

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

November, 2011

Has $E=mc^2$ been repealed? This month we catch up with speed-of-light news while we review the evolution of technology and the intelligence of machines. We reason about reason, why we don't believe, how we confuse our non-belief, and what's missing in secular humanism. We get good political analysis from an unexpected source, say goodbye to a free-thinking world-changer, and attend the (real) first Thanksgiving. But first, the religious right thumbs its nose at us, again. – JR

TAX-EXEMPTED RIGHT-WING CLERGY GET OUT OF JAIL FREE, AGAIN

Stephanie Strom

(Excerpted from "The Political Pulpit", in The New York Times, September 30, 2011)

This weekend [October 1-2], hundreds of pastors, including some of the nation's evangelical leaders, will climb into their pulpits to preach about American politics, flouting a decades-old law that prohibits tax-exempt churches and other charities from campaigning on election issues.

The sermons, on what is called Pulpit Freedom Sunday, essentially represent a form of biblical bait, an effort by some churches to goad the Internal Revenue Service into court battles over the divide between religion and politics.

The Alliance Defense Fund, a nonprofit legal defense group whose founders include James Dobson, the founder of Focus on the Family, sponsors the annual event, which started with 33 pastors in 2008. This year, Glenn Beck has been promoting it, calling for 1,000 religious leaders to sign on and generating additional interest at the beginning of a presidential election cycle.

"There should be no government intrusion in the pulpit", said the Rev. James Garlow, senior pastor at Skyline Church in La Mesa, Calif., who led preachers in the battle to pass California's Proposition 8, which banned same-sex marriage. "The freedom of speech and the freedom of religion promised under the First Amendment means pastors have full authority to say what they want to say."

Mr. Garlow said he planned to inveigh against same-sex marriage, abortion and other touchstone issues that social conservatives oppose, and some ministers may be ready to encourage parishioners to vote only for those candidates who adhere to the same views or values.

"I tell them that as followers of Christ, you wouldn't vote for someone who was against what God said in His word", Mr. Garlow said. "I will, in effect, oppose several candidates and – de facto – endorse others."

Participating ministers plan to send tapes of their sermons to the I.R.S. [*Note: they did*], effectively providing the agency with evidence it could use to take them to court. But if history is any indication, the I.R.S. may continue to steer clear of the taunts [*Note: it did*].

"It's frustrating", said Erik Stanley, senior legal counsel at Alliance Defense. "The law is on the books but they don't enforce it, leaving churches in limbo." ...

Last year, the I.R.S. also quietly ceased its Political Activities Compliance Initiative, under which it issued reports in 2004 and 2006 detailing its findings of illegal political campaigning by charities, including churches.

Comment: When – if ever – is the Obama administration going to stand up for church-state separation? – JR

A DIFFERENT KIND OF CLERIC WRITES A LETTER TO THE TIMES

(Forwarded by Brad Wheeler)

To the Editor:

In reflecting on the moral dudgeon of my fellow clergy who claim they have been silenced by the government ... I believe that preachers and houses of worship can take any political side they want, if they relinquish their tax-exempt status. Our tax exemption is part of that "wall of separation" between religion and politics that some say should not exist.

They can complain all they want about being prevented from speaking, but if they mean it, prove it – start paying taxes. To use a common saying, you gotta pay to play.

(Rev.) W. Frederick Wooden, Grand Rapids, Mich., October 14

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

MORE ELEVATOR SPEECHES

John Rafferty

In October we began what will be an occasional feature in PIQUE, of short answers (you're in an elevator, time to talk is limited) to questions frequently asked of humanists. Last month we provided "elevator speeches" answers to the question, "What is Secular Humanism?" (See below for reader contributions.)

This month, we ask for your variations on ...

Why don't you believe in God?

(15 seconds)

Because there is no evidence for any such being. None. I'm willing to be proved wrong if you have any – have you?

(30 seconds)

Because there is no evidence for any such supernatural being. None. Please don't reference the Bible, because it isn't evidence, it's folklore. In science it's said that "extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence". An invisible supernatural being? That's an extraordinary claim, so where's the evidence? If such a being gave me a brain and the power to reason, why did He, She, or It give me no evidence for its existence, no *reason* to believe?

(60 seconds)

Which god? Thor? Zeus? Venus? You don't believe in any of those gods that millions of people once believed in. And you don't believe in a god as He, She, or It is represented by today's religions like Islam or Hinduism, yet billions of people believe in *those* versions of "god". If you had been born in Arabia you'd undoubtedly be a Muslim. If you'd been raised in India, you'd be a Hindu. If, like more than a billion other human beings, you'd been born in East Asia in a Buddhist or Confucian tradition, you'd consider belief in life after death crazy. I just believe in one fewer god than you do. And I don't believe in any because there is no evidence for any. None. Why do you believe in a being for which there is absolutely no evidence, no *reason* to believe?

