

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

January, 2014

Welcome the new year and a new mayor in Our Town: we're worried about both of them. But we celebrate cities anyway, including ours (*We're Number Two!*) and look to the future (*We're Number Seven!*). We compare Muslim scholarship and American politics, consider our Iraq legacy, un-celebrate the Pope, and ponder such big questions as "negative" atheism, greed as a philosophy, the how of nothing, and the proper amount a minimum-wage worker should tip her dog walker. — JR

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

WHAT SHOULD WE BE WORRIED ABOUT?

Brian Merchant

(Excerpted from "The 150 Things the World's Smartest People Are Afraid Of", on motherboard.vice.com/blog)

Every year, the online magazine *Edge*—the so-called smartest website in the world—asks top scientists, technologists, writers, and academics to weigh in on a single question. This year, that query was "What should we be worried about?" and the idea was to identify new problems arising in science, tech, and culture that haven't yet been widely recognized.

This year's respondents include former presidents of the Royal Society, Nobel prize-winners, famous sci-fi authors ... and a bunch of top theoretical physicists, psychologists, and biologists. And the list is long. Like, book-length long. There are some 150 different things that worry 151 of the planet's biggest brains. And I read about them all, so you don't have to: here's the Buzzfeedized version, with the money quote, title, or summary of the fear pulled out of each essay.

(Editor: The following selected 15 "worries" are my personal choice from just the first half of Merchant's distilled list. See all 150 at <http://motherboard.vice.com/blog/what-150-of-the-worlds-smartest-scientists-are-worried-about>)

What keeps the smartest folks in the world awake at night? Here goes:

3. That we will be unable to defeat viruses by learning to push them beyond the error catastrophe threshold. — William McEwan, molecular biology researcher
11. That there will be another supernova-like financial disaster. — Seth Lloyd, professor of Quantum Mechanical Engineering at MIT
12. That search engines will become arbiters of truth. — W. Daniel Hillis, physicist

24. We should be worried about the new era of the Anthropocene—not only as a geological phenomenon, but also as a cultural frame. — Jennifer Jacquet, clinical assistant professor of environmental studies, NYU

28. That there are an infinity of universes out there, but that we are only able to study the one we live in. — Lawrence M. Krauss, physicist/cosmologist

29. The rise of anti-intellectualism and the end of progress. "We've now, for the first time, got a single global civilization. If it fails, we all fail together." — Tim O'Reilly, CEO and founder of O'Reilly Media

33. Men. — Helen Fisher, biological anthropologist

36. That technology may endanger democracy. — Haim Harari, physicist

48. That we will literally lose touch with the physical world. — Christine Finn, archaeologist

51. That we will worry too much. — Joseph LeDoux, neuroscientist

54. That the internet will end up benefiting existing power structures and not society in general. — Bruce Schneier, security technologist

61. "We should be worrying about a growing dominance of the Fourth [pop] Culture and how it may directly or indirectly affect us all." — Bruce Parker, professor

62. The coming fight between engineers and druids. — Paul Saffo, technology forecaster

70. That Idiocracy is looming. — Douglas T. Kenrick, psychology professor

71. That the gap between news and understanding is widening. — Gavin Schmidt, NASA climatologist

Question: Okay, World's Smartest People Who Read PIQUE, what do *you* think we should be worried about? Send your short, pithy worries to editor@shsny.org for inclusion in the February issue. — JR

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

John Rafferty, *President/Editor*; Robert A. Murtha, Jr., *Vice President*; Donna Marxer, *Treasurer*; Lee Loshak, *Secretary*; Remo Cosentino; Mirta Cotto; Arthur Harris; Brian Lemaire; Elaine Lynn; Carl Marxer; Irv Millman; Carlos Mora; John Wagner; Mike Weiss
SHSNY, P.O. Box 7661, F.D.R. Station, New York, NY 10150-7661 • www.shsny.org • NEW PHONE: 646-922-7389

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

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

Congrats, Mayor de Blasio: Now for the Tricky Bit
The following three essays were received on or about Election Day in November, but rather than run them in December PIQUE, when they would have been “old news”, I have saved them for this pre-inauguration issue. – JR

BRINGING RELIGION BACK TO CITY HALL

Dennis Middlebrooks

It looks as though NYC’s likely next mayor, Bill de Blasio, who, like current mayor Michael Bloomberg is almost certainly an atheist, plans to pander to the various religious groups in the Big Apple in a big way, in stark contrast to Bloomberg, who, for all his elitist faults, stood up to the demands of religious groups for special treatment.

Particularly alarming is de Blasio’s plan to use tax dollars to provide “security officers” in sectarian schools, to allow church services in public schools, and to back off on regulations to introduce basic sanitation to (and warnings to parents about) a barbaric Orthodox Jewish circumcision procedure that places male infants in jeopardy of brain damage and even death. His GOP opponent, Joseph Lhota, who has no chance at election, would be even worse, based on his comments.

So electing an atheist to public office is not necessarily an advantage to the freethought movement!

RELIGION RETURNING TO CITY HALL IS ONLY PART OF THE PROBLEM

Harvey Offenartz

I read an article in yesterday’s [Nov 4] *New York Times* which predicted that whoever is elected Mayor today will return religion to City Hall. Apparently Bloomberg ignored New York’s “Religious Right” (what there is of such), but neither of the current candidates will.

I don’t think I’ve read much about this religious desecration of our Constitution in PIQUE, nor have I been following it that closely in *The Times*, so I may be new to these events, and late to the battle, if there is one.

But it seems to me that we humanists, so busy defining ourselves, fighting the mythologies of religious belief and its manifestations counter to science and reason, etc., are in the wrong war. For our well-being and that of our nation—and even its religions—we need to combat the ongoing assaults on our Constitution.

Unless I failed History too (as opposed to History 2), we have, by law, a Constitutional separation of church and state in America. What we also have are weak-willed politicians who deny that fact in order to be elected. Worse, if elected, and to stay in office, they do more damage in their pandering that violates this basic Constitutional principle.

What I believe humanists must do is not just fight religion, but educate Americans about the realities of our history: the church-state conflicts that go all the way back to the theocratic Pilgrims, the deists and agnostics (even atheists) who wrote our Constitution, and the long, proud tradition of freethought in America.

