

# PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

June 2005

Inside, lots of pictures from our lots-of-fun FriendRaiser party, a report on a beaut of a new book (and suggestions for fall reading), and comments on America yesterday by today's Vonnegut and on America today by yesterday's Eisenhower. We decry fanatics in Kabul and Colorado Springs, anti-feminists, and the Kansas school board, again. We make fun of Unitarian jihadists, self-righteous rabbis, and interfaith chickens. But first, congratulations to both our new and re-elected officers.

## THE SHSNY BOARD ELECTS NEW OFFICERS

At its first meeting after the general election completed April 15, the new SHSNY Board on May 26 elected the following officers for the 2005-2008 term:

President - Conrad Claborne  
Vice President - Remo Cosentino  
Treasurer - Donna Marxer  
Secretary - John Rafferty  
Program/Events Chair - Jane Bertoni

## LUNATIC LOGIC

**John Rafferty**

Follow the logic, if you can: 1. American soldiers may or may not have flushed a copy or copies of the Koran down toilets. 2. *Newsweek*, relying on a single source, ill-advisedly reported that it was so (and indeed, it may be). 3. Politicians opposed to Pakistan's semi-pro-American president whipped up crowds of Muslim demonstrators. 4. Pro-Taliban Muslims in Afghanistan then goaded their followers to riots in which seventeen people have died. 5. Bush administration spokesmen and right-wing pundits, claiming that the flushings are all liberal lies, blame *Newsweek* for the riot deaths, demand apologies and abasements, and suggest that any press hostile to "American purposes" (read "administration purposes") needs to be curbed.

Wait a minute. Seventeen people are dead because of a 300-word article in a magazine they haven't seen, written in a language most of them can't read? Demagogues and religious fanatics incite people to riot over a story that in fact may be true (I'd bet on it), and the magazine is responsible? That's lunatic, shoot-the-messenger logic. True story or not, the blame belongs on the heads of the Pakistani and Afghan politicians and mullahs who are rejoicing in those made-for-TV deaths, which further inflame anti-American passions.

And who else is rejoicing? The right-wing zealots of the Bush administration, who piously tut-tut *Newsweek's* gaffe. They'd rather have a cheap victory over a free press than actually do something about the very real torture and abuse story that won't go away. As Hendrik Hertzberg writes in the May 30 *The New Yorker*:

“Is it really necessary at this late date to point out that the problem is torture and abuse, not dubiously sourced reports of torture and abuse? If the allegations in the Newsweek story seemed credible on their face, not only to its editors but also to government officials (such as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who quickly assigned a general to look into them), perhaps that is because of the long, dismal history of horrors that have already been documented — in many cases, by investigations conducted within the Armed Forces themselves, which are full of men and women who recognize that the honor of their service is at stake. ...

“The indulgence of this sort of depravity goes to, and comes from, the top. ... Nobody in a position of real authority has ever been held accountable for any of it. Against this background, words like ‘hypocritical’ and ‘cynical’ are inadequate to describe the White House campaign to demonize *Newsweek*. ‘Nauseating’ is more like it.”

### KANSAS, AGAIN

*(Excerpted from “A Real Monkey Trial,” by Peter Dizikes, salon.com, 5/13/05; “The New Monkey Trial,” by Michelle Goldberg, salon.com, 1/10/05; and various news reports during May in The New York Times.)*

Biblical literalists have regained their majority (6-4) on the State Board of Education, and will, sometime in June, mandate that Darwinian evolution be challenged as “controversial” in all classrooms. They engineered hearings last month on changing state standards so the creationist “theory” of “intelligent design,” and perhaps other religious ideas, can be taught in science classes along with evolution.

When a creationist “witness” at the hearings admitted he hadn’t read a report by scientists and educators on Kansas’ curriculum committee, which wants to keep the state’s solid science standards intact, majority Board member Kathy Martin sympathized: “Please don’t feel bad that you haven’t read the whole thing, because I haven’t read it myself.”

Do the words “kangaroo court” come to mind?

