound humiliations, its sadism and its masochism, its abuses of power and its impulses to destroy and dominate.”

America has many university religion departments, scholarly religious foundations, and other religion research centers. I wonder how many of the experts quietly share Dr. Orsi’s view that religion is harmful?

The Northwestern scholar didn’t mention religion’s worst flaw: that it’s based upon lies, supernatural fairy tales that affront the intelligence of educated modern people.

## USA! USA! WE’RE NUMBER 32!

Hemant Mehta

(Excerpted from “*The U.S. Drops to 32nd in Global Ranking of Nations Promoting Freedom of Thought*”, *friendlyatheist on patheos.com*, 11/13/2019.)

For the eighth straight year, Humanists International has released its annual *Freedom of Thought Report* describing serious cases of discrimination and persecution against atheists around the world. ...

There’s some good news overall. Since 2015, eight countries (or parts of countries) have repealed or are on the verge of repealing their blasphemy laws, including three in the past year.

At the same time, though, the nations where blasphemy is a punishable offense are taking the fake “crime” more seriously than ever, either making the punishments more severe or depriving the accused of any form of due process.

But here’s the bottom line: 69 countries believe blasphemy is a crime. The death penalty applies in six of them. 18 countries punish apostasy (leaving religion), with 12 saying it’s a capital offense.

The worst nations when it comes to these human rights violations? Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Afghanistan. The best include Belgium, the Netherlands, and Taiwan.

The United States ranks 32nd on that list of 196 nations, a drop from 8th last year. That’s in large part due to “very strong, deeply-rooted Christian [conservatism]” that has made it more difficult to “preserve the inherent secularism of the constitution from persistent challenges”. We’re on a bad path even if we’re not quite there yet.

I would add that while there may be a social stigma against atheists, there’s very little legal opposition to our existence. When it exists, it’s not enforceable. That said, Christian activists have succeeded in getting their beliefs enshrined into law, where being Christian can give you a license to discriminate against groups of people. Lawsuits have to be filed to stop those rules from going into effect.

Still, it’s disturbing that the United States is no longer a model of free speech and religious freedom for the rest of the world because we’ve allowed right-wing Christians to dictate policy and have to fight to stop them from creeping closer to a theocracy.

## ANTI-VAX LIES & MEASLES COME TO SAMOA

Michael Gerson

*(Excerpted from Samoa has become a case study for 'anti-vax' success, The Washington Post, 12/9/2019)*

One form of Samoa's contact with the world ... is anti-vaccination propaganda, much of it generated in the United States, that arrives through social media and discourages Samoan parents from vaccinating their children. This type of import has helped turn Samoa into a case study of "anti-vax" success — and increased the demand for tiny coffins decorated with flowers and butterflies.

As measles outbreaks generally do, the problem appeared rapidly. A few cases in October have mushroomed into more than 4,000 today. At least 70 (mainly children) are dead. ... Samoa is a reminder of a pre-vaccine past and the dystopian vision of a post-vaccine future. Its government has declared a state of emergency. Schools have been closed. Children under 17 have been banned from public gatherings. Unvaccinated families have been asked to hang red flags outside their homes so mobile vaccination teams can find them.

When it comes to public health, science alone does not save lives. This requires science, plus healthy social norms. Cigarette use, for example, was reduced (in part) through the application of stigma. But vaccinations face a unique challenge.

Public health is always just a few years away from catastrophe, because vaccination rates against infectious diseases need to be so high each year (generally 90 percent to 95 percent) to maintain herd protection.

Across the world, social norms on vaccination have run headlong into social media. Given the unrivaled power of Facebook and other platforms to cultivate conspiratorial paranoias, it is not easy to get 90 percent of any human population to think or do anything, particularly when it involves the infinitesimal risk of a bad reaction. ... A destructive fanatic doesn't need to win an election to hurt people, just gain the support of a fringe. ...

In any sane society, the prevention of deadly, highly infectious diseases is a nonnegotiable public commitment. Coercion must be set at whatever level is necessary to ensure herd immunity. In Samoa, vaccination is now mandatory. One anti-vax campaigner (who recommends the treatment of measles with a papaya leaf extract) has been arrested.

This is admittedly harsh. But amid a public-health crisis, this type of speech is like crying "remain seated" in a burning theater.

*(And from CFI's The Morning Heresy, 12/9/2019)*

It seems Anti-vaxxers don't want to be called anti-vaxxers any more. I'd be happy if we called them anti-vaxers, with one "x", except maybe that would mean pronouncing it as "VAYK-sers" instead of "VAX-ers". Anyway ... other people had better ideas such as "Polio fanciers", "plague enthusiasts", "typhoid mummies", "influenzers", and my favorite, "bioterrorists".