FROM A “FAITHFUL” READER OF THE NEW YORK TIMES

Jonathan Engel

On Monday, November 4, *The New York Times* contained a front-page article entitled “Top 2 Candidates Vow to Make City Hall More Faith-Friendly”. The article mentions a number of issues where both the Democrat Bill de Blasio and the Republican Joseph Lhota have apparently expressed a willingness to turn the United States Constitution inside-out in order to pander to religious minded voters in the mayoral election (this piece is being written the day before Election Day). Each of the issues mentioned in *The Times* is worthy of individual discussion, but in this piece I’d like to focus on *The Times’* use of the word “faith”.

Why does *The New York Times* use the phrase “faith-friendly” instead of the more accurate “religion-friendly”? It’s clear from the article that religion is what they’re talking about. “Faith”, on the other hand, has multiple meanings. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines faith as: 1. Allegiance to duty or a person; 2. Belief and trust in God; 3. Complete trust; 4. A system of religious beliefs. Now, I have faith (quite possibly misplaced) that eventually human beings will free themselves from the shackles of superstitious nonsense, but I doubt that this is the kind of “faith” that *The Times* is talking about. So why didn’t *The Times* use the more apt phrase “religion-friendly”, as religion was the only kind of faith mentioned in the article?*

I believe that the answer lies in the fact that the word “faith” (and its mealy-mouthed cousin, “faith-based”) have become substitutes for the words “religion” or “religious” for individuals who know deep down that they are injecting religion into the public sphere where it doesn’t belong, but hope that being somewhat vague in their language will help them to get away with it.

As Charles P. Pierce writes in *Idiot America*,
“A politician discussing his religion now refers to himself as a ‘person of faith’, which tells you more about the politician’s balls than it does about his soul. He doesn’t have enough of the former to call himself “religious” because that leads to the question of which religion and why he chooses to follow it and not one of the dozens of others, or none of them at all. ... ‘Faith-based’ is another dishonest term for a dishonest time. It’s a word for people too cowardly to call themselves religious and it is beloved by politicians too cowardly to debate something as substantial as faith. ... It’s camouflage under which religion is sold like smuggled goods in places where it doesn’t belong.”

I don’t know exactly when the chicken-hearted practice of substituting “faith-based” for “religious” began, but I do believe it gained steam from President George W. Bush’s establishment of an Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives in his Administration. I guess he was afraid that if he established an Office of Religious Initiatives someone might have remembered that the Constitution prohibits

a government establishment of religion. So call it “faith-based” and maybe no one will notice, which, by and large, they didn’t. Say what you will about Mike Bloomberg (and I have plenty to say, some of it good, much of it not), at least he seems for the most part to understand and appreciate the concept of separation of church and state.

It is depressing to see that his successor, whomever that turns out to be, either doesn’t understand this principle or is willing to disregard it in order to get elected.

**Comment: Jonathan, while we can’t do anything much about the corruption of words by the “mealy-mouthed”, I offer you the definitions that I use in these pages:*

Faith is belief in the truth of something in the absence of, or even in contradiction of, evidence.

Belief is an expectation of truth based on evidence and/or experience.

Knowledge is the actual experience of truth, which experience can be independently verified. – JR

WHY WE LIVE IN NEW YORK #1

Edward Glaeser

(From Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier, excerpted on Delanceyplace.com, 11/15/2013)

Two hundred forty-three million Americans [of a total of 320 million] crowd together in the 3 percent of the country that is urban. Thirty-six million people live in and around Tokyo, the most productive metropolitan area in the world. Twelve million people reside in central Mumbai, and Shanghai is almost as large. On a planet with vast amounts of space (all of humanity could fit in Texas – each of us with a personal townhouse), we choose cities. Although it has become cheaper to travel long distances, or to telecommute from the Ozarks to Azerbaijan, more and more people are clustering closer and closer together in large metropolitan areas. Five million more people every month live in the cities of the developing world, and in 2011, more than half the world’s population is urban.

Cities, the dense agglomerations that dot the globe, have been engines of innovation since Plato and Socrates bickered in an Athenian marketplace. The streets of Florence gave us the Renaissance, and the streets of Birmingham gave us the Industrial Revolution. The great prosperity of contemporary London and Bangalore and Tokyo comes from their ability to produce new thinking. Wandering these cities – whether down cobblestone sidewalks or grid-cutting cross streets, around roundabouts or under freeways – is to study nothing less than human progress. ...

Cities are the absence of physical space between people and companies. They are proximity, density, closeness. They enable us to work and play together, and their success depends on the demand for physical connection. ...

Within the United States, workers in metropolitan areas with big cities earn 30 percent more than workers who aren’t in metropolitan areas. These high wages are offset by higher costs of living, but that doesn’t change the fact that high wages reflect high productivity. The only reason

why companies put up with the high labor and land costs of being in a city is that the city creates productivity advantages that offset those costs. Americans who live in metropolitan areas with more than a million residents are, on average, more than 50 percent more productive than Americans who live in smaller metropolitan areas. These relationships are the same even when we take into account the education, experience, and industry of workers. They’re even the same if we take individual workers’ IQs into account. The income gap between urban and rural areas is just as large in other rich countries, and even stronger in poorer nations. ...

There is a myth that even if cities enhance prosperity, they still make people miserable. But people report being happier in those countries that are more urban. In those countries where more than half of the population is urban, 30 percent of people say that they are very happy and 17 percent say that they are not very or not at all happy. In nations where more than half of the population is rural, 25 percent of people report being very happy and 22 percent report unhappiness. Across countries, reported life satisfaction rises with the share of the population that lives in cities, even when controlling for the countries’ income and education.

So cities like Mumbai and Kolkata and Bangalore boost not only India’s economy, but its mood. And certainly they are not un-Indian, any more than New York is un-American. These cities are, in so many ways, the places where their nation’s genius is most fully expressed.

BUT IS LIVING IN A MEGACITY SUCH A GREAT IDEA?

Laurence C. Smith

(Excerpted from The World in 2050: Four Forces Shaping Civilization’s Northern Future.)

For the first time ever [since 2008], we have more people living in cities than out on the land. For the first time, most of us have no substantive ability to feed or water ourselves. We have become reliant upon technology, trade, and commerce to carry out these most primitive of functions. Sometime in 2008, the human species crossed the threshold toward becoming a different animal: an urban creature, geographically divorced from the natural world that still continues to feed and fuel us. ...

