

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

December, 2011

Our ideal newsletter? Front-to-back contributions from readers. This issue, essays, letters, forwarded quotes (and a hand-lettered cardboard sign) from *thirteen* of you who aren't me. Wow! We make more speeches in elevators and parse punctuation yet again, but we also question Christmas, promote rigatoni religion, and swap religion for humor. We salute Occupy Wall Street, some rational Congresspersons (really), and the Humanist of the Year. And, what the hell, Happy Holidays. – JR

END-OF-YEAR GIVING? THINK OF SHSNY

If you are thinking of bringing your charitable contributions up to the tax-laws limit before the end of the year – or even if you haven't thought about it yet – please consider adding SHSNY to your list of worthwhile causes. At the top, please.

SHSNY has several ambitious programs in mind for 2012, including an interactive website, and expanded presence on Facebook and other social networking venues, and a "We are secular humanists" recruitment video (using our members' faces and voices – *this means you!*) for the internet and for use in our most ambitious project, a weekly cable-TV talk show. Most of which will cost money.

Organized religions will reap billions in tax-free contributions by the end of the calendar year, and spend much of what they take in to lobby for even bigger breaks and to further their anti-choice, anti-science, anti-humanist agendas. So please consider giving generously to your favorite freethought organization – this one.

You can donate by check, made out to "SHSNY", and mailed to the P.O. Box noted below, or at our website, www.shsn.org, using your credit card or your PayPal account. Because SHSNY is an educational organization under section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code, your donation is 100 percent tax-deductible.

GIVE PIQUE FOR THE HOLIDAYS

C'mon, even Dawkins celebrates Christmas. So, the item that belongs at the top of your extended holiday gift list? A subscription to PIQUE. It costs just \$30 for eleven 2012 issues, keeps the giftee thinking of you (and of humanism and rationality) all year long, and can be arranged with one phone call to 212-308-2165 (leave a call-back number).

THE CHRISTMAS STORY: WHENEVER, WHEREVER, WHATEVER Diarmaid MacCulloch

(Excerpted from Mr. MacCulloch's monumental history of the religion, Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years.)

And so to Bethlehem of Judea, where Jesus was born in a stable because there was no room at the inn. Or perhaps not. We learn of these events within four books of the Christian "New Testament", credited with authorship by early followers of Jesus called Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They shine for a different spotlight on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and ... all four were probably written not less than half a century after his death. They are collectively called the Gospels, a word which started life as the Greek for "good news"

It is important to realize that a book of good news is not the same as straightforward reported news, or its more aged and academically respectable relative, history. ... We may pare away the non-historical from the probably historical elements in Christian sacred literature, but that is in order better to understand the motives and preoccupations which led to the shape of the good news constructed by the first generations of Christians. Nowhere is that more apparent than in the stories of the birth of Jesus.

Only two out of four Gospels, Matthew and Luke, have narratives of his birth in Bethlehem at the end of the reign of King Herod the Great (73-4 BCE), and outside those narratives, there is much to direct the alert reader to a contrary story. John's Gospel is most explicit when it records arguments among people in Jerusalem, once Jesus had grown up and his teaching was making a stir: some skeptics pointed out that Jesus came from the northern district of Galilee, whereas the prophet Micah had foretold that the Jews' anointed one, the Messiah, would come from

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

Articles published in PIQUE are archived in <http://www.shsn.org>. They may be reprinted, in full or in part, in other newsletters. The URL (<http://www.shsn.org>) should be referenced.

SHSNY is an Affiliated Local Group of the Council for Secular Humanism, and a Charter Chapter of the American Humanist Association.

Bethlehem in Judea, in the south. The other three Gospels, even the Gospels with stories of his birth in Bethlehem, repeatedly referred to Jesus as coming from Galilee, or more precisely from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. In fact outside the text of the two birth narratives, the Gospels do not refer to Jesus being born in Bethlehem, nor does any other book of the New Testament.

Luke's birth narrative, the more elaborate, explains that Jesus's parents traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem at the time of Jesus's birth because they had to comply with the residence terms of a Roman Imperial census for tax purposes, "because he was of the house and lineage of David". This does not ring true: the idea is based on Luke's ancestor list for Jesus, designed to show that he was linked to King David 1000 years before, which was a matter of no concern whatsoever to Roman bureaucrats. Implausibilities multiply: the Roman authorities would not have held the census in a client kingdom of the empire such as Herod's, and in any case there is no record elsewhere of such an empire-wide census, which would certainly have left traces around the Mediterranean. The story seems to embody a confusion with a well-attested Roman Imperial census which certainly did happen, but in 6 CE, far too late for the birth of Jesus, and long remembered as a traumatic event because it was the first real taste of what direct Roman rule meant for Judea. The suspicion therefore arises that someone writing a good deal later, rather hazy about the chronology of decades before, has been fairly cavalier with the story of Jesus's birth, for reasons other than retrieving events as they actually happened. The suspicion grows when one observes how little the birth and infancy narratives have to do with the latest story of Jesus's public ministry, death, and resurrection, which occupies all four Gospels; nowhere do these Gospels refer back to the tales of birth and infancy, which suggests that the bulk of their texts were written before these particular stories. We must conclude that beside the likelihood that Christmas did not happen at Christmas, it did not happen in Bethlehem.

CHRISTMAS IN TODAY'S AMERICA:

"VALENTINE'S DAY WITH MORE PRESENTS"

(From National Secular Society (UK) Newslines, 12/23/10)

Christmas has become a purely secular holiday – even in supposedly pious America, and religious right wingers are trying to make sense of the drift of Christmas away from religion. The Lifeway Research organization has conducted research to find out how Americans see Christmas and how they will celebrate it.

Just 47 percent of respondents say their household typically attends Christmas week church services, but non-religious activities are much more popular. Almost twice as many (89 percent) give gifts to family members. Also popular is gathering with family or friends for a Christmas meal (86 percent), putting up a Christmas tree (80 percent), listening to Christmas music (79 percent), and decorating their homes (77 percent).

The survey also found 62 percent of people who follow

non-Christian religions still celebrate Christmas, along with 89 percent of people who say they're agnostic or have no religious identity, and 55 percent of atheists.

"Christmas for them is just something you do because you're an American these days," says Drew Dyck, who works in church ministry. If they come home Christmas week to more religious parents, "church is the first thing to go. Everyone thinks, 'Oh, why have that fight?'"

Esther Fleece, who works for the evangelical Focus on the Family, says: "Christmas is like Valentine's Day with more presents." But rather than criticize retailers for saying "Happy holidays", Fleece was part of a group of under-30s who persuaded Focus to drop its "Naughty & Nice" list of stores that failed the "Merry Christmas" test. This year, the organization more pragmatically celebrates retailers who give back to their communities.