In fact, the reason that “intelligent design” has risen from the dead in Kansas is that it’s simply a wedge issue in the larger agenda of the religious right. “If you believe God created a baby, it makes it a whole lot harder to get rid of that baby,” Terry Fox, pastor of the Southern Baptist Ministry in Wichita, told a *Washington Post* reporter this spring. “If you can cause enough doubt on evolution, liberalism will die.”

The Kansas idiocy is mirrored in a similar statewide mandate enacted in Ohio in 2002, and according to the May 6 *New York Times*, “Legislators in Alabama and Georgia have introduced bills this season to allow teachers to challenge Darwin in class, and the battle over evolution is simmering on the local level in 20 states.” In Missouri, legislation is being introduced to require state biology textbooks to include at least one chapter dealing with “alternative theories to evolution.” State Representative Cynthia Davis told the Times: “It’s like when the hijackers took those four planes on September 11 and took people to a place where they didn’t want to go. I think a lot of people feel that liberals have taken our country somewhere we don’t want to go. I think a lot more people realize this is our country and we’re going to take it back.”

*What? Liberals = 9/11 terrorists?*

And last month, voters in Dover, Pa., the first school district in the country to mandate the teaching of “intelligent design,” effectively deadlocked in a school board primary election over the issue. Bill Buckingham, chairman of the curriculum committee of the board, who wears a red, white and blue crucifix pin on his lapel, has said publicly, if confusedly: “This country wasn’t founded on Muslim beliefs or evolution. This country was founded on Christianity, and our students should be taught as such.”

Does all of this matter to us in enlightened, educated, blue-state New York, New Jersey and Connecticut? Well, if evolution is “controversial” in 40 percent of the states of the Union (or “embattled” in 43 of the 50, according to the National Center for Science Education), do you think textbook publishers—who need to sell their wares nationally—will treat evolution as the slam-dunk fact it certainly is in the biology texts your children and grandchildren will read?

### **THINK IT CAN’T HAPPEN HERE?**

Assemblyman Daniel L. Hooker, R-Saugerties, on May 3 introduced two bills in the New York State legislature: one requiring the teaching of intelligent design in New York state public schools; another allowing the posting of the Ten Commandments on government property. Hooker is the sole sponsor of both bills, which have been referred to committee, where they will presumably die quietly. Nevertheless ...

### **THE IDIOCY WATCH: MAY 1**

*Washington, D.C.:* Pat Robertson said the threat posed by “liberal judges” is probably more serious than a few bearded terrorists who fly into buildings. George Stephanopoulos asked if he really believed judges posed “the most serious threat America has faced in nearly 400 years of history, more serious than al Qaeda, than Nazi Germany and Japan, more serious than the Civil War?” “George,” Robertson responded, “I really believe that.”

### **A LOT PITHIER THAN THE 21-POINT, 494-WORD AFFIRMATIONS OF HUMANISM**

The “Question of the Month” in the March issue of *WASHline*, the newsletter of the Washington (D.C.) Area Secular Humanists, asked: “How might you describe humanism in a single sentence or phrase?” The best answer, we think, was forwarded by Francis Mortyn of The Humanist Fellowship of San Diego, from Article 1 of their bylaws — just two lines, the first from Felix Adler and John Dewey, the second from Tom Paine:

*Human experience is the source of values. The  
individual human being is the source of rights.*

What do *you* think?

### **UH-OH**

*(Excerpted from bbc.co.uk, 5/12/05)*

Researchers at Cornell University have devised a simple robot that can make copies of itself from spare parts. ... In a little more than a minute, a simple three-cube robot can make a copy of itself. That offspring version can then make further copies.

### **RELIGION’S WAR AGAINST WOMEN**

### **Rebecca Traister**

*(Excerpted from "Religious Right Would Kill to Stop Safe Sex," salon.com, 5/05/05)*

As we get closer to approval for a vaccine that will prevent human papillomavirus (HPV), the STD thought to cause 70 percent of cervical cancer cases, some sectors of the religious right have begun to make protest noises. Apparently, disease-prevention of this nature ... could mean just the green light we've all been waiting for to go out and rut like bunnies. ...