The century of megacities has already begun. From just two in 1950 and three in 1975, we grew to nineteen by 2007 and expect to have twenty-seven by 2025. Furthermore, in sheer size alone our global urban culture is shifting east. Of the eight new megacities anticipated over the next fifteen years, five are in Asia, two in Africa, and just one in Europe. Zero new megacities are anticipated for the Americas. Instead, this massive urbanization is happening in some of our most populous countries: Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Pakistan.

New York City was the world’s second-largest metropolis in 1977. By 2050, the “City That Never Sleeps” will be struggling just to stay in the top ten.

World Megacities of Ten Million or More

2008 report by the United Nations Population Division

1950

New York-Newark, USA (12.3)

Tokyo, Japan (11.3)

1975

Tokyo, Japan (26.6)

New York-Newark, USA (15.9)

Mexico City, Mexico (10.7)

2007

Tokyo, Japan (35.7)

New York-Newark, USA (19.0)

Mexico City, Mexico (19.0)

Mumbai, India (19.0)

Sao Paulo, Brazil (18.8)

Delhi, India (15.9)

Shanghai, China (15.0)

Kolkata (Calcutta), India (14.8)

Dhaka, Bangladesh (13.5)

Buenos Aires, Argentina (12.8)

Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, USA (12.5)

Karachi, Pakistan (12.1)

Al-Qahirah (Cairo), Egypt (11.9)

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (11.7)

Osaka-Kobe, Japan (11.3)

Beijing, China (11.1)

Manila, Philippines (11.1)

Moskva (Moscow), Russia (10.5)

Istanbul, Turkey (10.1)

2025

Tokyo, Japan (36.4)

Mumbai, India (26.4)

Delhi, India (22.5)

Dhaka, Bangladesh (22.0)

Sao Paulo, Brazil (21.4)

Mexico City, Mexico (21.0)

New York-Newark, USA (20.6)

Kolkata (Calcutta), India (20.6)

Shanghai, China (19.4)

Karachi, Pakistan (19.1)

Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo (16.8)

Lagos, Nigeria (15.8)

Al-Qahirah (Cairo), Egypt (15.6)

Manila, Philippines (14.8)

Beijing, China (14.5)

Buenos Aires, Argentina (13.8)

Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, USA (13.7)

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (13.4)

Jakarta, Indonesia (12.4)

Istanbul, Turkey (12.1)

Guangzhou, Guangdong, China (11.8)

Osaka-Kobe, Japan (11.4)

Moskva (Moscow), Russia (10.5)

Lahore, Pakistan (10.5)

Shenzhen, China (10.2)

Chennai, India (10.1)

Paris, France (10.0)

IN INDIA: BACKWARD, MARCH!

In India, a colonial-era law made gay sex a crime. In 2009, that country's Delhi High Court declared the 1861 law unconstitutional. But on December 11, India's Supreme Court reinstated the law that calls gay sex "against the order of nature", making it, again, a crime punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

There's virtually no chance of legislative action to overturn the ruling, because the right-wing Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party is poised to sweep the national elections this spring.

And so the world's largest democracy marches boldly back into the 19th century. – JR

AUSTRALIA JOINS THE MARCH

A law was passed in the Australian Capital Territory in October that allowed same-sex marriages in Canberra, the national capital, starting December 6. Thirty or more couples did exactly that during the week that followed.

But the Australian federal government, which amended the federal Marriage Act in 2004 to define marriage as between a man and a woman, sued in Australia's High Court. And won a unanimous decision.

The 30-plus couples? Automatic annulments.

And the chances for a change in the Marriage Act? As far-fetched as far-away Australia. – JR

IN THE PHILIPPINES:

BISHOPS (AND THE POPE) TO THE RESCUE!

While at least \$300 million has been pledged by nations (many of them secular) around the world to help survivors of super typhoon Haiyan, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, a billion-dollar non-governmental organization, has responded to the disaster by sending 1,000 bibles and 12,000 rosaries to survivors, according to CBS News.

Additionally, the Pope tweeted for Catholics to pray for the victims. His message was retweeted 30,000 times.

AND SPEAKING OF FRANKIE ...

"Pope Francis is 'Person of the Year'."

– Time Magazine, 2013

"And I am the Queen of Rumania."

– Dorothy Parker, 1925

JESUS, MO, AND THE BARMAID ON THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

(Transcribed from jesusandmo.net/2013/12/11/truly/)

Jesus: Pope Francis says gay priests should be forgiven. You can't argue with that, can you barmaid?

Mohammed: She doesn't look that impressed.

Jesus: What's the matter, barmaid? You don't think gay priests should be forgiven?

Barmaid: It depends.

Mo: On what?

Barmaid: On whether they truly repent becoming priests.

WHO GETS THE 2013 DUMBTH AWARD? THE SIX CLUELESS CONTENDERS

It's time to decide: Which nationally-recognizable personality was most spectacularly wrong-headed, denying or clueless about reality in 2013?

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

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

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

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

Tough acts to follow, certainly. But some dunderhead has to win, so here, in the order of their nominations, are 2013's clueless contenders.

"I think Martin Luther King, Jr. would agree with me if he were alive today that if African-Americans had been given the right to keep and bear arms from day one of the country's founding, perhaps slavery might not have been a chapter in our history."



So said Larry Ward, the either delusional or hate-inspired chairman of the January 19 Gun Appreciation Day rally against President Obama's "post-Sandy Hook assault on gun rights", timed for the same weekend as the President's

inauguration and the holiday honoring the gun-assassinated civil rights leader.

(By the way, the big rally flopped big time.)

While shilling for the oil industry's fracking pro-grams, Bryan Fisher, the Issues Director of the Christian fundamentalist American Family Association, recently told his radio audience, that God's feelings will be hurt if America stops using fossil fuels for energy.



Playing on our collective heartstrings, he said:

"God has buried those treasures there because he loves to see us find them."



How can we deny Congressman Steve Stockman, Republican from Texas' 36th District, a man whose career even the conservative *Houston Chronicle* called "weird"?