These evangelical organizations have realized that their aggressive campaigns of boycotts and scathing denunciations are counterproductive with the younger people who don't like such tactics.

Barry Kosmin, director of the Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, says: "Christmas is no longer about baby Jesus and the sheep. It's Solstice with friends, Saturnalia at the office party. At Thanksgiving, you say grace, but at Christmas, you take a break and you go on vacation. It's been downgraded on the religion calendar."

Jesuit priest James Martin complains about the commercial promotion of the "holiday season" because they "treat Jesus like 'He Who Must Not Be Named', the villain in the Harry Potter books. Christ may be the new Voldemort."

JESUS PROMOTES ABSTINENCE, MO OFFERS A SEASONAL REMINDER

(From jesusandmo.net, 2/28/2011)

Jesus: There is only one solution to the problem of teenage pregnancy – abstinence. Teaching kids about contraception only encourages them to have sex. And it doesn't always work. Who can deny that abstinence is the only 100% effective method of birth control?

Mohammed: Your mom.

Jesus: Leave my mom out of this!

JESUS AND MO SWAP RELIGIONS

Jesus (*reading Koran*): I've got an idea – let's swap religions for a while, see what it's like.

Mohammed: Ha, Ha! Okay, sounds like fun. I hereby accept you as my personal Lord and Savior.

Jesus: There is no God but Allah, and You are his prophet.

Mo (*reading Bible*): This is weird. How can you believe all this shit?

Jesus: It takes practice.

Mo: I'm changing back now.

Jesus: Yeah, me too.

Mo: I'm sorry, I can't let you do that.

MORE ELEVATOR SPEECHES: ANSWERING EVOLUTION DENIERS

John Rafferty

PIQUE readers are responding to the idea of “elevator speeches” – simple, short statements you should have on the tip of your tongue when someone questions (or challenges) you about humanism. In October we considered “What is secular humanism?” and in November “Why don’t you believe in God?” This month we offer a single response to evolution deniers, suggest various-length answers for the confused, and ask for *your* elevator speeches at editor@shsny.org.

“EVOLUTION IS JUST A THEORY.”

(15 seconds)

In science, a theory is not a guess. It’s a concept, a system of explaining facts. The theory of evolution is the best, proven scientific explanation of the facts of life on earth.

(30 seconds)

I think you misunderstand the meaning of the word “theory” in science. Scientific theories are explanations meant to unify a broad range of observations*, not guesses or conjectures. In mathematics we have “number theory”, but I’m sure you don’t disbelieve arithmetic. Evolution is based on facts observable in the fossil record and in animal and plant DNA, and is itself a fact.

(60 seconds)

I think you misunderstand the meaning of the word “theory” in science. Scientific theories are explanations meant to unify a broad range of observations*, not guesses or conjectures. The Darwinian theory of evolution, of natural selection through descent by modification, is the best fact-based explanation we have of how all living things, from microbes to humans, came to be what they are. Like all science, the theory of evolution *itself* evolves as we learn more about genes and DNA and protein chains—which Darwin of course had never heard of back in the mid-19th century – but all the new information we’ve gathered since then only strengthens the theory. It works. It explains the diversity of life on Earth. It’s a fact.

**Thank you, Massimo Pigliucci.*

Of course, sooner or later you’ll run into this:

“I DON’T BELIEVE IN EVOLUTION.”

(15, 30 and 60-second versions)

If you don’t believe in science and evidence, we really have nothing to discuss. Have a good day.

Readers respond:

“WHY DON’T YOU BELIEVE IN GOD?”

Bill Lindley

The champ is an old atheist friend of mine, now no longer with us, Al Ames. His answer is:

(1 second)

Which god?

I come in second place with ...

(2 seconds)

The universe is enough.

Next in line is Annie Besant, courtesy of Annie Laurie Gaylor’s book, *Women Without Superstition*:

(5 seconds)

“God” is always the equivalent of “I do not know”.

For the full-length elevator ride, I’ll just have fun.

(15 seconds)

I just can’t take seriously the notion that the Creator of the universe dragged Moses, the leader of His Chosen People, to the top of Mt. Sinai and showed him His “back parts” (KJV: I think history shows that King James knew a thing or two about back parts and sought the correct translation meticulously) in the infamous “Moon over Mt. Sinai” of Exodus 33:23. And to the anti-Bible-citers, I declare my liberty to cite, not in adoration but for a good belly laugh and/or to ask searching questions, such as, “Do you call *that* adoration?”

Readers respond:

“WHAT IS SECULAR HUMANISM?”

Stan Friedland

October PIQUE was excellent: varied, good humored, substantive, informative and challenging in the form of the lead article, “You Need An Elevator Speech”. That situation has arisen for all of us, and my response, on several occasions, can be summed up as follows.

(15 seconds)

“I appreciate your interest and I’ll be happy to respond, but to do my answer any justice, it will take perhaps two or three minutes. Do you have the time?”

This answer has two values. It determines whether the questioner is serious or just pushing my buttons, and any sort of decent answer to be assimilated by that person does require more time. Yours, at all three time levels, were excellent. Anyway, if I was given the green light, here is the substance of my answer.

(2-3 minutes)

“I regard my secular humanism as a belief system in which reason replaces blind faith; science-based inquiry replaces superstition, and motivation to develop myself into a good human being replaces worship of a mystical, unknown entity. For me, there is no hereafter; only the present, which translates into making the most of my earthly life, not for any eternal rewards, but for the goal of self-actualization that benefits me, my family and my community, near and far. Do you have any questions?”

Thank you for the high quality issue of PIQUE and for the challenge.

Readers respond:

Bob Bhaerman

Of Secular Humanists and Boy Scouts

I was on an elevator in Columbus, Ohio the other day in the many-story Buckeye Building when an elderly lady entered. On seeing the T-shirt I was wearing, she threw me a very suspicious glance and asked, “What the hell is a humanist?” I took more than 15 seconds to reply ...

"Let me answer your question this way," I answered. "You remember that Boy Scouts pledge themselves to help little old ladies (like you) across the street. Brownies do the same to earn 'brownie points'. Well, those acts of kindness are at the core of humanist belief. However, we do not do so because it is written in the Boy Scouts' code of conduct or to chalk up 'brownie points' so that we can slip through the gates of some sort of heaven or avoid that other place. Nor do we do so because it is written in any so-called 'authoritative' source like the Hebrew or Christian Bibles. We do not believe that a divine force or the son of a divine force commands us to do good deeds like helping little old ladies (like you) safely to the other side of the street so they won't be clobbered by cars or buses. It is the consequence of an act that leads us to ethical action, not superimposed commandments from a sugar-daddy in the sky.