HPV, which doesn't always produce symptoms and often goes undetected, is a terrifyingly common condition. According to the CDC, over 50 percent of sexually active men and women contract it ... and by age 50, more than 80 percent of women will have had the virus. While many cases disappear of their own accord, it's the main risk factor in contracting cervical cancer ...

Because it is a wily virus that can slip past condoms, HPV has long been a darling of the abstinence-only brigade ... in its argument that there is no such thing as "safe sex" short of abstaining entirely.

But two vaccines, which could be licensed as early as next year, have recently brightened the picture. Both Merck and GlaxoSmithKline have announced that in clinical trials their HPV vaccines had prevented around 90 percent of new infections. The idea is that women would be vaccinated before they become sexually active, never contract HPV, and thus dramatically lower the risk of getting cervical cancer.

If the vaccines get approved, there is the possibility that HPV would cease to be a threat to women, and the right would lose one of its major weapons in the war against premarital sex. Perhaps that explains why some groups are in such a bad mood over such good medical news. In an April article in *New Scientist*, Bridget Maher of the Christian lobby Family Research Council ("Defending Family, Faith, and Freedom") is quoted as saying that "giving the HPV vaccine to young women could be potentially harmful, because they may see it as a license to engage in premarital sex."

### **WHY ARE WE NOT SURPRISED BY THE ABOVE?**

"Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." — *I Timothy 2:11-12*

"Every woman should be overwhelmed with the shame ... of being a woman."

— *St. Clement of Alexandria*

"If a woman grows old and weary and dies bearing children, it is of no consequence. Let her die bearing children. That is what she is here for. — *Martin Luther*

"Don't you think that the irresponsible behavior of men is caused by women?"

— *Pope John Paul II, 1994*

### **THIS IS TOO GOOD, AND I AM NOT MAKING IT UP**

**John Rafferty**

*(Photo of two chief rabbis in Jerusalem, reproduced from May PIQUE)*

Remember these guys from May PIQUE? They're the most important of the dozens of clerics who held a "unity" press conference in Jerusalem to protest a gay pride festival scheduled for August in the "holy land" which, they announced, is "not the homo land." Why "most important"? Well, it is Jerusalem, and they're Israel's chief rabbis.

On the left is Chief Sephardi Rabbi Shlomo Amar, who famously pronounced that last December's tsunami that killed 220,000 people was "an expression of God's great ire with the world, the world is being punished for wrongdoing." Okay, let's talk about wrongdoing. On April 26, according to Jerusalem police, Amar's son hired two thugs, and kidnapped and beat a 17-year-old young man who was involved in a "romantic relationship" with his sister, then took the youth to the rabbi's apartment for more beatings and threats, in which his mother and sister joined. The rabbi, who admits he was at home at the time, says he knew nothing about anyone being beaten up in his apartment, and that his "business trip" to Thailand the day the youth went to the police had nothing to do with, well, anything. The young man has passed a lie-detector test, the rabbi's son and the goons are indicted, mother and daughter spent a week under house arrest, and the cops have announced that they don't buy the rabbi's story.

On the right, meet Amar's fellow homo-hater, Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Yonah Metzger. Like Amar, his job is a government position akin to a Supreme Court Justice here, so he's bound by anti-corruption rules. However, he's been under investigation for allegedly receiving "thousands of shekels worth of benefits" from Jerusalem's David Citadel hotel. For what in return? the cops would like to know.

*But wait, wait, that's not all.*

Not all? The leading guardians of heterosexual morality and family values in the Holy Land involved in kidnapping, assault and corruption—what could possibly be worse? Well, it seems that handsome Rabbi Metzger has been accused of "sexual misconduct" with and by (*You know what's coming, don't you? How could you not know? Wait for it ...*) four men!

### **SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND AIR FORCE**

*(Excerpted from a New York Times editorial, 5/14/05)*

Whatever is ailing the Air Force Academy, and the academy has had its share of ailments over the years, campus pressure on cadets to adopt a particular set of religious beliefs will not cure it. Last year, academy officials promised to do something about widespread complaints of unconstitutional proselytizing of academy students by evangelists whose efforts were blessed by authority figures in the chain of command. An authorized investigation by the Yale Divinity School and local news reports documented numerous instances of pressure on cadets to adopt Christian beliefs and practices. Such pressure came from dozens of faculty members and chaplains, and even the football coach, with his "Team Jesus Christ" banner.