Combining two of his favorite fixations - guns for everyone and freedom of choice for no one, his election-campaign platform was summed up by the bumper sticker that read: *"If babies had guns they wouldn't be aborted."*

Penny Nance is the new President and CEO of Concerned Women for America, a 32-year-old creationist, anti-choice, anti-sex education, anti-stem-cell research, and anti-gay organization that claims hundreds of thousands of "members" (but has never shown anyone the numbers). Discussing the bogus National Day of Prayer on Fox News (of course), she offered this whopper:



"The Age of Enlightenment and Reason gave way to moral relativism, and moral relativism is what led us all the way down the dark path to the Holocaust."

And two more, just under the wire for 2013 honors.



In December we found Rep. Scott Rigell, Republican of Virginia's 2nd District. Scott is up for re-election next year, and he obviously wants to fend off any challenges from the know-nothing right that he might be soft on, well, you know, anything.

So, he told Politico, he wants to clarify what does and what does not keep him up at night:

"I wake up every day not thinking about social issues."

And on December 11 Fox News anchor Megyn Kelly made her bid. Promoted as the "new face" of Fox ever since she stood up (literally) on election night, 2012, to Karl Rove for his inability to do simple arithmetic, she nevertheless upholds the Fox tradition of hyper-reaction to inanities. Commenting on a meaningless holiday-filler *Slate* article suggesting that African-Americans need a black Santa Claus, Ms. Kelly pronounced:



"You know, I mean, Jesus was a white man too. He was a historical figure; that's a verifiable fact, as is Santa, I want you kids watching to know that."

Yes, kids, Jesus and Santa Claus: both real, both white.

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

Cast Your Vote Now, and Again in February

Balloting begins now, through January 31. Cast your vote at editor@shsny.org, or leave a message at 646-922-7389. Celebrators will get a second ballot at our February 14 Anniversary/ Darwin Dinner, at which the winner of the not-so-coveted horse's-ass trophy will be announced. - JR

SHSNY CALENDAR: JANUARY - MARCH 2014

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURS, JAN 2, 7-8:30 pm
in the front room of
THE COMMUNITY CHURCH
OF NEW YORK

28 East 35 St. (Park-Mad)
(3 doors West of the church - red door)
We'll discuss

**36 ARGUMENTS FOR THE
EXISTENCE OF GOD:
A Work of Fiction**

Rebecca Newberger Goldstein

36 Arguments for the
Existence of God

plunges into the great debate of our day: the clash between faith and reason. Through the enchantment of fiction, award-winning novelist and MacArthur Fellow Rebecca Newberger Goldstein shows that the tension between religion and doubt cannot be understood through rational argument alone. It also must be explored from the point of view of individual people caught in the raptures and torments of religious experience in all their variety.

After *Time* magazine calls best-selling Author Cass Seltzer "the atheist with a soul", he is haunted by reminders of the two people who ignited his passion to understand religion: a literary scholar with a suspicious obsession with messianism – and an angelic six-year-old mathematical genius who is heir to the leadership of a Hasidic sect.

Goldstein has produced a true crossover novel, complete with a nail-biting climactic debate ("Resolved: God Exists") at Harvard.

– *Paper & Kindle editions*

**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 at
Community Church of NY
28 East 35 Street (Park-Mad)

**THE OXFORD BOOK OF
MODERN SCIENCE WRITING**
Richard Dawkins, Ed.

Boasting almost one hundred articles and book excerpts, this is a breathtaking celebration of the finest writing by scientists (Gould, Pinker, Einstein, Huxley, Gardner, Dennett, Turing) packed with scintillating essays on everything from "The Discovery of Lucy" to "The Terror and Vastness of the Universe". A must-read volume for all science buffs. – *Paper*

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURS, MARCH 6, 7-8:30 pm
at Community Church of NY
28 East 35 Street (Park-Mad)

WHO'S IN CHARGE?

Free Will and the

Science of the Brain

Michael S. Gazzaniga

In this remarkable book, the "father of cognitive neuroscience" makes a powerful and provocative argument that counters the common wisdom that our lives are wholly determined by physical processes we cannot control.

Gazzaniga's well-reasoned case against the idea that we live in a "determined" world is fascinating and liberating, solidifying his place among the likes of Oliver Sacks and other bestselling science authors exploring the mysteries of the human brain.

LIKE SHSNY ON FACEBOOK

www.facebook.com/pages/The-Secular-Humanist-Society-of-New-York/168704396485734

AND MEET US ON MEETUP

www.meetup.com/shsny-org/

BRUNCH & CONVERSATION SUNDAY, JAN 19, 12 NOON MONTHLY CASUAL BRUNCH

New Restaurant:

Radiance

Fine Asian Cuisine

208 East 50 Street

Our first brunch at Radiance in November was a smash success – ask any of the 25 happy and well-fed attendees who gathered in our private space beyond the bar.

So we'll meet again (and again) at Noon between 2nd and 3rd Aves for outstanding Cantonese cuisine, including sumptuous \$12.95 to \$14.95 Lunch Specials and a huge menu of specialty teas.

January Brunch Discussion:

*What should humanists expect/
demand of our new mayor?*

(See pages 2-3)

MONDAY, JAN 13, 7:00 pm

SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT

Stone Creek Bar & Lounge

140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)

THE RULING CLASS

Let's say
Goodbye to
the recently late
Peter O'Toole
with this over-
the-top cult classic comedy.



A member of the House of Lords dies in a shockingly silly way, leaving his estate to his son (O'Toole). Unfortunately, his son is insane: he thinks he is Jesus Christ.

The other somewhat-more respectable members of the family plot to steal the estate from him. Murder and mayhem ensue.

After-film Discussion:

Thinking you are God: crazy.

Talking to God: sane.

Says who?

SHSNY Movie Night is FREE.

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

SHSNY CALENDAR: JANUARY - MARCH 2014

GREAT LECTURES ON DVD
WED, JAN 26, 7 pm
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)
COLLISION

Hitchens vs. Wilson: Is Christianity Good for the World?

In May 2007, atheist Christopher Hitchens and Christian apologist Douglas Wilson began to argue the topic "Is Christianity Good for the World?" in a series of exchanges published in *Christianity Today*. The rowdy literary bout piqued the interest of filmmaker Darren Doane, who sold them on the idea of making a film around the debate.



In *Collision* the two contrarians laugh, confide and argue, in public and in private, as they journey through three cities.