"We strive to perform acts of service because we strongly believe it is our responsibility to lead ethical and moral lives. We strive to perform acts of kindness for all people, young or old (like you), no matter what their creed, color or shape of their eyes. We believe in the worth and dignity of all people and that everyone should be treated with respect. We base this on the experiences we have had as well as evidence."

"What evidence?" she asked.

"Statistics indicate that more little old ladies (like you) are safer when they are assisted across the street by humanists. It's a proven fact. You can look it up."

"Very interesting!" she exclaimed. "Well, here is my floor. I have to get off."

"May I help you off the elevator? After all, that's the humanistic thing to do."

"Sure you may," she answered, "And sign me up as a humanist. I've been looking for a little old man (like you) to help cross the street."

Dr. Bob Bhaerman is Director of the Kochhar Education Center of the American Humanist Association.

THE FALSE GOD OF THE LIE

Parcival

(Reprinted from "From a Round Table," in The Voice of Sanity, the newsletter of Upstate South Carolina Humanists, April 2009)

While back I was out with a very attractive Baptist woman who persisted in going on about all the things wrong with her ex-husband. She then proceeded with great delight to tell me the details of how she got even with him: keying his Corvette and destroying his reputation, causing him to lose his job. She said that he deserved it for not being the way she needed him to be.

After about an hour of this, I stopped her and asked, "I understand, but what really annoyed you about your ex?" She startled me when she said, "He disillusioned me".

I did, perhaps, the wrong thing and let out a great laugh and asked her, "But what greater gift can one give another than to free him from his illusions?" She got mad at me and emphatically stated, "I don't want to give up my

illusions, my beliefs about the world are sacred to me. They are the things that make me me."

Now I have told this story a great many times and I have been surprised to learn that most of the responses I get back side with the angry girl. People don't want to give up their beliefs about themselves and the world. The Churches drive this home: "Your belief is your salvation", "Whatever you do, hold on to your belief, never give it up", "The most important thing in the world is your faith, never change it; better to die as a martyr to your faith than give it up and suffer eternal damnation."

I say, beliefs are simply hardened opinions. Everyone has opinions. The point is, can we change our opinions? If everything and everyone must come to us in the exact way we demand and we are willing to flood the entire world, killing all life, because we were ignored, we are surely not very healthy. Yahweh hardened Pharaoh's heart, why? So He'd be justified in further punishing him with more curses. This god does not like free will. Poor Pharaoh, he was punished not because he was defiant but because god was. Martin Buber, the Jewish theologian, said, "Evil begins with the insistence on affirmations independent of all evidence". Beliefs may be fine for children, but adults making adult decisions on whom to bomb next should base those decisions on facts rather than opiates.

As children, many of us were taught that religion and politics are not subjects for polite conversation. Why should this be so? We are told that people have powerful feelings around these areas and disagreements and conflict are likely to result. The fact that there is so much free-floating anger associated with these subjects indicates a high level of illusion and unconsciousness. The areas of the priest and the king are off limits to us common folk and shall not be questioned.

For hundreds of generations, people have adopted their parents' religion and politics, never questioning why they believe what they believe. They are good obedient little children and they surround themselves with like-minded people to assure themselves of how right they are. This is why all the monotheistic religions are so querulous. To accept another's right to worship at another church would mean I would have to question my beliefs, and I certainly am not prepared to do that. A man who worships an irritable, raging, jealous Old Testament god of destruction is telling the world exactly what kind of man he is. One would do well to avoid this "Christian" when he demands your soul, lest one risk seeing his real nature.

The real danger here is that much of our culture is based on this unconscious model of forcing every knee to bow to my will as if it were god's will. Two thousand years of killing unbelievers as "evildoers" has not made the world a safer place.

These are dangerous times and the world remains in bondage to a demon more destructive than the devil. He is the false god of the lie, and our own creation, who resides in stubborn illusions about who we are, and what we will do in revenge for not getting our own way.

“OWS” ISN’T ABOUT UTOPIA, IT’S ABOUT REALITY

John Rafferty

Note: This was written October 10 in response to an email from a new SHSNY member bemoaning the “utopian” idealism of the Occupy Wall Street demonstrators, and subsequently posted on one of my daughters-in-law’s Facebook threads.

Our problem is not utopias or utopians, but the dystopia in which we are living. Where people with college degrees can’t get work. Where people who have worked for 20 or 30 years find their jobs outsourced or the companies they have worked for sold off or moved offshore, while the corporate executives who thereby eliminate those American jobs and avoid American taxes are rewarded with multi-million dollar bonuses. Where trusting people are gulled by the banks, the credit card companies, and Wall Street, whose malefactors caused the greatest economic crisis in 80 years, and who were then bailed out with the people’s tax dollars, and whose skills in the government and media right wing are determined to let them do it again.

In the 1980s they removed the safeguards protecting savings-and-loans in the name of the “free market”, and destroyed that industry, along with many of the homeowners and small businesses that depended on safe havens for their savings and investments. They deregulated the mortgage-lending laws in the past decade, and caused the collapse of 2008. And they continue to pound out the message that Social Security is bankrupt, which it is not, and that we would all be richer and happier if we let them put the basic retirement system on which tens of millions of Americans depend at the mercy of their unregulated free-market roller coaster.

I, too, am a basic believer in the capitalist system, but I know that, like any system, it needs regulation. Even though only one or two percent of our citizens are thieves and murderers and the like, we have criminal laws that apply to everyone, all 100 percent. And police and judicial systems whose efforts (at least ideally) apply to everyone, all 100 percent. But ever since Ronald Reagan put a smiley face on dog-eat-dog market morality, the American public has been pounded with the message that the people who handle our money—our savings, our investments, our mortgages, our retirement funds—should be unregulated, un-policed, and absolutely exempt from scrutiny. “Trust the market”, they cry. “Trust us”, say the Gordon Gekkos.

What the Eric Cantors and Peter Kings and Ann Coulters who have lambasted and lampooned the Occupy Wall Street demonstrators don’t understand is that there is a reckoning coming. The great slumbering giant that is the American public is stirring from its “Real Housewives” and “Jersey Shore” sloth.

Too many people in the last few years have been hurt, even humiliated by what even Republican Theodore Roosevelt called “the malefactors of great wealth”* not to

know that there is something seriously wrong with the system. The Cantors, Kings, and Coulters are laughing at the upstarts whose “rage against the machine” may be inchoate (but which is building), just as British merchant-politicians disdained ungrateful and boorish American “colonials” in 1775, French aristos laughed at illiterate peasants in 1788, and Churchill mocked Gandhi as a “half-naked fakir” in 1935.