One chaplain instructed 600 cadets to warn their comrades who had not been born again that "the fires of hell" were waiting. Pressure to view "The Passion of the Christ" was reported, extending to "official" invitations at every cadet's seat in the dining hall. Nonevangelicals complained of bias in the granting of privileges and of hazing by upper-class superiors, who made those who declined to attend chapel march in "heathen flights."

The cure for this blatant abuse of God and country should be obvious. But it turns out that the academy's remedial program of religious toleration is running into resistance. The Air Force's chief chaplain expressed displeasure at the object lessons dramatized in a multidenominational educational videotape. "Why is it the Christians never win?" the chief, Maj. Gen. Charles Baldwin, demanded to know after watching the give-and-take of

instructional encounters. General Baldwin had segments cut out on such non-Christian religions as Buddhism, Judaism and Native American spirituality.

Capt. MeLinda Morton, a campus chaplain charged with helping to fix the problem, was thoroughly disheartened by the response. She warned that the altered video program would do little to cure ... “systemic and pervasive” proselytizing. [She] was removed last week as executive officer of the chaplain office.

***Update: from the Times of May 15 and 24:***

Capt. Morton has been given orders to transfer from the Academy in Colorado Springs to Okinawa, and from there, probably, to Iraq or Afghanistan. Prof. Kristen Leslie of the Yale Divinity School “authorized investigation,” has not been interviewed by anyone on the Air Force’s task force investigating the complaints. Neither has Mikey Weinstein, an academy alumnus who interviewed 117 cadets and staff and faculty members after his cadet son was subjected to anti-Jewish slurs. The only call he has received was from a rabbi serving on the task force who asked him to stop talking to the news media.

## **UNITARIAN JIHAD**

**Jon Carroll**

*(Excerpted from the San Francisco Chronicle, 4/8/05, and forwarded by Mike Tuchman)*

Greetings to the Imprisoned Citizens of the United States. We are Unitarian Jihad. There is only God, unless there is more than one God. The vote of our God subcommittee is 10-8 in favor of one God, with two abstentions. Brother Flaming Sword of Moderation noted the possibility of there being no God at all, and his objection was noted with love by the secretary.

Greetings to the Imprisoned Citizens of the United States! Too long has your attention been waylaid by the bright baubles of extremist thought. Too long have fundamentalist yahoos of all religions (except Buddhism - 14-5 vote, no abstentions, fundamentalism subcommittee) made your head hurt. Too long have you been buffeted by angry people who think that God talks to them. You have a right to your moderation! You have the power to be calm! ...

People of the United States, why is everyone yelling at you? Whatever happened to ... you know, everything? Why is the news dominated by nutballs saying that the Ten Commandments have to be tattooed inside the eyelids of every American, or that Allah has told them to kill Americans in order to rid the world of Satan, or that Yahweh has instructed them to go live wherever they feel like, or that Shiva thinks bombing mosques is a great idea? Sister Immaculate Dagger of Peace notes for the record that we mean no disrespect to Jews, Muslims, Christians or Hindus. Referred back to the committee of the whole for further discussion. ...

We are Unitarian Jihad, and our motto is: “Sincerity is not enough.” ... Just because you believe it’s true doesn’t make it true. Just because your motives are pure doesn’t mean you are not doing harm. Get a dog. Feed the birds in the park. Play basketball. Lighten up. The world is not out to get you, except in the sense that the world is out to get everyone.

Brother Gatling Gun of Patience notes that he’s pretty sure the world is out to get him because everyone laughs when he says he is a Unitarian. There were murmurs of assent around the room. Someone suggested that we buy some Congress members and really stick it to the Baptists. But this was deemed against Revolutionary Principles, and

Brother Gatling Gun of Patience was remanded to the Sunday Flowers and Banners committee.

People of the United States! We are Unitarian Jihad! We can strike without warning. Pockets of reasonableness and harmony will appear as if from nowhere! Nice people will run the government again! There will be coffee and cookies in the Gandhi Room after the revolution.