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

HUMANISM 102
MONDAY, JAN 27, 6:30-8:30
Community Church of New York
28 East 35 Street (red door)
Meeting/Discussion #3:
The 'Sin' of Scientism
Readings

Online (all posted at shsny.org - click January 27 on Calendar of Events):

- Steven Pinker: *Science is Not Your Enemy*
- Leon Wieseltier: *Science Does Not Have All the Answers* (video)
- Leon Wieseltier: *Crimes Against Humanities*
- Richard Feynman: *The Value of Science*

Note: No book for January.

Note: You can do all the online reading carefully in an hour or two. If you haven't done the reading, you may still audit the discussion – all are welcome!

Book early - save 10%!
SATURDAY, FEB 15, 7:00 pm
Our 6th Annual
SHSNY ANNIVERSARY &
DARWIN DAY CELEBRATION &
CHINESE NEW YEAR
BANQUET

Golden Unicorn Restaurant
18 East Broadway
(in the heart of Chinatown)

Come gather with your fellow (and sororal) NYC freethinkers at "the Côte Basque of Chinese restaurants" to celebrate the 205th birthday of Charles Darwin and the 26th Anniversary of the birth of SHSNY.

Highlights of the evening:

13-Course Chinese Banquet
 (Yes, with lots of vegetarian choices)
Election and Presentation
of the 13th Annual
SHSNY Dumbth Award

Vote a second time (see page 5).

Special Guest Speaker

To be announced soon.

Cost, all-inclusive:

\$45 per person. (Cash bar)
Book now (by January 31)
 and save 10% - just \$40/pp.

Pre-pay (credit card or PayPal) at www.shsny.org. Or mail your check to SHSNY, PO Box 7661, FDR Station, New York, NY 10150-7661. Questions? Call 646-922-7389.

PLANNING AHEAD

The usual SHSNY schedule is ...

Book Club: First Thursday
 at the Community Church of NY

Movie Night: Second Monday
 at Stone Creek Lounge.

Brunch: Third Sunday
 at Radiance

Great Lectures: 4th Wednesday
 at Stone Creek Lounge.

Humanism 101: Last Monday
 at the Community Church of NY

More info: www.shsny.org,
 and/or 646-922-7389

OTHER REASONABLE NEW YORK EVENTS

www.reasonablenewyork.org
CFI-NYC. Mon., Jan 13, 10 pm,
 Googie's Lounge (Upstairs at the
 Living Room), 154 Ludlow St.:
 "Skeptics on the Mic Karaoke".

Gotham Atheists: For January
 events, dates, and places, check
meetup.com/GothamAtheists/
New York Philosophy: For Janu-
 ary events, dates, and places,
 check nyphilosophy.com

NY Society for Ethical Culture:
 Fri, Jan 3, 7 pm, Ethics in Film:
Boys Don't Cry. Snacks/Bevs, \$5
 suggested donation.

Mon, Jan 6, 1 pm, Ethics in Lit-
 erature: *The Beautiful Struggle: A*
Father, Two Sons, and an Unlikely
Road to Manhood, by Ta-Nehisi
 Coates. Snacks & Bevs, \$5.

Thurs Jan 9, 6 pm, New Work-
 shop: *The Struggle to Forgive and*
Be Forgiven

Fri, Jan 10, 6:30 pm, Ethics and
 the Theater: *The Homecoming,*
 by Harold Pinter. Reception/
 Refreshments, \$10 suggested
 donation.

PLUS

Agnostic A.A.: Nine weekly
 AA-endorsed meetings. agnosticAA.nyc.org/meetings.html

Atheism History Week – With
 SHSNY's John Rafferty, 5:30 p.m.
 Wednesdays, MNN Ch. 57 and
 RNN Ch. 84 in Manhattan, and
 live streaming at www.mnn.org.

Drinking With Atheists: Every
 Friday, fun and conversation.
meetup.com/GothamAtheists/
Feminist Freethinkers of New
York: Check schedule at
feministfreethinkers.org

Manhattan History Buffs: Ev-
 ery 3d Tues, 6:00, dinner/talk at
 Lili's rest, 83-84th/3rd. Jan 21:
Scholasticism. Info at 212-802-7427

THE DESERT WE CALL PEACE

John Rafferty

From a single week's gleaning of the "World Briefing" box and the inside pages of *The New York Times* a little over a month ago:

Tuesday, November 26:

Iraq: Attacks Kill at Least 23 People

A series of bombings and shootings on Monday left at least 23 people dead and more than 20 wounded, Iraq security officials and medical workers said. Just after sunset, an explosion at a market in Baghdad ...

Wednesday, November 27:

Iraq: Suicide Bombers

Kill 16 Soldiers and Policemen

Four suicide bombers struck northern Baghdad Tuesday, targeting an army base and police station ...

Thursday, November 28:

Iraq: Execution-Style Killings

Raise Sectarian Fears

More than 300 Iraqis have been killed this month in bombings and shootings in markets, bakeries and near schools and mosques. ... 18 dead were among at least 40 people ... killed across Iraq on Wednesday. ...

Friday, November 29:

Iraq: At Least 29 Killed in Attacks

... The deadliest attack took place in Hilla, about 60 miles south of Baghdad, when three separate car bombings struck two outdoor markets ...

Saturday, November 30 (in a bylined news article):

18 People, Abducted in Baghdad, Are Found Shot to Death

BAGHDAD – Eighteen people were found dead in what appeared to be an execution-style killing on Friday, their bodies dumped on a farm near the predominantly Sunni neighborhood ...

Sunday, December 1:

No news from Iraq.

Monday December 2 (in a bylined news article):

Blasts Kill at Least 12 Mourners At Funeral of Iraqi Sunni Leader

BAGHDAD – Three blasts struck mourners at a funeral in northern Iraq ... Also on Sunday, in eastern Baghdad, unidentified gunmen stormed a house and killed five members of a Sunni family ... In western Baghdad, a roadside bomb exploded near a police patrol killing three police officers and wounding six others. In Falluja ... gunmen killed ...

Ten-and-a-half years ago, in the course of empire, our country invaded and conquered Iraq, a country that had not attacked or threatened us. Our leaders falsely told us we had to "liberate" Iraqis from a murderous thug who was behind the 9/11 attacks on the U.S., was developing nuclear and biological weapons, and was a threat to world peace. The "peace" we brought Iraq is exemplified above.