Yes, there are idiots in Zuccotti Park who muddle-headedly want to end capitalism, or legalize pot or disband the U.S. Army (you think we have an unemployment problem now?), and they’re easy to mock. Just as we on the left mock the extreme Tea Partiers with their “No taxes”, “death panels”, and “Get your government hands off my Medicare” signs. But those are just the left and right fringes of a real and broad-based awakening. The Tea Partiers blame government; the Occupiers blame Wall Street; what they – we – are both blaming is the system, and they – we – are both right. More and more and more Americans – left and right – are coming to realize that their government and the representatives they supposedly elect are owned by the rich. Not just “rich” but ridiculously, filthy rich – the 1 percent of Americans who now own as much as 30 percent of all the wealth in the country, and whose

voice speaks louder in our government/society/system than those of the other 99 percent. The demonstrators have a great rallying cry – if they stay focused on it – “We’re the 99%”.

“Class warfare!” scream the Cantors and Kings and Coulters. Maybe, if that’s what you want to call fighting back against the thugs who have stolen our jobs and our savings. But understand something: if the 1 percent doesn’t effect change, the 99 percent will. Just ask King George III, King Louis XVI or the paladins of the British Empire.

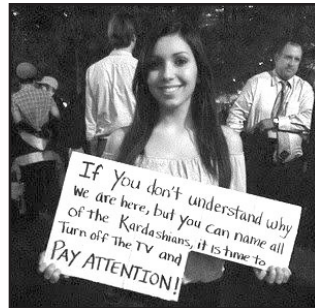
**Comment:* Teddy Roosevelt used the phrase “malefactors of great wealth” in his inspirational New Nationalism speech of 1910, in which he cited Lincoln as one of the first Americans to condemn capital for capital’s sake, and those who forget that capital is the fruit of labor.

“Labor is prior to, and independent of, capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor, and could never have existed if labor had not first existed. Labor is the superior of capital, and deserves much the higher consideration.”

That’s First Republican Abraham Lincoln, not a communist, a socialist, or a druggie or freak – and the new malefactors who are sneering at the OWS protestors might take his advice to their stony hearts. – *David Rafferty*

The liberty of democracy is not safe if we tolerate the growth of private power to the point that it is stronger than the Democratic State itself. That in its essence is fascism!

– *Franklin Roosevelt*



*Savannah Jane Rafferty
at Occupy Wall Street*

SHSNY CALENDAR: DECEMBER 2011 - FEBRUARY 2012

SHSNY BOOK CLUB meets

THURSDAY, DEC. 1, 6:30 pm
in the Gallery room of
THE COMMUNITY CHURCH
OF NEW YORK

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

FUTURE SCIENCE:
Essays from the
Cutting Edge
Ed: **Max Brockman**

Future Science features eighteen exciting young scientists, most of whom are presenting their work, ideas, and insights to a general audience for the first time. This



“remarkable collection of fluent and fascinating essays” introduces the very latest theories and discoveries in science. Samples:

“Despite considerable evidence to the contrary, Earth was not a particularly good place for life to arise. The main ingredients for life as we know it are a lot easier to find farther out in the Solar System.”

“How will advances in the science of moral judgment change the way we think about the law?”

“Several novel empirical findings suggest that human altruism has deeper roots than previously thought.”

“A tidal wave of talent . . . a wealth of new and exciting ideas.”

– Steven Pinker

Paperback and Kindle editions

Join us even if you haven't finished reading.

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

SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURSDAY, JAN. 5, 6:30 pm
at **The Community Church**
28 East 35 Street (Park-Mad)
THE SWERVE: How the
World Became Modern
by **Stephen Greenblatt**

An innovative work of history and a thrilling story of discovery, in which one manuscript, the ancient Roman philosophical epic, *On the Nature of Things*, by Lucretius, plucked from a thousand years of neglect, changed the course of human thought and made possible the world as we know it.

“The Swerve is one of those brilliant works of non-fiction that's so jam-packed with ideas and stories it literally boggles the mind.” – NPR
Paperback and Kindle editions

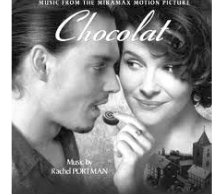
SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURSDAY, FEB. 2, 6:30 pm
at **The Community Church**
28 East 35 Street (Park-Mad)
THE BETTER ANGELS
OF OUR NATURE:
Why Violence has Declined
by **Steven Pinker**

Part One of two Book Club meetings devoted to this outstanding new history, an exploration of the essence of human nature, mixing psychology and history to provide a remarkable picture of an increasingly nonviolent world. The key, Pinker explains, is to understand our intrinsic motives – the inner demons that incline us toward violence and the better angels that steer us away – and how changing circumstances have allowed our better angels to prevail. Exploding fatalist myths about humankind's inherent violence and the curse of modernity, this provocative book is sure to be hotly debated.

– Kindle edition available

MONDAY, DEC. 12, 7:00 pm
SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)
“CHOCOLAT”

An iconoclastic single mother (Oscar nominee Juliette Binoche) and her young daughter move into a peaceful French village virtually frozen in time, and open an uncommon chocolate shop during the height of Lent – directly across the street from the church. At first, the shop's rich, sensuous desserts scandalize the town and its hyper-conservative leading citizen (Alfred Molina). But the villagers (including Judi Dench, Lena Olin, Leslie Caron, and Johnny Depp) soon learn to savor the sweetness.



SHSNY Movie Night is FREE.
Check out the menu and prices at www.stonecreeknyc.com

BRUNCH!
SUNDAY, DEC 18, 12 NOON
Gather for our
MONTHLY CASUAL BRUNCH
GET-TOGETHER
at BXL East, 210 East 51 St.

We'll meet at Noon at our new favorite bistro just east of 3rd Avenue, for outstanding Belgian fare, with dishes ranging from \$7 to \$16, and prix-fixe Sunday Brunch (including a drink) for \$18. Check it out at bxlcafe.pregraphic.com/

Everyone interested in getting together with 15-20 or more like-minded humanists and rationalists for good grub (huge selection of beers!) and lively talk in a charming East-side setting is welcome.

Bring friends!

SHSNY CALENDAR: DECEMBER 2011 - FEBRUARY 2012

GREAT LECTURES

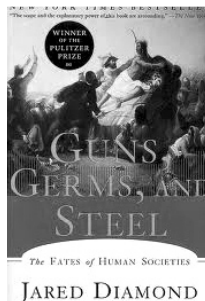
TUESDAY, DEC. 27, 7:00 pm
"GUNS, GERMS & STEEL"

Part 3: Into the Tropics

Stone Creek Bar & Lounge

140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)

A National Geographic production based on author Jared Diamond's best-selling, Pulitzer Prize-winning book whose subtitle, "The Fates of Human Societies", addresses the questions: Why is the world so unequal? and What part does geography play in human and societal development?