(Photo montage from May 19 FriendRaiser party)

### **RAISING FRIENDS WHILE RAISING GLASSES**

Forty or more members and friends of SHSNY turned out for our first-ever FriendRaiser on May 19, and an even-more-than-friendly time was had by all. The party, at Donna Marxer's spacious artist's loft in SoHo, brought together long-time members and their first-time guests over (lots of) wine, cheese, and homemade brownies and cookies. And, just to be safe, everyone got a Get Out Of Hell Free! pass.

### **CONRAD EXPLAINS IT ALL FOR YOU**

President Conrad Claborne (above, left, with Austin Dacey of CFI-MetroNY) answered most of our guests' questions with a welcoming, please-get-involved speech, which was answered with checks from several new members. (That's new member Chuck Corbett, below, surrounded by his fan club.)

### **THE IDIOCY WATCH: MAY 4**

Pretoria South Africa: Health Minister Manto Tshabal-ala-Msimang says that eating garlic is a far better treatment for AIDS than anti-retroviral drugs, because garlic has no side effects. "Raw garlic and the skin of a lemon—not only do they give you a beautiful face and skin," she said, "but they also protect you from disease."

### **JEWES, MUSLIMS, HINDUS AGREE ON CHICKEN**

*(From The Onion satirical weekly, May 18, 2005)*

Geneva: After years of sectarian violence, a coalition of Jews, Muslims, and Hindus signed an international resolution Monday, confirming their mutual appreciation of chicken dishes. "Whether it is breaded with matzo, served as shwarma, or covered in tikka masala sauce, chic-ken is the one meat upon which all faiths can agree," said spokesman Jerome Maliszewski, addressing an assembly of rabbis, mullahs, and swamis. "Let this friendly exchange of recipes be the first tentative step toward everlasting peace." Attendees at the combination summit and potluck dinner labeled it a qualified success, regretting the altercation that broke out between factions with differing views on skewer length.

### **KURT VONNEGUT ADVISES IRAQ ON DEMOCRACY**

*(Via Paul Krassner on huffingtonpost.com 5/11/05)*

Dearest Iraq:

Act like me. After 100 years of democracy, let your slaves go. After 150, let your women vote. At the start of democracy, ethnic cleansing is quite OK.

Love you madly!

Uncle Sam

**THE BOOK CLUB READS *THE END OF FAITH*,  
BY SAM HARRIS**

**Reported by John Rafferty**

*Interviewer:* In your book you seem to argue for a kind of religious intolerance. Do you mean to suggest that we need not respect a person's religious beliefs?

*Sam Harris:* Yes.

So begins an interview distributed by *The End of Faith* publisher, W.W. Norton, in which, as in the book itself, author Harris states his thesis right up front: religious faith is the most dangerous force in the modern world, and it's time we grew up and got rid of it.

And the SHSNY Book Club agreed.

Thirteen members and book-loving friends of SHSNY gathered in Donna Marxer and John Rafferty's apartment the evening of May 12, and enjoyed a stimulating and wide-ranging discussion that touched on such topics as the nature of faith, the condition of unbelievers in an increasingly religious America, the intrusion of religion into public school education in America (see "Kansas, Again," page 2), and the general decline in literacy and educational standards in America.

While a few readers held to the more widely accepted idea that respect for other people's beliefs was a cornerstone of democratic society, a consensus among the participants seemed to agree with Natalie Angier in her *New York Times* review of the book:

*"A zippered-lip policy would be fine, a pleasant display of the neighborly tolerance that we consider part of an advanced democracy, Harris says, if not for the mortal perils inherent in strong religious faith. The terrorists who flew jet planes into the World Trade Center believed in the holiness of their cause. The Christian apocalypticists who are willing to risk a nuclear conflagration in the Middle East for the sake of expediting the second coming of Christ believe in the holiness of their cause. In Harris's view, such fundamentalists are not misinterpreting their religious texts or ideals. They are not defaming or distorting their faith. To the contrary, they are taking their religion seriously ..."*

The second half of *The End of Faith*—in which Harris attempts "experiments in consciousness" to explain such human experiences as transcendence and awe, and in which he attempts to create "a science of good and evil" to replace religion—is a muddle, most of us agreed. But, we also agreed, his failure to find a substitute for religion (Who ever has?) does not detract from his searing, prescient, and important indictment.