READERS WRITE THEIR OWN ANSWERS TO "WHAT IS SECULAR HUMANISM?"

Carmen Elliott

My short answer to "What is Secular Humanism?":
Goodness without god.

Bill Lindley

Shorter versions of "Secular Humanism is ..."

(10 seconds)

Post-mortem survival of the ego is off the agenda.

(5 seconds)

Secular humanism is this-worldly concern for humanity.

(1 second)

People come first!

And so on. We secular humanists can be a lot more concise than we're used to being.

Fun exercise. Thanks.

Phil Appleman

*Perfidious Proverbs** was my contribution!

**His very funny book of secular poetry.*

MACHINE INTELLIGENCE

Ray Kurzweil

(Excerpted from Mr. Kurzweil's book, The Singularity is Near, and reprinted on delanceyplace.com 10/10/2011)

Consider this parable: a lake owner wants to stay at home to tend to the lake's fish and make certain that the lake itself will not become covered with lily pads, which are said to double their number every few days. Month after month, he patiently waits, yet only tiny patches of lily pads can be discerned, and they don't seem to be expanding in any noticeable way. With the lily pads covering less than 1 percent of the lake, the owner figures that it's safe to take a vacation and leaves with his family. When he returns a few weeks later, he's shocked to discover that the entire lake has become covered with the pads, and his fish have perished. By doubling their number every few days, the last seven doublings were sufficient to extend the pads' coverage to the entire lake. (Seven doublings extended their reach 128-fold.) This is the nature of exponential growth.

Consider Gary Kasparov, who scorned the pathetic state of computer chess in 1992. Yet the relentless doubling of computer power every year enabled a computer to defeat him only five years later. The list of ways computers can now exceed human capabilities is rapidly growing. Moreover, the once narrow applications of computer intelligence are gradually broadening in one type of activity after another. For example, computers are diagnosing electrocardiograms and medical images, flying and landing airplanes, controlling the tactical decisions of automated weapons, making credit and financial decisions, and being given responsibility for many other tasks that used to require human intelligence. The performance of these systems is increasingly based on integrating multiple types of artificial intelligence (AI). But as long as there is an AI shortcoming in any such area of endeavor, skeptics will point to that area as an inherent bastion of permanent human superiority over the capabilities of our own creations. ...

Although impressive in many respects, the human brain suffers from severe limitations. We use its massive parallelism (one hundred trillion interneuronal connections operating simultaneously) to quickly recognize subtle patterns. But our thinking is extremely slow: the basic neural transactions are several million times slower than contemporary electronic circuits. That makes our physiological bandwidth for processing new information extremely limited compared to the exponential growth of the overall human knowledge base. ...

While human intelligence is sometimes capable of soaring in its creativity and expressiveness, much human thought is derivative, petty, and circumscribed. The [acceleration of technological change] will allow us to transcend these limitations of our biological bodies and brains. We will gain power over our fates. Our mortality will be in our own hands. We will be able to live as long as we want (a subtly different statement from saying we will live forever). We will fully understand human thinking and will vastly extend and expand its reach. By the end of this

century, the nonbiological portion of our intelligence will be trillions of trillions of times more powerful than unaided human intelligence. ...

Before the middle of this century, the growth rates of our technology—which will be indistinguishable from ourselves—will be so steep as to appear essentially vertical. From a strictly mathematical perspective, the growth rates will still be finite but so extreme that the changes they bring about will appear to rupture the fabric of human history. That, at least, will be the perspective of unenhanced biological humanity.

[The result will ultimately] be no distinction between human and machine or between physical and virtual reality. If you wonder what will remain unequivocally human in such a world, it's simply this quality: ours is the species that inherently seeks to extend its physical and mental reach beyond current limitations.

Many commentators on these changes focus on what they perceive as a loss of some vital aspect of our humanity that will result from this transition. This perspective stems, however, from a misunderstanding of what our technology will become. All the machines we have met to date lack the essential subtlety of human biological qualities. Although [long-term technological change] has many faces, its most important implication is this: our technology will match and then vastly exceed the refinement and suppleness of what we regard as the best of human traits.

RAY KURZWEIL: THE SIX EPOCHS OF TECHNOLOGY EVOLUTION

David Honan

(Transcribed from bigthink.com/ideas/40291, 10/12/2011)

Ray Kurzweil is an expert at predicting the future. Some of his career highlights include foreseeing the fall of the Soviet Union, the invention of the Internet and a computer beating a man at chess.

So what will the coming decades hold for us? In tracking our progress in the technological-evolutionary journey, Kurzweil has identified six epochs, each of which is characterized by a major paradigm shift. He describes where we came from, where we are today ... and to recap, here are the 6 epochs of Technology Evolution, as defined by Kurzweil.