Haven't seen Parts 1 and/or 2? No worries – the Part 3 intro will catch you up.

SHSNY Great Lectures Editor Bob Murtha will lead the (probably lively, certainly interesting) discussion post-viewing.

January 24 Great Lecture:
"Has Science Buried God?"

A debate, at Oxford, between Richard Dawkins and John Lennox.
Great Lectures Night is FREE

PLANNING AHEAD

Holidays and disasters aside, the *usual* monthly schedule of SHSNY events is:

Book Club: First Thursday
at the Community Church of NY.

Movie Night: Second Monday
at Stone Creek Lounge.

Brunch: Third Sunday
at BXL East Bistro.

Great Lectures: Fourth Tuesday
at Stone Creek Lounge.

More info: www.shsn.org and at humanism.meetup.com/515; reasonablenewyork.org/ and 212-308-2165

SAVE THE DATE!

WED. DECEMBER 21, for:
REASONABLE NEW YORK'S
3RD ANNUAL SOLSTICE PARTY
Place/Details TBA

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3,
10:00 am - 6:00 pm
NYC SKEPTICS

"SKEPTICAMP NYC 2011"

The 3rd Annual SkeptiCamp NYC – like a science conference, except that content is provided by the attendees themselves. It's an "un-conference", with focus on topics related to science, critical thinking, and "other notions that appeal to a skeptical crowd."

Shetler Studios, Shetler 1
244 West 54 St.

More info: contact@nycskeptics.org

TUESDAY, DEC. 6, 7:00 pm
CFI-NYC Voices of Reason
JANET REITMAN
"INSIDE SCIENTOLOGY"

The Church of Scientology is America's most controversial religious movement. In spite of high-profile members like Tom Cruise and John Travolta, it has been called a "cult" and even a "mafia" by its critics. What is it?

Reitman, author of the new *Inside Scientology: The Story of America's Most Secretive Religion*, who has spent five years researching the movement, will be interviewed by CFI-NYC's Michael DeDora.

University Settlement (Speyer Hall)
184 Eldridge St. (at Rivington)
\$5; CFI Members & students free
sleroy@centerforinquiry.net

SAVE THE DATE!

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 10, for
SHSNY's DARWIN DAY & 24th
ANNIVERSARY PARTY
Place/Details TBA

OTHER REASONABLE NEW YORK EVENTS

Check them out at their websites or www.reasonablenewyork.org

NY Society for Ethical Culture:
Fri., Dec 2, 7 pm - "Ethics in Film":
Silkwood.

Wed., Dec. 7, 6:30 - Out@NYSEC:
Different Voices in the Epidemic

Fri., Dec 16, 7 pm - Ethics in the Theater: *Proof*. Wine/Cheese 6:30.
Jolly Thirteen Club of New York & Central New Jersey: Tues. Dec. 13, 8 pm, "Food, drink & skepticism."
www.meetup.com/Jolly13/

WEEKLY EVENTS

Sundays

Religion on the Line

6-9:00 a.m. – WMCA, 770 AM

Equal Time for Freethought

6:30 p.m. – WBAI-NY 99.5FM

Religion & Ethics Newsweekly

6:30 p.m. – Channel 13

Tuesdays

Socrates Cafe - 6:00 pm

NY Society for Ethical Culture:

Wednesdays:

Atheism History Week – 5:30 p.m.

Hosted by SHSNY's John Rafferty.

On MNN Channel 67 and RNN Channel 110 in Manhattan, and simultaneously via live streaming on your computer at www.mnn.org

Fridays

Drinking With Atheists – Meet, at a venue to be announced, with like-minded friends for a fun evening of conversation. Details at:

www.meetup.com/RichiesList/

Various Dates & Times

Agnostic A.A. – Seven A.A.-endorsed meetings. Schedules: agnosticAA NYC.org/meetings.html

YES, REASONABLE NEW YORK WILL JOIN REASON RALLY IN WASHINGTON, D.C. MARCH 24. JOIN IN! – DETAILS TBA.

A LAST "FEW MINUTES WITH ANDY ROONEY"

No, of course I don't [believe in God], and anyone who tells you that there is a god who makes His or Her presence known to him or her is hallucinating or not telling the truth.

– Forwarded by Warren Allen Smith

Comment: My own favorite Andy Rooney "60 Minutes" segment aired at least ten years ago (15?), when he excoriated the kind of cluelessness about Christ that would prompt someone to wear a diamond-studded \$25,000 crucifix necklace Andy had seen in the window of Tiffany's. – JR



'JOY AND SATISFACTION' IN A NON-THEIST LIFE

To the Editor: Recently, while sorting through copies of my father's correspondence, I came across a letter he wrote in 1956 to a friend (Jason). I wonder if you would consider it appropriate for publication in PIQUE. My father was Julian Rogatz, a highly respected Manhattan pediatrician, many of whose former patients are today in their eighties (as I am). If any of his patients are among your readers (as I am), they may find his letter interesting. Characteristically non-confrontational, he accepts his friend's terminology and refers to "God", but I knew him as a tolerant non-theist (I tend to a more explicit atheism), who could put his thoughts into the most graceful prose. His letter, reproduced below, is something I would like to share. – Peter Rogatz, M.D.

June, 1956

Dear Jason,

I am flattered that you thought sufficiently of me and my lost soul to write me your lengthy letter, which I have read with care. I suspect that you see weakness in a character that can find no place in life for religion in your sense of the word, so I am compelled to answer in a way which will probably leave everything as it was before but which, I hope, you will not take amiss.

I find nothing persuasive in the piece you sent me by Adolph Ochs or nothing, let me say, that is profoundly different from my way of life and thought. With him I "inherited good health and sound moral principles; I find pleasure in work that comes to my hand and in doing it conscientiously; I find joy and satisfaction in having been helpful to my parents when they were alive and to others since; and in thus making my life worthwhile I find happiness and consolation."

My Jewish home life gave me a "spiritual" uplift; it was not the religion we practiced (of which there was more than a modicum throughout my childhood) that gave me "a sense of responsibility to my subconscious better self" which I too, think "is the God within me". It was not the religion we practiced that made me believe I am "more than an animal" and it was not religion that has given me perhaps even greater conviction than you have that "life cannot be the end of our spiritual future". And no one who knows me minimizes my pride in my Jewishness – that is beside the point.