Nineteen hundred years ago, the historian Tacitus quoted an unwilling subject of another empire: Rome.

"They make a desert and call it peace."

THE PHILOSOPHERS OF GREED USE CHRISTIANITY AS THEIR COVER STORY

Amanda Marcotte

(Excerpted from "Gospel of selfishness pervades American Christianity" on *Alternet*, 11/16/2013)

Anyone who has worked in the restaurant business will be happy to tell you that waiters always fight each other to avoid working Sunday lunch shift. Not because they want to sleep in, but because it's a widespread belief that the post-church crowd is loud, demanding and unwilling to tip appropriately. In the food service industry, "Christian" is synonymous with "selfish".

Unfair stereotype? Probably. Big groups, regardless of affiliation, tend to tip poorly. More to the point, waiters probably remember the bad Christian tippers more because the hypocrisy is so stunning. The image of a man piously preening about what a good Christian he is in church only to turn around and refuse the basic act of decency that is paying someone what you owe them perfectly symbolizes a lurking suspicion in American culture that the harder someone thumps the Bible, the more selfish and downright sadistic a person he is. And that perception—that showy piety generally goes hand in hand with very un-Christ-like behavior—is not an urban myth at all. On the contrary, it's the daily reality of American culture and politics.

Bill Maher recently had a rant on his show that went viral addressing this very issue, bad tippers who leave sermons or notes scolding waiters instead of paying them what they're owed. [see *PIQUE*, December, 2013: "The New Christian Charity"] His larger point is a much more important one: It's absolutely disgusting how the politicians who make the biggest show of how much they love Jesus would be the first in line to bash him if he returned with a message of clothing the naked and feeding the poor. The Jesus of the Bible multiplied the loaves and fishes. His loudest followers these days gripe about feeding people, claiming it creates a "culture of dependency". They may even comb through the Bible to take quotes out of context to justify their selfishness toward the poor, as Rep. Steven Fincher did when he claimed the Bible says, "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat." The fact that those jobs are unavailable didn't give him a moment's pause when suggesting this very un-Christ-like plan to his fellow Americans.

There are plenty of progressive Christians who genuinely try to live out Jesus' command to love your neighbor as yourself, described in the Bible as the root of Jesus' entire philosophy. That said, statistics bear out the sense that people who are more invested in being perceived as pious also embrace the most selfish policies. Self-identified conservatives and Republicans claim go to church regularly at twice the rate of self-identified liberals. People who go to church more than once a week are far more conservative than the rest of the population. Indeed, the research suggests how often you report being in the pews is the most reliable indicator of how you're going to vote. (Though it may not be a reliable indicator of how often you actually go to church.

In the grand tradition of showy piety, people who claim to be avid churchgoers often lie about it to pollsters.)

The attempts to reconcile the correlation between displays of piety and support for selfish policies get complex on the right, with conservatives often arguing that hating your neighbor at the voting booth doesn't count because church charities supposedly make up for it. (They don't.) In reality, the relationship between Christian piety and support for selfish policies is fairly straightforward. It's not that being Christian makes you conservative. It's that being conservative makes being a loud and pious Christian extremely attractive.

Without Christianity, the underlying mean-spiritedness of conservative policies is simply easier to spot. Without religion, you're stuck making libertarian-style arguments that sound like things cackling movie villains would say, like Ayn Rand saying civilization should reject "the morality of altruism". Since Christianity teaches altruism and generosity, it provides excellent cover for people who want to be selfish, a sheep's clothing made of Jesus to cover up the child-starving wolf beneath. Since Christians are "supposed" to be good people, people who really aren't good are lining up to borrow that reputation to advance their agenda.

The fact that conservatism causes obnoxious Christian piety in American culture is most obvious when looking at some of the theological developments that have accrued since the philosophers of selfishness decided to use Christianity as their cover story. The "prosperity gospel" that has developed in recent years is a classic example.

The prosperity gospel teaches, to be blunt, that you can tell how much God favors you by how rich you are. While some on the Christian right reject this idea as a tad crude, it's still wildly popular and its adherents, like Oral Roberts, are some of the major architects and organizers for the Christian right. It's a perfect example of how conservative ideology leads to pious Christianity. People want to believe that the rich are better than everyone else and the poor don't deserve squat, so they find a way to blame God for it rather than own their own greed and selfishness.

Pope Francis may be entirely sincere when he says he wants Catholic clergy to deemphasize the right-wing political pandering in favor of highlighting values that are more in line with liberalism, such as compassion and generosity to the poor, but the odds are slim of this message making inroads with church leaders in the United States. The church needs conservatives who need to believe they're good and holy people despite their selfish beliefs. Without them, who will show up and tithe? Liberals? Most of them are sleeping in on Sundays, secure that their commitment to social justice makes them good people regardless of how visibly pious they are.

The fact of the matter is that the purposes religion serves in America are shrinking in number. Our cultural identity is increasingly shaped by pop culture, not faith or ethnic identity. Our holidays are more about shopping

and having a chance to catch up with far-flung family these days, not showing devotion to a deity. Spiritual needs are often addressed through modern means like psychotherapy and self-help. People build communities through hobbies and interests more than through faith communities bound by geography, ethnicity and family.

Increasingly, the only thing religion has left to justify itself is that it provides cover for people who want to have bigoted, selfish beliefs but want to believe they are good people anyway. As these social trends continue, we can expect the alignment between public piety and grotesquely selfish political beliefs to get worse, not better.

THE FREE MARKET IS NOT FREE AND NOT NATURAL

Robert Reich

(Excerpted from <http://robertreich.org/post/61406074983>)

One of the most deceptive ideas embraced by the Ayn Rand-inspired Right is that the free market is natural, and exists outside and beyond government. ... In reality, the "free market" is a bunch of rules about:

- 1) what can be owned and traded (the genome? slaves? nuclear materials? babies? votes?);
- 2) on what terms (equal access to the Internet? the right to organize unions? corporate monopolies? the length of patent protections?);
- 3) under what conditions (poisonous drugs? unsafe foods? deceptive Ponzi schemes? uninsured derivatives? dangerous workplaces?);
- 4) what's private and what's public (police? roads? clean air and clean water? healthcare? good schools? parks and playgrounds?);
- 5) how to pay for what (taxes, user fees, individual pricing?).