Epoch 1. Physics and Chemistry: At the beginning of the universe, all information existed at the subatomic level.

Epoch 2. Biology and DNA: With the beginning of life on Earth, genetic information was stored in DNA molecules, and yet organisms take thousands of years to evolve.

Epoch 3. Brains: Evolution produced increasingly complex organisms. The birth of the brain allowed organisms to change their behavior and learn from past experiences.

Epoch 4. Technology: Humans evolved into organisms with the ability to create technology. We are right now in the final stages of this epoch.

Epoch 5. The Merger of Human Technology with Human Intelligence: Biology and technology will begin to merge in

order to create higher forms of life and intelligence.

Epoch 6. The Universe Wakes Up: This epoch will see the birth of super-intelligence, and with it, humans/machines expanding into the Universe.

So what does this all mean for us today and in the near-future? For one thing, it will be harder than ever before to find a distinction between human and machine. In fact, "it will be all mixed up", Kurzweil says. "The bottom line is we are one human-machine civilization. This technology has already expanded who we are, and is going to go into high gear when we get to the steep part of the exponential curve."

Some key dates along the way: by 2020, "we'll have computers that are powerful enough to simulate the human brain, but we won't be finished yet with reverse-engineering the human brain and understanding its methods". That will happen by 2029, when "we'll have reverse-engineered and modeled and simulated all the regions of the brain. And that will provide us the software/algorithmic methods to simulate all of the human brain's capabilities, including our emotional intelligence. And computers at that time will be far more powerful than the human brain."

Sound both scary and liberating? It should.

Kurzweil predicts, among other things, that biotechnology will stop aging. But we'll keep having sex, and just get rid of the death part.

A Postscript Recommendation

I got the above on bigthink.com, a website dedicated to, well, big thinking. It is self-described as "a forum where top experts explore the big ideas and core skills defining the 21st century". The experts, who appear in short videos, include such as James Dyson, Nicholas Carr, Andrew Sullivan, James Watson, James Randi, Freeman Dyson, Francis Fukuyama, Gloria Steinem, Isabel Allende, Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, Karen Armstrong, Cornell West, and Michio Kaku (see the following). - JR

WHAT TRAVELS FASTER THAN THE SPEED OF LIGHT?

Michio Kaku

(Reprinted from BigThink.com, <http://bigthink.com/ideas/24863?page=1>, 11/08/2001)

One frequent question I get is whether we can break the light barrier—because unless we can break the light barrier, the distant stars will always be unreachable.

Most textbooks say that nothing can go faster than light, but that statement actually should be qualified: The answer is yes, you can break the light barrier, but not in the way we see in the movies. There are, in fact, several ways to travel faster than light:

1. The Big Bang itself expanded much faster than the speed of light. But this only means that "nothing can go faster than light". Since nothing is just empty space or vacuum, it can expand faster than light speed since no material object is breaking the light barrier. Therefore, empty space can certainly expand faster than light.

2. If you wave a flashlight across the night sky, then, in principle, its image can travel faster than light speed (since the beam of light is going from one part of the universe to another part on the opposite side, which is, in principle, many light years away). The problem here is that no material object is actually moving faster than light. (Imagine that you are surrounded by a giant sphere one light year across. The image from the light beam will eventually hit the sphere one year later. This image that hits the sphere then races across the entire sphere within a matter of seconds, although the sphere is one light year across.) Just the image of the beam as it races across the night sky is moving faster than light, but there is no message, no net information, no material object that actually moves along this image.

3. Quantum entanglement moves faster than light. If I have two electrons close together, they can vibrate in unison, according to the quantum theory. If I then separate them, an invisible umbilical cord emerges which connects the two electrons, even though they may be separated by many light years. If I jiggle one electron, the other electron “senses” this vibration instantly, faster than the speed of light. Einstein thought that this therefore disproved the quantum theory, since nothing can go faster than light.

But actually this experiment (the EPR experiment) has been done many times, and each time Einstein was wrong. Information does go faster than light, but Einstein has the last laugh. This is because the information that breaks the light barrier is random, and hence useless. (For example, let’s say a friend always wears one red sock and one green sock. You don’t know which leg wears which sock. If you suddenly see that one foot has a red sock, then you know instantly, faster than the speed of light, that the other sock is green. But this information is useless. You cannot send Morse code or usable information via red and green socks.)

4. The most credible way of sending signals faster than light is via negative matter. You can do this either by:

a) Compressing the space in front of you and expanding the space behind you, so that you surf on a tidal wave of warped space. You can calculate that this tidal wave travels faster than light if driven by negative matter (an exotic form of matter which has never been seen).

b) Using a wormhole, which is a portal or shortcut through space-time, like Alice’s looking glass.