As for "God" I find him everywhere but in the house of worship. I find him, with Aldous Huxley, in the Adagio of Beethoven's Op 132 Quartet; I find him in the paintings of the great masters and in the writings of certain poets and philosophers; in the triumphs of science and in the over-all magnificence of man at his best; I find him, too, in the intense blue of a cloudless sky and in the overwhelming approach of a desert storm; in the new hope that comes with spring, in the rich color of autumn and in the snowy stillness of winter; I find God within me, too, when I pause to wonder about who I am and what I can possibly mean in the universe. I do not find him where people gather to do worship. It is there, in fact, where I lose him.

Perhaps you will be surprised that I find something of God in Freud, who was troubled with what the ordinary man understands by religion:

"That system of doctrines and pledges that on the one hand explains the riddle of this world to him with an enviable completeness, and on the other assures him that a solicitous Providence is watching over him and will make up to him in a future existence for any shortcomings of life.

"The ordinary man cannot imagine this Providence in any other form but that of a greatly exalted father, for only such a one could understand the needs of the sons of men or be softened by their prayers and placated by the signs of their remorse. The whole thing is so patently infantile, so incongruous with reality, that to one whose attitude to humanity is friendly it is painful to think that the great majority of mortals will never be able to rise above this view of life. It is even more humiliating to discover what a large number of those alive to-day, who must see that this religion is not tenable, yet try to defend it inch by inch, as if with a series of pitiable rearguard actions."

I quote at length because I fear you tremble for my soul. But you need not. There are other roads to "God" than through the Church or the Temple. And for myself I have found them. I might best resign from this discussion with Goethe's remark on the subject:

"He who has Science and has Art, Religion, too, has he; Who has not Science, has not Art, Let him religious be!"

So, Jason, let us not persuade each other. It is enough to care for each other as we do. I am content that each has found the way to his liking. Thanks for the try but I remain, beyond saving,

Your unregenerate, Jul

I find no need for any other faith than my faith in human beings. Like Confucius of old, I am so absorbed in the wonders of earth and the life upon it that I cannot think of heaven and the angels. I have enough for this life. If there is no other life, then this one has been enough to make it worth being born, myself a human being.

– Pearl S. Buck, 1892 - 1973, from *This I Believe* (Forwarded by Sam Milligan as another step in his insidious and pernicious Confucian agenda for world domination.)

WALTER BALCERAK INSPIRES LETTERS

To the Editor: I do enjoy PIQUE, especially this latest issue with the article by Walter Balcerak (“What Secular Humanism Lacks”, PIQUE, November), who brought up an important point about secular humanism not being a successor to religion. I am no expert, but this I feel: True, there are deep-seated needs in human nature to ponder and celebrate emotions concerning love, imagination, empathy, beauty, friendship, gratitude, and life itself. And perhaps also to deal with resentment, fear and hate. Religions do provide guidance and inspiration for such aspects of life.

They have houses for worship and learning that are for the semi-exclusive use of their members. But what does the secular humanism offer to balance its rationalism?

Nothing, and need not.

Secular humanists will balance rationalism with emotional experiences: visits to art galleries and symphony halls, hikes to mountain tops and walks in the woods and on the beaches, and with love and with meditation—alone and with friends. Thus they will satisfy their needs for inspiration, pleasure, and solace without needing institutions and prayer, but on their own. – *Giles Kelly*

To the Editor: Walter Balcerak needs to meet more humanists. I have *never* met a humanist who wasn't concerned with alleviating suffering in the world with charity, friendship and love.

Secular humanism doesn't “lack” anything. Further, I think Mr. Balcerak has confused humanists with atheists. I am not an “atheist”, a word meaning the opposite of “theist”, someone who believes in the existence of a creator who intervenes in the universe. Since there is no such thing as a “creator”, the belief is utter nonsense. I don't waste my time in being opposed to nonsense theory.

I call myself a humanist because I try to spend my time doing some good in the world, working on behalf of people, animals and other life, to the best of my ability. Life is too short to spend arguing, unless the opposing argument is causing damage to people's lives, like the attempts in this country to prevent the teaching of evolution in the schools. It is waste of time to be an atheist, yelling at stupid, uneducated people about their beliefs. Let's affirm life and fight ignorance, and work for justice in this “harsh” world, “drawing our breath in pain to tell our story”, to paraphrase Hamlet. – *Barbara Lifton*

WILDE, SPINOZA, AND OUR CONFRATERNITY OF THE FATHERLESS

Rebecca Goldstein
2011 Humanist of the Year

Note: The following is excerpted from the transcription, in The Humanist (Nov-Dec, 2011) of Ms. Goldstein's speech upon accepting the 2011 Humanist of the Year Award at the AHA's 70th annual conference in Boston this spring.

“When I think about religion at all, I feel as if I would like to found an order for those who cannot believe:

the Confraternity of the Fatherless one might call it, where on an altar, on which no taper burned, a priest, in whose heart peace had no dwelling, might celebrate with unblessed bread and a chalice empty of wine.”

– Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*

What Spinoza teaches us—as humanists, as those who seek our comfort and our meaning in the Confraternity of the Fatherless—is that we can't confine ourselves to the negative. The reason that Spinoza was so dangerous to the spirit of religion, the reason that he was denounced over and over again well into the Age of Enlightenment, with Kant having to defend himself against charges of being a closet Spinozan — the reason Spinoza was seen as so dangerous is that he was so positive. In his magnum opus, *The Ethics*, he certainly argues that there is no room in an enlightened vision of the world for the notion of a transcendent God. But the most important thing he does is demonstrate that we don't need God in order to ground morality. He derives morality from human nature itself. And it's a grand and inspiring vision of the largest kind of life that we can live. A life that is completely secular, that is transcendent *because* it's secular. And I think this positive vision is something that we still have to learn from Spinoza.

One often hears that we need God in order to be good, in order to ground morality or in any case in order to enforce morality. What reason could one have for being good, the thinking goes, if there isn't the great police officer upstairs ready to give you a summons? Spinoza demonstrates a grand and high-minded, noble and transcendent view of how we can live our lives on purely secular grounds. And that's why he was so despised, why he was so feared, why he had to be condemned, why he was called Satan's emissary on earth, why his *Theological-Political Treatise* was described over and over again as a book forged in hell. Other great philosophers said things just as radical — David Hume's beautifully reasoned argument against miracles, for example, or against arguments for the existence of God. But what Spinoza does is not just argue against the rationality of beliefs that anchor a religious point of view. He also inspires us with a secular point of view. He inspires us with a secular vision.