**AGAINST MODERATION, AGAINST TOLERANCE**

**Sam Harris**

*(From Chapter 1 of The End of Faith, "Reason In Exile.")*

Our situation is this: most of the people in this world believe that the Creator of the universe has written a book. We have the misfortune of having many such books on hand, each making an exclusive claim as to its infallibility. People tend to organize themselves into factions according to which of these incompatible claims they accept—rather than on the basis of language, skin color, location of birth, or any other criterion of tribalism. Each of these texts urges its readers to adopt a variety of beliefs and practices, some of which are benign, many of which are not. All are in perverse agreement on one point of fundamental importance, however: "respect" for other faiths, or for the views of



unbelievers, is not an attitude that God endorses. While all faiths have been touched, here and there, by the spirit of ecumenicalism, the central tenet of every religious tradition is that all others are mere repositories of error or, at best, dangerously incomplete. Intolerance is thus intrinsic to every creed. Once a person believes—*really* believes—that certain ideas can lead to eternal happiness, or to its antithesis, he cannot tolerate the possibility that the people he loves might be led astray by the blandishments of unbelievers. Certainty about the next life is simply incompatible with tolerance in this one.

Observations of this sort pose an immediate problem for us, however, because criticizing a person's faith is currently taboo in every corner of our culture. On this subject, liberals and conservatives have reached a rare consensus: religious beliefs are simply beyond the scope of rational discourse. Criticizing a person's ideas about God and the afterlife is thought to be impolitic in a way that criticizing his ideas about physics or history is not. ... Faith itself is always, and everywhere, exonerated.

But technology has a way of creating fresh moral imperatives. Our technical advances in the art of war have finally rendered our religious differences—and hence our religious *beliefs*—antithetical to our survival. We can no longer ignore the fact that billions of our neighbors believe in the metaphysics of martyrdom, or in the literal truth of the book of Revelation, or any of the other fantastical notions that have lurked in the minds of the faithful for millennia — because our neighbors are now armed with chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. There is no doubt that these developments mark the terminal phase of our credulity. Words like “God” and “Allah” must go the way of “Apollo” and “Baal,” or they will unmake our world. ...

Many religious moderates have taken the apparent high road of pluralism, asserting the equal validity of all faiths, but in doing so they neglect to notice the irredeemably sectarian truth claims of each. As long as a Christian believes that only his baptized brethren will be saved on the Day of Judgment, he cannot possibly “respect” the beliefs of others, for he knows that the flames of hell have been stoked by these very ideas and await their adherents even now. Muslims and Jews generally take the same arrogant view of their own enterprises and have spent millennia passionately reiterating the errors of other faiths. It should go without saying that these rival belief systems are all equally uncontaminated by evidence.

And yet, intellectuals as diverse as H. G. Wells, Albert Einstein, Carl Jung, Max Planck, Freeman Dyson, and Stephen Jay Gould have declared the war between reason and faith to be long over. On this view, there is no need to have all of our beliefs about the universe cohere. A person can be a God-fearing Christian on Sunday and a working scientist come Monday morning, without ever having to account for the partition that seems to have erected itself in his head while he slept. He can, as it were, have his reason and eat it too. ...

The only reason anyone is “moderate” in matters of faith these days is that he has assimilated some of the fruits of the last two thousand years of human thought (democratic politics, scientific advancement on every front, concern for human rights, an end to cultural and geographic isolation, etc.). The doors leading out of scriptural literalism do not open from the *inside*. The moderation we see among nonfundamentalists is not some sign that faith itself has evolved; it is, rather, the product of the many hammer blows of modernity that have exposed certain tenets of faith to doubt. Not the least

among these developments has been the emergence of our tendency to value evidence and to be convinced by a proposition to the degree that there is evidence for it. Even most fundamentalists live by the lights of reason in this regard; it is just that their minds seem to have been partitioned to accommodate the profligate truth claims of their faith. Tell a devout Christian that his wife is cheating on him, or that frozen yogurt can make a man invisible, and he is likely to require as much evidence as anyone else, and to be persuaded only to the extent that you give it. Tell him that the book he keeps by his bed was written by an invisible deity who will punish him with fire for eternity if he fails to accept its every incredible claim about the universe, and he seems to require no evidence whatsoever.