In summary, the only viable way of breaking the light barrier may be through General Relativity and the warping of space time. However, it is not known if negative matter exists, or whether the wormhole will be stable. To solve the question of stability, you need a fully quantum theory of gravity, and the only such theory which can unite gravity with the quantum theory is string theory (which is what I do for a living).

Sadly, the theory is so complex that no one has been able to fully solve it and give a definitive answer to all these questions. Maybe someone reading this blog will be inspired to solve string theory and answer the question whether we can truly break the light barrier.

FASTER THAN LIGHT? SCIENTIFIC SKEPTICISM

John Rafferty

(Based on – and including excerpts from – The New York Times, 9/22 and 9/23/2011, and *harpersweekly.org*, 9/27)

The whole physics world was watching in September when Dario Autiero, of the *Institut de Physique Nucléaire de Lyon* in France, in front of a palpably skeptical roomful of physicists, described a recent experiment in which neutrinos were clocked going faster than the speed of light, the cosmic speed limit set by Albert Einstein in his theory of relativity back in 1905.

According to Dr. Autiero’s team, neutrinos emanating from a particle accelerator at CERN, outside Geneva, had raced to a cavern underneath Gran Sasso in Italy – a distance of 454 miles – about 60 nanoseconds faster than it would take a light beam. That amounts to a speed greater than light by about 25 parts in a million. “We cannot explain the observed effect in terms of systematic uncertainties,” Dr. Autiero said.

Physicists at the September 22 press conference, and others around the world, were quoted in the press.

“This is quite a shake-up. The correct attitude is to ask oneself what went wrong.”

“It is the duty of a lab like CERN to give the collaboration the possibility to ask the community for scrutiny of their findings.”

“The constancy of the speed of light essentially underpins our understanding of space and time and causality. If we do not have causality, we are bugged.”

“This thing is so important many of the normal scientific rivalries fall by the wayside. Everybody is going to be looking at every piece of information.”

“It’s dangerous to lay odds against Einstein. Einstein has been tested repeatedly over and over again.”

“The feeling that most people have is this can’t be right, this can’t be real.”

“This is ridiculous ... until this is verified by another group, it’s flying carpets. It’s cool, but ...”

“I don’t think you’re going to ever kill Einstein’s theory. You can’t. It works.”

“This would change the idea of how the universe is put together. But I would bet just about everything I hold dear that this won’t hold up to scrutiny.”

“They’ve done their best. The light’s going to shine on us now while we repeat our experiment.”

Notice something? Notice the difference between religion and science, which theists keep insisting is as much a religion as religion? Notice that not one of those “high priests of science” cried “Heresy!”, “Apostasy!”, or even “You can’t say that.”

In fact, what famed Columbia University physicist Brian Greene said is my favorite quote of the lot:

“We’d be thrilled if it’s right because we love something that shakes the foundation of what we believe. That’s what we live for.”

CONFUSIONS: FAITH, SPIRITUALITY, AND GOD

Giddian Beer

F*faith*: When asked what they believe in, most atheists say something like “science”, “critical thinking”, or “the Golden Rule”. But many of them confuse language by also saying they have or need “faith”.

They say something like, “I have faith that the sun will rise in the morning” or that “when I go to sleep I will later wake up”. But such reasoning is not faith at all, it is belief based on evidence and/or experience.

Faith is quite opposite; its basic meaning is belief without—often in spite of—evidence. But when “people of faith” find secular people saying they have faith, it confirms their notion that everyone really believes in God, including atheists who just don’t realize that they do – you know, their “no atheists in foxholes” crap.

Spirituality: When atheists speak of spirituality they generally mean something like, as Ann Druyan, author, television producer, widow of Carl Sagan has written, “the spiritual uplift of science’s central revelations: the vastness of the universe, the immensity of time, the relatedness of all life, and life’s preciousness on our tiny planet”.

Surely anyone contemplating the universe must be overcome by feelings of wonder, awe, even reverence. But to most people “spiritual” and its derivatives connote things like “spirit”, “soul”, a “higher power”, awareness of the supernatural and of fantasies and beliefs that are the very antithesis of rational inquiry and science.

God: “Do you believe in God?” By far the most common answer is “Yes”, followed by “Maybe” and “No”.

However, when questioned for details, one finds little agreement -- even among very devout people of different sects -- about the properties of God, what God really is.

Is He a creator-supervisor of the universe and everything in it (loving, caring, and trustworthy – or jealous, vengeful, and capricious – or both)? Or is He a mere initiator of the universe, maybe the Big Banger? Or an unknowable, possibly supernatural, “something”? The answer can affect a person’s religiosity or lack thereof.