And so on. These rules don't exist in nature; they are human creations. Governments don't "intrude" on free markets; governments organize and maintain them. Markets aren't "free" of rules; the rules define them.

WHILE THEIR WORKERS ORGANIZE FOR A LIVING WAGE, McDONALD'S HAS SOME ADVICE

Josh Eideson

(Based on "Get a clue, McDonald's", by Mr. Eideson, on salon.com, 12/9/2013)

While fast-food workers across the nation—and no, they're not after-school teenagers; most of them are the adult working poor—are organizing and striking for a \$15-an-hour living wage, the industry's top chain, McDonald's, has been offering their employees some advice.

And no, not just warnings to resist the organizers of the Service Employee International Union (SEIU), but avuncular, pat-on-the-head advice on how to make their \$8 or \$9-an-hour wages go further.

In July, McDonald's suggested a sample budget for workers, which imagined an employee working *two* jobs

(sic) and still devoting zero dollars to heat. In October, an activist worker recorded and shared her call to the company's McResources hotline in which a counselor suggested she "would most likely be eligible" for food stamps, which "takes a lot of pressure off how much money you spend on groceries". And last month ... a McResources website offered advice on budgeting, stress, and diet which included cutting food into smaller pieces and spending more time at church.

Best of all? The "To Tip or Not to Tip" guide ... that appeared on that same McResources website. It offered McDonald's minimum-wage workers "tips for the holidays" from "etiquette guru Emily Post" on how much to tip the "servicepersons" in your life, including "Au Pair", "Beauty Salon Staff", "Dog Walker", "Fitness Trainer, personal", "Garage Attendants", "Massage Therapist", "Pool Cleaner", and "Yard/ Garden Worker".

Comment: McDonald's quickly took down the "guide", but the smell won't go away. - JR

WHAT DOES THE GOD PARTICLE HAVE TO DO WITH HUMANISM?

Joel Galker

The topic of the November session of Humanism 102 was about nothing, or rather mainly about Lawrence Krauss' book, *A Universe From Nothing*. The book, as well as my sketchy understanding allows, is an account of the physics of the creation of the universe out of empty space, from the viewpoint of contemporary physics. I was somewhat disappointed that it was not the nothing I was hoping for, the absolute nothing of not even empty space and I wondered, what does any of it have to do with humanism?

Krauss pretty much sticks to science, but he does make some remarks about religion being worthless in explaining anything about the universe or anything else. I agree, but I have to say that in the context of the book, it seemed to me gratuitous. For Krauss, the "how" is everything and the "why" is without meaning. Much of our discussion was about Krauss' nothing and some of his insights into the history of physics that humanists could and maybe should pay more attention to. For me, Krauss, while denouncing religion, makes a point by what he *doesn't* address. It is, I think, the understanding that science as a discipline and a project is an institution that doesn't totally lack any of the human aspects which we think pertain to all social institutions.

That discussion leader John Rafferty's choice of the book was a canny one became clear to me when he voiced what had been my unnamed discomfort throughout the reading: that however meaningless the "why" question, we still have the irresistible impulse to ask it. I have long thought that though the answers are often doubtful we can better trust the questions because they speak from our infantile hearts, from what we most desire and need. I arrived there, I think, by my own preoccupations with origins and ontology, which are among my earliest memories. "Why?" is a meaningless question, but I still haven't gotten over it.

ATHEISM IS NEGATIVE?

Giddian Beer

In the November 2013 issue of *Ethical Outlook*, the newsletter of the New York Society for Ethical Culture, Dr. Joseph Chuman writes that "atheist groups exist to oppose and attack religion, and seemingly little else . . . seem to have no social program, no positive vision of social reform, no commitment to social engagement . . . atheism is a negative philosophy."

Apparently, Dr. Chuman's knowledge of atheism derives mainly from the writings of Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens and others, but these do not provide the whole story. We support and contribute to various worthy social and political causes. We also oppose harmful social and political causes. Hopefully, Dr. Chuman will take another look.

Here's why we oppose religion, starting with some clarification:

First, we are not atheists because we oppose religion; we are atheists because we see no iota of real evidence for a creator-supervisor of the universe; it has the same level of credibility as spiritualism or flying saucers.

Second, we do not oppose religion because we are atheists; we oppose religion because we see the harm that it can do and often does. We feel no obligation to exonerate its behavior because of its popularity.

Religions provide mythical explanations for existence, for the vicissitudes of life, and for a supposed continuation of life after death. In ancient times, when there was so little knowledge, the only reasonable explanations for almost everything were powerful capricious creatures lurking somewhere and working their will. Even though our knowledge base now is so much larger (providing reasons for almost everything that was once inexplicable), people still prefer magical explanations for things that they (often deliberately) do not understand.

Religions also provide prescriptions for placating and cajoling those imaginary creatures. Certain persons, by dint of special knowledge or aptitude, are supposedly able to intercede with them or to know what they want people to do; therefore, those persons also have power. They establish dogma and precepts to control the minds and set up rules and laws to control the activities of followers. However, when necessary, dogma and rules can be adjusted to conform to popular attitudes.

The power of religion is directly proportional to the depth of ignorance, so followers are exhorted to purge doubt, purify thought, intensify faith—a recipe for fanaticism. And when people want to believe, nothing is too absurd. Religion corrupts history, replaces science with fantasy and dumbs down the people. It enables all sorts of behavior, the best, the worst and everything in between.

The "nice" religions (a contemporary phenomenon) are rather benign, helpful and comforting in various ways, providing feelings of belonging, comfort, love and hope for members. Lower echelons of some denominations work effectively to diminish suffering and help the needy.

Recently we see a growing tendency among them to reduce inter-religious conflict and to adjust their dogma and rules in light of reality and of fundamental human needs.

Other religions, including a few of the largest, are mercilessly virulent. Ignorance is enforced. Fanaticism, foolishness and inhumanity (including maniacal sex obsessions) prevail; common sense, compassion and understanding are abandoned. Violators, heretics and unbelievers are disciplined, often brutally. Imposing their practices and prejudices on people and places where they are not wanted, sometimes by violence and bloodshed, is a sacred duty.

To be sure, once it was even much worse. There were no “nice” religions. For a millennium of Europe-Mideast history this virulence was normal. The several religions enforced ideological purity with oppression, massacres, witch hunts and the most painful, gruesome executions they could devise. They ground against each other with bloody interdenominational warfare.