Religious moderation springs from the fact that even the least educated person among us simply *knows* more about certain matters than anyone did two thousand years ago — and much of this knowledge is incompatible with scripture. ...

While moderation in religion may seem a reasonable position to stake out, in light of all that we have (and have not) learned about the universe, it offers no bulwark against religious extremism and religious violence. From the perspective of those seeking to live by the letter of the texts, the religious moderate is nothing more than a failed fundamentalist. He is, in all likelihood, going to wind up in hell with the rest of the unbelievers. The problem that religious moderation poses for all of us is that it does not permit anything very critical to be said about religious literalism. We cannot say that fundamentalists are crazy, because they are merely practicing their freedom of belief; we cannot even say that they are mistaken in *religious* terms, because their knowledge of scripture is generally unrivaled. All we can say, as moderates, is that we don't like the personal and social costs that a full embrace of scripture imposes on us. ...

Moderates do not want to kill anyone in the name of God, but they want us to keep using the word "God" as though we knew what we were talking about. And they do not want anything too critical said about people who *really* believe in the God of their fathers, because tolerance, perhaps above all else, is sacred. To speak plainly and truthfully about the state of our world — to say, for instance, that the Bible and the Koran both contain mountains of life-destroying gibberish — is antithetical to tolerance as moderates currently conceive it. But we can no longer afford the luxury of such political correctness. We must finally recognize the price we are paying to maintain the iconography of our ignorance.

*Note: Author Sam Harris will discuss his book for the first time in New York at the New York Society for Ethical Culture on November 16, as part of the CFI-MetroNY "Voices of Reason" lecture series. Details in next month's PIQUE.*

### **WHAT SHALL WE READ THIS FALL?**

Participants in our May 12 book club meeting made several suggestions for fall and winter readings and discussions.

Let's definitely start with a dual selection for mid- to late-September: *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, by Azar Nafisi, a memoir of a teacher's life in Iran, centered on a women's reading group; and *The Bookseller of Kabul*, by Norwegian journalist Asne Seirstad, who examines the treatment of Afghan women (both books are now available in paperback). Exact date and place to be announced.

Let's also certainly read the Norton *Darwin*, by long-time SHSNY member Philip Appleman, Distinguished Professor Emeritus, Indiana University. It includes not only the most important excerpts from Darwin's own writings, but contributions from, among others, Richard Dawkins, Edward O. Wilson, Daniel Dennett, and Stephen Jay Gould, who called this "the best Darwin anthology on the market." The new 3rd Edition is just \$13, and Phil Appleman hopes to arrange his winter schedule to lead our discussion. Date and place TBA.

What else? How about ...

*The Science of Good & Evil*, by Michael Shermer.

*Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*, by Malcolm Gladwell. Should be in paper by fall.

*The World Is Flat*, by Thomas Friedman.

*On Bullshit*, by Harry G. Frankfurt, \$10 hardcover.

*The Future of An Illusion*, by Freud.

*War Is A Force That Gives Us Meaning*, by Chris Hedges, in \$11 paperback now.

What do you want to read ... and discuss? Drop a note to the P.O. box, email [john@rafferty.net](mailto:john@rafferty.net), or leave a message on the machine at 212-308-2165.

### **FINALLY, POLITICAL PROPHECY, CIRCA 1952**

Should any political party attempt to abolish social security, unemployment insurance, and eliminate labor laws and farm programs, you would not hear of that party again in our political history.

There is a tiny splinter group, of course, that believes that you can do these things. Among them are a few Texas oil millionaires, and an occasional politician or businessman from other areas. Their number is negligible and they are stupid.

— *Dwight D. Eisenhower (via Phil Winegar)*