For example, if God is supposed to be the creator-supervisor of the universe—or have any intelligence or awareness—then I am absolutely an atheist. If God is something like the Big Banger, then I am an agnostic tending towards believer. If God is “something”, then ... what? God only knows.

Gods live in imaginations, which, unlike reality, are not constrained. When words are carelessly chosen unintended meanings can be conveyed.

ALAN ALDA SOUNDS LIKE A HUMANIST

I still don’t like the word agnostic. It’s too fancy. I’m simply not a believer. But, as simple as this notion is, it confuses some people.

Someone wrote a Wikipedia entry about me, identifying

me as an atheist because I’d said in a book I wrote that I wasn’t a believer. I guess in a world uncomfortable with uncertainty, an unbeliever must be an atheist, and possibly an infidel.

This gets us back to that most pressing of human questions: why do people worry so much about other people’s holding beliefs other than their own?

WHAT SECULAR HUMANISM LACKS

Walter Balcerak

I’m a secular humanist who has doubted the claims of religion for many years. Still, I’m glad I was married in the Lady Chapel of St. Patrick’s Cathedral instead of the dungeon-like gloom of the Municipal Building. I am thrilled by Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus”, despite its religiosity, and “Silent Night” and “Ave Maria” at times have moved me to tears. Although I have not uttered a prayer in decades, I am awed by the kaleidoscopic colors of stained-glass windows and the soaring eloquence of Gothic cathedrals.

Religion is wrong about many things, including creation myths and evils such as the Inquisition and deadly suicide bombings. But for countless millennia, religion has gotten some things right: its rituals and ceremonies lend significance to important events, such as birth, coming of age, marriage, and death; and the art it inspires often moves us deeply.

Those are some of the reasons religion has been around since our ancestors began walking upright, and why it likely will remain until the end of time. For while secularism is right about many things, its emphasis on rationalism and science, carried to an extreme, results in a cold, lifeless creed that ignores our strongest emotional needs.

Humanism is meant to address that problem, but does it really? A current organizing brochure of the American Humanist Association defines humanism as “a progressive philosophy of life that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity.”

These are noble ideals, but some important things are missing from this definition of humanism. How about wonder, joy, friendship, and love? Those things, along with the pursuit of humanistic goals, are hallmarks of a life well lived.

I experienced a wonderful feeling of liberation, it’s true, when I threw off the shackles of religion. But I can’t say my atheism ever inspired me or filled me with a sense of transcendence. Yet I experience such things. Away from the city’s glaring lights, the starry nighttime sky can leave me speechless with wonder and awe. A Beethoven symphony or a soprano’s aria may make me shiver with esthetic pleasure. And the love I share with my wife and daughter is a gift I treasure above all else in life.

Secular humanism, I submit, will never succeed as an alternative to religion until it balances its emphasis on rationalism and altruism with ceremonies and ideas that celebrate humanity’s deepest positive emotions, such as wonder and awe, esthetic pleasure, friendship, and love.

SHSNY CALENDAR: NOVEMBER 2011 - JANUARY 2012

**SHSNY BOOK CLUB
meets**

**THURSDAY, NOV. 3, 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**

**IS THE INTERNET
CHANGING
THE WAY YOU THINK?
The Net's Impact on
Our Minds and Future
by John Brockman**

How is the internet changing the way you think? That is one of the dominant questions of our time, one that affects almost every aspect of our life and future. And it's exactly what John Brockman, publisher of Edge.org, posed to more than 150 of the world's most influential minds.

"Brilliant, farsighted, and fascinating", this is an essential guide to the Net-based world and how all our worlds are being impacted by it.

Brockman, publisher of Edge.org, and compiler of previous Book Club selections *What Is Your Dangerous Idea?*, *What Have You Changed Your Mind About?* and *This Will Change Everything*, asked such secular leading lights as Dawkins, Dennett and Harris, of course, but also the likes of Brian Eno, Helen Fisher, Martin Rees and Alan Alda.

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, DEC. 1, 6:30 pm
at The Community Church
of New York
28 East 35 Street (Park-Mad)**

**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. "A tidal wave of talent. . . . A wealth of new and exciting ideas." – *Stephen Pinker*

"I would have killed for books like this when I was a student!"
– *Brian Eno*

Paperback and Kindle editions

**SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURSDAY, JAN. 5, 6:30 pm
at The Community Church
of New York
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.

Paperback and Kindle editions
Advance Notice

We'll read Stephen Pinker's new best-seller, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, in early 2012. Reserve at your library now.

**MONDAY, NOV. 14, 7:00 pm
SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)
"BABETTE'S FEAST"**



A French feast for Thanksgiving. This adaptation of an Isak Dinesen short story won the 1987 Oscar for Best Foreign Film. Two young and beautiful daughters of a 19th century Danish minister pass up love and life to remain in their tiny village and its dour sect. Years later they take in a Parisian refugee (with a secret) as housekeeper and cook. When she comes into some money, Babette thanks them with a glorious feast you must see.