Though the viciousness and violence abated in the most recent centuries, the impulse to purify humanity, by force—even by eliminating some of it—if necessary, still exists. The Holocaust was, absolutely, an offspring of the many-centuries-long hostility towards, and persecution of, a people (Jews) who would not believe required precepts and dogmas.

So, in any list of pursuits that drive “man’s inhumanity to man” religion would certainly be near the top. How is opposition to that negative?

Finally, imagine that all religions were, instead, like the Baha’i, whose adherents promote their faith only by example and persuasion, not by inflicting their memes and mores on others. Or imagine that there were no religions at all. In a world like that there would be no religious persecution, and governments would not proscribe reproductive health care for women. Shia, Sunni, Roman Catholics, Orthodox Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, and Hindus would not kill each other. There would be no ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, no murders and bombings in Northern Ireland, Iraq, or Mumbai, no Holocaust, no 9/11 event.

No Harris would write *The End of Faith*, Dawkins and Dennett would not be troubled by religion any more than they are troubled by astrology and crop circles. And new atheists, if any, would be like former atheists — arguing for the replacement of fantasy with science, reason and critical thinking.

What do *you* think?

JANUARY 16 IS RELIGIOUS FREEDOM DAY

John Rafferty

Each year, the Religious Freedom Day website announces, the President declares January 16th to be Religious Freedom Day, and calls upon Americans to “observe this day through appropriate events and activities in homes, schools, and places of worship”.

We agree, so on January 16 feel free to be free of religion all day long.

RECENT CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCIENCE BY MUSLIM SCHOLARS

(Excerpted from ExMuslimBlogs, 11/23/2013)

GYNECOLOGY: “Women who drive cars suffer from ovarian problems and ‘rolled-up pelvises’, giving rise to genetically defective babies.” - Sheik Salah al-luhaidan, Saudi “psychologist”

SEISMOLOGY: “Many women who do not dress modestly lead young men astray, corrupt their chastity and spread adultery in the society, which increases earthquakes.” - Hajatosalam Kazem Sedighi, Iranian Islamic Scholar

FORENSIC SCIENCE: “DNA tests should not be used as evidence in rape cases.” - Maulana Mohammed Khan Sherani, Head of the Council for Islamic Ideology

GEOLOGY: “If the earth is rotating as they claim, the countries, the mountains, the trees, the rivers, and the oceans will have no bottom and the people will see the eastern countries move to the west and the western countries move to the east. The earth is flat, and anyone claiming it is round is an atheist deserving punishment.” - Sheik Abdul Aziz ibn Baaz, supreme authority of Islam in Saudi Arabia, the “walking Quran”

According to one Hadith, the Prophet (peace be upon him) had said:

“Learn as much Arabic as to read the Koran, then stop. Learn as much of the stars as to guide your way in the night, then stop.”

RECENT CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCIENCE BY AMERICAN POLITICIANS

GYNECOLOGY: “From what I understand from doctors, [pregnancy caused by rape] is really rare. If it’s a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down.” - Rep. Todd Akin (R-MO).

SEISMOLOGY: “I don’t know how much God has to do to get the attention of the politicians. We’ve had an earthquake; we’ve had a hurricane. He said, ‘Are you going to start listening to me here?’” - Rep. (and presidential candidate) Michelle Bachman, (R-MN)

FORENSIC SCIENCE: “We send a package [via UPS or FedEx] to everyone who’s here illegally and when it’s delivered we pull it up in a computer, and we know where they are.” - Presidential candidate Newt Gingrich

GEOLOGY: “My fear is that the whole island [of Guam] will become so overly populated [with Navy and Marine personnel] that it will tip over and capsize.” - Rep. Hank Johnson, (D-GA)

Comment: Not to mention (but I will), politician-in-reporter’s-clothing Bill O’Reilly’s contribution to Earth Science: “Tide goes in, tide goes out. It always comes in, and always goes out, never a missed communication. You can’t explain that.” - JR

The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn. - Alvin Toffler

THE LAST FEW JOKES FOR INTELLECTUALS

Chrissy Stockton

(Lifted from *thoughtcatalog.com* by Brian Rafferty)

A Buddhist monk approaches a hotdog stand and says
“Make me one with everything.”

The vendor makes the hot dog and hands it to the Buddhist monk, who pays with a \$20 bill. The vendor puts the bill in the cash box and closes it.

“Excuse me, but where’s my change?” asks the Buddhist monk. The vendor replies,

“Change must come from within.”

Knock-knock.
Who’s there?

To.

To who?

No, to *whom*.

The barman says, “We don’t serve time travelers in here.”
A time traveler walks into a bar.

How many surrealists does it take to screw in a light bulb?
A fish.

This sentence contains exactly three errors.

I APOLOGIZE

John Rafferty

The masthead at the foot of Page 1 of PIQUE carries an offer allowing other freethought organizations to freely reprint—with credit—articles from this newsletter. Those other organizations give us the same freedom, and since I became Editor in 2002 articles have been traded back and forth a hundred or more times.

However, the December issue of PIQUE carried a piece titled “Answering the Question: ‘Why Do You Bother?’” by Tyson Gill. I reprinted it from—and credited it to—David Orenstein’s Paleolibrarian blog, in which it had been titled “Non-Belief as a Cause to Celebrate”.

I made a mistake. I didn’t notice the last line of the Paleolibrarian email, which acknowledged that the article had originally run in the November issue of the New York City Atheists’ newsletter, which I had not seen.

On December 6 I received a scolding email from the editor of the NYCA newsletter, Jane Everhart, which questioned my journalistic experience and ethics.

I have since apologized to David Orenstein in a more-than-friendly phone conversation, in an email exchange with original author Gill (apology accepted “without reservation”), as well as to Ken Bronstein, President of NYCA (of which I have been a member as well as a cable-TV spokesperson for several years), to Ms. Everhart, and now to the readers of PIQUE.

It will not happen again.

Muslim Scholarship
& American Politics
Page 11

Vote for the SHSNY
Dumbst-of-the-Year, 2013
Page 5

Welcome Our New Mayor
Page 2

Happy New Year! What
Should We Worry About?
Page 1

Secular Humanist
Society of New York
FDR Station
PO Box 7661
New York, NY
10150-7661