So there is, as Wilde wrote in his jail cell, a Confraternity off the Fatherless, and there is a kind of ethics in hard-core rational epistemology, in demanding good grounds for one's beliefs, and holding one's beliefs to high standards. There is also an ethical vision that comes out of the recognition that we are fatherless, and in accepting responsibility for the world's ills. There is no ultimate, supernatural force that's going to right the wrongs. We have to do it for one another. We are all in this Confraternity off the Fatherless together, which places tremendous responsibilities on us. It demands that we be grown-ups.

To me, that is what the American Humanist Association and like-minded organizations are all about. It's what being a humanist is all about. It is the vision that people like Spinoza and Wilde dreamed of, and now it's ours. Let's make the most of it.

POSITIVE HUMANISM

Bart Ehrman

Note: The following is excerpted from the transcription, in The Humanist (Nov-Dec, 2011) of Mr. Ehrman's speech upon accepting the Religious Liberty Award at the AHA's 70th annual conference in Boston this spring.

In my part of the world, in the South, humanists are largely known as negative opponents of all things religious, strident protesters against values that people in my world hold near and dear. So forgive me if I'm being overly obvious, but in my opinion, for humanism to strive and to succeed in these places, it's not enough to protest. Humanism must make a positive impact on people's lives and be looked upon, even by outsiders, as a good and healthy phenomenon. Among other things, humanists need to provide social outlets that mirror what believers have in their churches.

When someone leaves the womb of the church, they need to have somewhere else to go. They need warm, loving, welcoming, safe communities of like-minded people where they can establish social networks and find fellowship with people who share their worldviews, their loves, hates, concerns, passions, and obsessions. They need context within which they can discuss the big issues of life, not just politics but also life-and-death issues. They need places where they can celebrate what is good in life and where they can work to overcome what is bad.

Humanist organizations need to become as recognizable as the Baptist church on the corner and the Episcopal church up the street. They need to be seen as the first responders when an earthquake hits Haiti, to be seen as major forces in the fight against poverty, homelessness, malaria, AIDS, and other epidemics. They need to be seen as vibrant and viable alternatives to the religions of the world, which often do so much harm while trying to do good. Whatever else we might say about organized religion, it cannot be denied that it is often the catalyst for much of what is good in the world. But it shouldn't be the only catalyst, especially since so many people are silenced, oppressed, and harmed by religion. In other words, people must be liberated not only from something but also for something. That, in my opinion, should be the leading goal and objective of every humanist organization.

It is not what a lawyer tells me I may do; but what humanity, reason, and justice tell me I ought to do. – *Edmund Burke*

LOOKS LIKE THE BRITISH REALLY IS COMING

To the Editor: I was delighted to read your item ("The British Is Coming! Or Is It?", PIQUE, October) reporting that the newsletter of the Capital District (Albany) Secular Humanists [*and PIQUE*] is joining the often insufferable but occasionally sensible British in discarding the odd American practice of placing commas and periods inside closing quotation marks whether they belong there or not. I didn't realize that I've been part of a movement all these years,

much less one that is actually changing the way we write. As Director of Data Processing at a small but important unit of the City University of New York I always insisted on logical placement of punctuation, and sometimes had to stamp my foot and pull rank on formalist writers who insisted "that's not how it's supposed to be done". I pointed out that, especially in technical writing, the American standard is nothing short of crazy-making.

(I'm not a UNIX person, but I'm told that in that command language, adding a period at the end of certain commands can result in wiping out an entire directory instead of the intended single element.)

Now if I could only find similar success with my insistence on writing time in the 24-hour format (is it any wonder that a country that thinks it makes sense for 12:30 pm to come 11 hours before 11:30 pm also thinks that capital punishment is a good idea and that the world was created by an invisible man in the sky?) and dates in the ISO/Japanese yyyy-mm-dd format (even the usually-logical Europeans get that last one wrong).

Reminiscing about my document-editing days reminds me of another crusade (if you'll pardon the use of that word) for consistency, this time in the use of the word *data*. The head of our production sub-unit came to us from the Office of Statistical Analysis, where she had gotten into the habit of using plural verbs when *data* was the subject. I pointed out that this doesn't make sense to non-statisticians because we use *data* not as a plural form but as a mass noun. Who besides a statistician ever says *datum*? She remained unconvinced, so again I had to pull rank by telling her, "When you're Director of Datum Processing, you can make the style rules".

I've always said that I have the kind of little mind of which Emerson said a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin, and I hope I've demonstrated that I behave this way consistently. – *Harvey Wachtel*

To the Editor: Finally got around to reading October PIQUE, and I heartily endorse the "British" method of using quotes.

With my many years of computer programming, where proper inclusion of items in such things as brackets, parentheses, and quotes was critical, I could hardly do anything else. Even though my daughter the copywriter is strongly on the American side. – *Gene Edelstein*

To the Editor: Both in Europe and Russia British English is taught. And it looks like the Internet has started to influence Americans as well. So, if you are interested in my opinion, I would also pick the British version of quoting.

Gary Gutting's article, Beyond "New Atheism" (PIQUE, October) invigorated me most, because in Russia we were taught from childhood: No god(s), period. And it was religious people, not atheists who had to "prove" that they were good, as opposed to us, here, where atheists are "under siege". – *Robert Bohr*

HOW MANY RIGATONI CAN DANCE ON THE HEAD OF A PIN?

Nicole Sharpe

(Reprinted from "Pastafarian 'stuff' revisited" in *The Humanist Monthly*, newsletter of the Capital District (Albany) Humanist Society, November, 2011)

In our last issue, a "Happenings" item reported on Pastafarian activity in Kansas and Austria [similarly in October PIQUE]. We asked: "Does this Pastafarian stuff hurt or help the atheist/agnostic/humanist/secular cause?" which prompted this.

Oh Ye of Little Faith, what an interesting question you pose: does this help or hurt the atheist/agnostic/humanist/secular cause? Mostly, it creates other questions in the mind. Such as: Do the a/a/h/s actually have a "cause" and, if so, could it even remotely be said to be a common one? Picture the a/a/h/s crusaders mounting up to defend the honor of our various beliefs (and non-beliefs) against the infidels of Ignorance ... and then riding off in all directions at once, tilting with every windmill but vanquishing none.

How can the establishment of another religion either help or hurt, except to possibly dilute the a/a/h/sophobia of the Religious Right by two (presuming those wearing hole-y headgear are more open-minded than most). For it is a religion to at least two people, one in (yes, Toto) Kansas, another in Austria, and you know what the Bible says about "whenever two or more are gathered together in my name".