Leonard Maltin's Movie Guide says, "Don't miss this one!"

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

**BRUNCH!
SUNDAY, NOV. 20, 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!

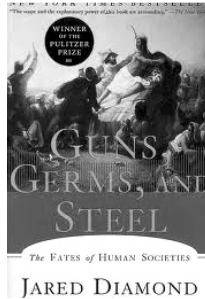
SHSNY CALENDAR: NOVEMBER 2011 - JANUARY 2012

GREAT LECTURES TUESDAY, NOV 22, 7:00 pm "GUNS, GERMS & STEEL"

Part 2: Conquest

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?

This three-part series, with all the production values you expect of a *National Geographic* presentation, stars Peter Coyote and author Jared Diamond himself.

SHSNY Great Lectures Editor Bob Murtha will lead the (probably lively) discussions after each almost-an-hour dvd showing.

December 27 Great Lecture:

"Guns, Germs & Steel - Part 3"
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.shsny.org and at humanism.meetup.com/515; reasonablenewyork.org/ and 212-308-2165

SUNDAY, NOV. 6, 3-5:00 pm CFI-NYC "Scientists & Philosophers Series": "THE SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY OF FREE WILL"

Are advances in the scientific understanding of the human mind shaping our conception of free will? If so, how? Is neuroscience revealing that free will does not exist, or is it merely shedding light on the inner workings of agency? And do the answers to these questions have implications for moral responsibility?

NYIT Auditorium,
1871 Broadway (61-62 Sts)
\$10; CFI Members free
sleroy@centerforinquiry.net

TUESDAY, NOV. 15, 7:00 pm CFI-NYC & THE HARVARD CHAPLAINCY present "A NEW WAY TO BE NON-RELIGIOUS: A Public Event on Humanist Community and Interfaith Work"

Join the discussion, led by Harvard Humanist Chaplain Greg Epstein and Chris Stedman, on communities for the nonreligious and the role of atheists in interfaith work.

Park 51, 51 Park Place
(bet Church & West Broadway)

THURSDAY, NOV. 17, 7:00 pm NEW YORK SOCIETY FOR ETHICAL CULTURE FUNDRAISER University Glee Club Benefit Concert 2 West 64 St. (CPW)

\$25 members; \$35 guests
Tickets:

UGCBenefit.eventbrite.com

More info:
nysec.org/ glee-club-11-17-2011

OTHER REASONABLE NEW YORK EVENTS

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

Friday, Nov 4, 7 pm - New York Society for Ethical Culture,

"Ethics in Film": *Atonement*.

Mon., Nov. 7, 7 pm - Dinner & Philosophy Now: *God and the*

online media. Le Poisson Rouge, 158 Bleeker St.

Sun. Nov. 13, 8 pm, Jolly Thirteen Club of New York & Central New Jersey. "Food, drink & skepticism."

www.meetup.com/Jolly13/
Wed. Nov. 30, 8 pm, "Drinking Skeptically", NYC Skeptics.

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 President John Rafferty. On MNN Channel 67 and RNN Channel 110 in Manhattan, and simultaneously anywhere 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: agnosticAAnyc.org/meetings.html

AN INTERFAITH JOKE

(Thanks to Art Harris)

A man goes to his rabbi with a sad story. “Rabbi”, he says, “my only son, who I brought up to be an observant Jew and to love Torah, has just told me that he’s becoming a Christian. I don’t know what to do.”

“I can’t help you”, the rabbi says, “because I have the same problem. My only son, too, has become a Christian. In my grief I turned to God. I tore my garments and I cried out, ‘God, my only son, a Jew, is becoming a Christian.’ And do you know what God said to me?”

“What?”

“He said, ‘Tell me about it.’”

REASONS FOR REASON

Michael P. Lynch

(Reprinted from *The Stone*, The New York Times’ online forum, 10/2/2011)

Rick Perry’s recent vocal dismissals of evolution, and his confident assertion that “God is how we got here” reflect an obvious divide in our culture. In one sense, that divide is just over the facts: Some of us believe God created human beings just as they are now, others of us don’t. But underneath this divide is a deeper one. Really divisive disagreements are typically not just over the facts. They are also about the best way to support our views of the facts. Call this a disagreement in epistemic principle.

Our epistemic principles tell us what is rational to believe, what sources of information to trust. Thus while a few people may agree with Perry because they really think that the scientific evidence supports creationism, I suspect that for most people, scientific evidence (or its lack) has nothing to do with it. Their belief in creationism is instead a reflection of a deeply held epistemic principle: that, at least on some topics, scripture is a more reliable source of information than science. For others, including myself, this is never the case.