## THE NEXT GENERATION NEEDS OUR HELP! CAN ANYONE STEP FORWARD?

Raising a secular child in our current environment presents great challenges. Our society tends to push people toward religious and other supernatural beliefs, whether they want to go there or not. This is particularly difficult for young children, who tend to be even more susceptible to peer pressure on this issue than are adults. That is why SHSNY is looking to implement a parenting group to give secular parents the resources they need to raise their children to be critical free-thinkers.

Do you (or someone you know) have the knowledge, experience, and willingness to lead this proposed group?

If so, please contact SHSNY President Jon Engel at engel@shsny.org. Thank you.

### READERS RESPOND

*To the Editor:* The late Ambrose Bierce displayed great foresight in his *Devil's Dictionary* over a century ago with respect to the qualities of Donald Trump as president, as a Christian (alleged) and as a possessor of vast self-esteem.

*President:* The leading figure in a small group of men of whom — and of whom only — it is positively known that vast numbers of their countrymen did not want any of them for president.

*Christian:* One who believes that the New Testament is a divinely inspired book admirably suited to the spiritual needs of his neighbor. One who follows the teachings of Christ so far as they are not inconsistent with a life of sin.

*Self-Esteem:* An erroneous appraisal.

Bierce also defined "Reporter" as: A writer who guesses his way to the truth and dispels it with a tempest of words.

I guess Bierce would have known, since he was a reporter himself. — Cheers, Dennis Middlebrooks

### CULTURE EVOLVES, LIKE IT OR NOT

*(Excerpted from CFI's The Morning Heresy, 11/25/19)*

While Julia Sweeney considered how cultural standards have evolved, she said we should be careful not to reflexively dismiss performers or works that are deemed out of step.

"Don't dismiss everything, because norms and expectations that we once accepted are going to keep changing. In another 30 years It could be that people will watch movies from now, that are the most politically correct, and you know what they might say?

"I couldn't listen to what the characters were saying because they were eating hamburgers."

### AND WE ALL LIVE IN GEORGE ORWELL'S NIGHTMARE VISION OF THE FUTURE NOW

The Trump Administration last month informed the Centers for Disease Control that in documents related to next year's budget the words "vulnerable", "entitlement", "diversity", "transgender", "fetus", "evidence-based", and "science-based" cannot be used.

**Freethought of the Day: January 16**

**STATUTE FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ENACTED**

The preamble of Thomas Jefferson's Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom passed is a sweeping indictment of state-dictated religion, noting that "false religions over the greatest part of the world and through all time" have been maintained through the church-state. He wrote:

*"[T]hat no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer, on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities."*

So important was it to Jefferson that he gave these instructions for the epitaph to be placed on his tombstone:

*"Thomas Jefferson / Author of the Declaration of American Independence, of the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom & Father of the University of Virginia."*

Omitting his two terms as president, Jefferson wrote these were the "testimonials that I have lived [and by which] I wish most to be remembered."

**JANUARY 2 IS ISAAC ASIMOV'S  
100TH BIRTHDAY**

For a half-hour crash course in critical thinking and enlightened humanism, just Google "Isaac Asimov Quotes", and enjoy the wit and wisdom of SHSNY's first-ever Honorary Member. Like this regarding religion ...

*Humanity has the stars in its future and that future is too important to be lost under the burden of juvenile folly and ignorant superstition.*

And of course (nothing shy about Isaac) this ...

*People who think they know everything are a great annoyance to those of us who do.*

**ON KNOWING ENOUGH**

**Kurt Vonnegut**

True story, Word of Honor: Joseph Heller, an important and funny writer now dead, and I were at a party given by a billionaire on Shelter Island.

I said, "Joe, how does it make you feel to know that our host only yesterday may have made more money than your novel *Catch-22* has earned in its entire history?"

And Joe said, "I've got something he can never have."

And I said, "What on earth could that be, Joe?"

And Joe said, "The knowledge that I've got enough."

Not bad! Rest in peace.

**Darwin Day Dinner  
Pete's - Feb 15 - Book now!  
Page 7**  
**Happy (better-than-ever) New Year  
Page 1**  
**They  
Page 2**  
**(Most) Christians are better  
than Christianity  
Page 9**  
**Plus Jefferson, Orwell,  
Asimov, Sweeney, Twain,  
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