Well, yes, there is the Name, which gives rise to still more questions. Will there be a gluten-free Reform movement for the intolerant? Will there be hymns like "What a Friend We Have in Cheeses" and "Blessed Cheese Sauce, Heavenly Cheese Sauce"? Will there be deep doctrinal divisions over the tran- or con- substantiation of American red sauce vs. traditional Italian ragu? Sectarian disputes among the -oni, the -ini, the -elli, the -etti, and the -iti factions? Dietary laws prescribing or proscribing knaidlach, lokshen, and mandelen for the observant? Missionaries from the banh pho, ramen, soba and udon provinces? Great philosophical treatises about the first-mover: Egg noodle or Chicken soup?

One thing is certain, however. Dismissively calling it Pastafarian "stuff" does not much help our CDHS [or SHSNY] claim to welcome diversity. Even the agnocchistics among us deserve some respect, and a 501(c)3.

With kindest regards, *Dona Nobis Pastam*

Would [the ideal religion] not be that which taught morality and very little dogma? That which tended to make men just without making them absurd? That which did not order one to believe in things that are impossible, contradictory, injurious to divinity, and pernicious to mankind, and which dared not menace with eternal punishment anyone possessing common sense? Would it not be that which did not uphold its belief with executioners, and did not inundate the earth with blood on account of unintelligible sophism? – *Voltaire*

ONE MORE (LATE-ARRIVING) DUMBTH NOMINEE

Yes, that's a photo of presidential candidate and serial harasser Herman Cain. But it is not his sleazy behavior toward female subordinates, not his "999" idiocy, not even his dismissive "Uzbeki-bekki-bekki-stan" attitude toward knowledge of foreign affairs that has earned him a late-entry nomination in the SHSNY 2011 Dumbth race (the only one he could conceivably win this year).



Nope. As the Huffington Post has reported (and Al Henick forwarded), former pizza mogul Cain wrote a RedState column last December* entitled "The Perfect Conservative". Guess who?

Jesus, of course!

"He [Jesus] helped the poor without one government program," Cain wrote. "He healed the sick without a government health care system. He fed the hungry without food stamps. For three years He was unemployed, and never collected an unemployment check."

And for doing all that, what happened to Him? He was sentenced to death, Cain says, "by a liberal court."

"Liberal court"? The *Sanhedrin*? The Jerusalem gang that for more than 2,000 years have been the poster boys for reactionary bias? Herman Cain has let his half-baked politics confuse his history (or what passes for history in the New Testament). Jesus was condemned by a court? Had to be liberals, right? Classic right-wing dumbth.

And speaking of the right wing, Mr. Cain joins four other 2011 Dumbth nominees, all of them extreme-right Republicans. We know there are plenty of idiots on the left side of the American divide, but for the life of us we could not find any this year who matched: 1) early betting-line favorite and TV blowhard Bill O'Reilly, who claimed that atheists can't explain how the tides go in and out; 2) perennial candidate Newt Gingrich, who worried illogically and out loud in March that the U.S. could "become a secular atheist country, potentially one dominated by radical Islamists"; 3) America's most glamorous ditz, Sarah Palin, who believes that Paul Revere's ride "... warned, uh, the British that they weren't gonna be takin' away our arms"; 4) Michelle Bachmann, who contended that a minor earthquake and Hurricane Irene hitting Washington was God admonishing Congress ("Are you going to start listening to me here?"), oblivious of the fact that Congress—including Ms. Bachmann—was out of town during both disasters.

If you have a candidate with an anti-rational, based-on-nothing, hare-brained statement to nominate, email editor@shsny.org, or write to the P.O. box on page 1 before December 16. Ballots in January PIQUE, and the winner to be announced at our Darwin Day Dinner in February (where attendees will get a chance to vote a second time).

*Yes, I know the rules say only what's said or written this year qualifies – I wrote the rules. But this little dandy has just been unearthed, so I'm bending, not breaking the rules. Sue me. – JR

RELIGION OR HUMOR

Dave Barry

(From an interview in TheAtlantic.com 5/17/2010)

Humor is definitely a coping mechanism. The truth is, if you're a conscious human being, you are conscious more and more of two things.

First, you're going to die. Second, while you're alive, bad things are going to happen to you and people around you, and there's nothing you can do about it. And I don't think we're good at that. We pretend, day to day, that it's not the case, that it's a rational world and we can control it, and we can stay healthy and happy, and our loved ones will be around us. The truth is, none of that's going to happen. You will die, and the end, even if you live a long life, is not going to be pleasant. I formed a theory a long time ago that there are two reactions to that. One: religion, you create an afterlife. Now I think it's a good idea, it makes people calmer.

And then there's humor. At its basis humor is a very strange, nervous reaction to, you know, death. To me that's the only explanation of why so much of what makes people laugh really hard is scary. There are so many death jokes, so many movies where the humor situation is based on great danger—just a slight twist and it would be a horror movie.

So to me that's how we're coping with it. We see right through our own narrative that everything's OK, and the way we handle the resulting anxiety is to make jokes about it. That's an not original insight on my part. But I'm convinced that that's why we have a sense of humor and dogs don't.

THANK YOU JERRY, GARY, AND THE REST OF "THE FIRST AMENDMENT NINE"

While the unemployment rate in America is stuck at 9 percent, while we're still at war in Afghanistan (against whom exactly?), while the country's infrastructure is in critical need of repair, while warnings on climate change reach fire-alarm levels, and while tens of thousands of citizens demonstrate in the streets across the country to protest the obscene disparities in wealth and privilege in our society, the U.S. House of Representatives took time off on November 2 from its divinely-mandated efforts to roll back a woman's right to choose, to disenfranchise millions of poor and minority voters, to overturn clean air and water and workplace-safety laws, and to reduce the tax "burden" on its wealthiest benefactors ... to vote for a re-affirmation of "In God We Trust" as the nation's motto.

Our own Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) and Gary Ackerman (D-NY), head the list of just nine of the House's 435 members who had the guts to vote against this triviality.

They were joined by Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA) (the only "out" non-believer in Congress), Rep. Mike Honda (D-CA), Rep. Judy Chu (D-CA), Rep. Emanuel Cleaver (D-MO), Rep. Justin Amash (R-MI), Rep. Bobby Scott (D-VA), and Rep. Hank Johnson (D-GA). Yes, the same Hank Johnson who earned a Dumbth Award nomination a year ago for worrying that the island of Guam might tip over if too many sailors were stationed on it. Go figure.

Anyway, thank you, Jerry and Gary, and the rest of the nay-saying First Amendment Nine, for your courage.

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Humanist of the Year
Rebecca Goldstein,

Page 5
is a humanist issue!
Occupy Wall Street

Page 1
Support SHSNY
A year-end plea:

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