Disagreements like this give rise to an unnerving question: How do we rationally defend our most fundamental epistemic principles? Like many of the best philosophical mysteries, this a problem that can seem both unanswerable and yet extremely important to solve.

The ancient Greek skeptics were the first to show why the problem is so difficult to solve. Every one of our beliefs is produced by some method or source, be it humble (like memory) or complex (like technologically assisted science). But why think our methods, whatever they are, are trustworthy or reliable for getting at the truth? If I challenge one of your methods, you can’t just appeal to the same method to show that it is reliable. That would be circular.

And appealing to another method won’t help either – for unless that method can be shown to be reliable, using it to determine the reliability of the first method answers nothing. So you end up either continuing on in the same vein – pointlessly citing reasons for methods and methods for reasons forever – or arguing in circles, or granting that

your method is groundless. Any way you go, it seems you must admit you can give no reason for trusting your methods, and hence can give no reason to defend your most fundamental epistemic principles.

This skeptical argument is disturbing because it seems to suggest that in the end, all “rational” explanations end up grounding out on something arbitrary. It all just comes down to what you happen to believe, what you feel in your gut, your faith. Human beings have historically found this to be a very seductive idea, in part because it is liberating. It levels the playing field, intellectually speaking. After all, if all reasons are grounded on something arbitrary, then no one’s principles rest on any firmer foundation than anyone else’s. It seems to give us the freedom to go with any epistemic principle we choose.

Many people who are committed to the core epistemic principles of science – say, that observation and experiment should be trusted over appeals to scripture – are inclined to shrug this worry off. Why, they ask, should I care about convincing people who don’t understand the obvious fact that science is always the better method for knowing about matters like the origin of life on this planet? ...

Again, epistemic principles tell us what is rational. So anyone who doubts my basic epistemic principles is going to appear to me as someone who doubts the rules of rationality. So, why should I care about what they think? It’s not as if they’ll be able to recognize my (good) reasons anyway, and to me, their “reasons” will not be legitimate.

But what counts as “legitimate”? There’s the rub. A legitimate challenge is presumably a rational challenge. Disagreements over epistemic principles are disagreements over which methods and sources to trust. And there we have the problem. We can’t decide on what counts as a legitimate reason to doubt my epistemic principles unless we’ve already settled on our principles—and that is the very issue in question.

The problem that skepticism about reason raises is not about whether I have good evidence by my principles for my principles. Presumably I do. The problem is whether I can give a more objective defense of them. That is, whether I can give reasons for them that can be appreciated from what Hume called a “common point of view” – reasons that can “move some universal principle of the human frame, and touch a string, to which all mankind have an accord and sympathy.”

I think that we ignore this problem – the problem of defending our epistemic principles from a common point of view – at our peril. It is not that I think we should come up with a list of bullet-points to convince people to employ scientific reason in public discourse. That would be a waste of time. Nor is my point that it is politically stupid to dismiss other people’s viewpoints in a democratic society. (Although it is. You don’t help your message by displaying a haughty indifference to others’ challenges.)

My point is that defending some of our epistemic principles, our faith in reason, is required by some of our other principles. Hume’s point, in alluding to what he also

sometimes called “the principle of humanity”, was that the ideal of civility requires us to find common currency with those with whom we must discuss practical matters.

More recent political philosophers like Rawls and Habermas have seen this ideal as a key component of a functioning liberal democracy. In this view, democracies aren’t simply organizing a struggle for power between competing interests; democratic politics isn’t war by other means. Democracies are, or should be, spaces of reasons.

So one reason we should take the project of defending our epistemic principles seriously is that the ideal of civility demands it. But there is also another, even deeper, reason. We need to justify our epistemic principles from a common point of view because we need shared epistemic principles in order to even have a common point of view. Without a common background of standards against which we measure what counts as a reliable source of information, or a reliable method of inquiry, and what doesn’t, we won’t be able to agree on the facts, let alone values. Indeed, this is precisely the situation we seem to be headed towards in the United States. We live isolated in our separate bubbles of information culled from sources that only reinforce our prejudices and never challenge our basic assumptions. No wonder that — as in the debates over evolution, or what to include in textbooks illustrate — we so often fail to reach agreement over the history and physical structure of the world itself. No wonder joint action grinds to a halt. When you can’t agree on your principles of evidence and rationality, you can’t agree on the facts. And if you can’t agree on the facts, you can hardly agree on what to do in the face of the facts.

Put simply, we need an epistemic common currency because we often have to decide, jointly, what to do in the face of disagreement. Sometimes we can accomplish this, in a democratic society, by voting. But we can’t decide every issue that way, and we certainly can’t decide on our epistemic principles — which methods and sources are actually rationally worthy of trust — by voting. We need some forms of common currency before we get to the voting booth. And that is one reason we need to resist skepticism about reason: we need to be able to give reasons for why some standards of reasons — some epistemic principles — should be part of that currency and some not.

Yet this very fact—the fact that a civil democratic society requires a common currency of shared epistemic principles—should give us hope that we can answer the skeptical challenge. Even if, as the skeptic says, we can’t defend the truth of our principles without circularity, we might still be able to show that some are better than others.

Observation and experiment, for example, aren’t just good because they are reliable means to the truth. They are valuable because almost everyone can appeal to them. They have roots in our natural instincts, as Hume might have said. If so, then perhaps we can hope to give reasons for our epistemic principles. Such reasons will be “merely” practical, but reasons—reasons for reason, as it were—all the same.

GUESS WHICH DARLING OF THE POLITICAL LEFT SAID THIS

[Excerpted from *The New York Times*, 10/12/2011]

“In the last few years, a seductive idea has come on the scene. It involves the growing collaboration between big business, big finance, big government and big union bosses. ... Well-connected banks get bailed out ... certain companies get special deals through governments,” [and taxpayer dollars are] “given to companies that are run by politicians’ campaign contributors so often.” [In return, lobbyists and politicians] “slip sweet deals and tax breaks into the tax code that they get to help to write.

“I call it crony capitalism,” said Sarah Palin, speaking about contemporary America to the World Knowledge Forum in Seoul, South Korea, on October 11.

Who?!

RE: “THE BRITISH IS COMING! OR IS IT?” IN OCTOBER PIQUE

Dear John,

Since you solicited opinions on punctuation, here’s mine. The illogical “American” way of enclosing all the punctuation within quotation marks has always irritated me (I much prefer the sensible “British way”) -- but I’ve always conformed to the former because it’s “expected” of Yank writers. I would, however, commend your switching to the Brits as a way of boldly striking a blow for reasonableness.

An even more serious irritation for me is the way the *NYTimes* insists on omitting the comma before the “and” in a series -- thus making some sentences non-understandable unless read a second time. Hardly anyone else follows that practice, but the *Times* has its own style sheet and stubbornly persists. I’d write an indignant letter to them, but hey, nobody tells the Gray Lady what to do, right?

Thanks for this new and interesting issue of PIQUE. Keep on knocking them out of the park! – *Phil Appleman*

Dear Phil:

Couldn’t agree more, though even after three weeks, placing commas and periods outside quotes is still discomfiting.

I got over the missing comma-in-series a few years back, although I can still see and hear Miss Corcoran patiently, logically explaining to seventh graders that the conjunction “and” logically obviates the need for a comma. She made perfect sense then, and (there, I did it again!) the “rule” still does. Except for the teensy practical problem you point out – that lack of a comma all too often simply confuses the hell out of a sentence.

I still do not split infinitives (at least not consciously) but only recently learned (as I’m sure you know) that the rule against that grammatical crime was based on Latin—in which the infinitive cannot be split, because “to do”, “to love”, “to walk”, etc., are each one word, not two as in English—and the pedants defaulted to “the classic”, i.e., If Cicero couldn’t do it, who the hell are you to think you can? As I say, I still don’t, but I look more tolerantly on those who do. – *John Rafferty*

HASIDS WARN WOMEN AND GIRLS: STEP ASIDE

Trevor Kapp and Tracy Connor

(Excerpted from the Daily News, 10/11/2011)

Yiddish signs in Brooklyn roughly translated as, "Precious Jewish Daughters, please move over to the side when you see a man come across," were removed by city workers from the trees to which they were bolted in the Hasidic neighborhood of South Williamsburg.

The Parks Department says the teardowns had nothing to do with the message itself; it's just illegal to post signs on street trees.

Neighborhood residents were annoyed. "The signs don't bother anybody", said Abraham Klein, 18. "Men and ladies don't go together. It's just our religion." Faye Grunfeld, 70, said the signs were "a private thing" - even though they were posted on public property. "It's taking away freedom of speech."

Deborah Feldman, an ex-Hasid and author of *Unorthodox: The Scandalous Rejection of my Hasidic Roots*, said, "This is standard practice in Hasidic communities all over: step aside when a man is approaching you from the opposite direction." She said the signs likely were posted as part of a crackdown on "rebellious behavior" by women. "It's a way of reminding people to stay in line."

Comment: "Precious Jewish Daughters"? What self-deluding and self-righteous hypocrisy! There couldn't be a more blatant example of the second-class standing of Jewish women (actually third-class, after men and even little boys), and indeed, women in any of the "religions of the Book".

I seem to remember another subjugated group in America that was expected to "step aside" when a (white) man was passing by. How is this different? And if the stepping aside is really about separation and modesty, not male superiority, why don't the men step aside? It would seem the gentlemanly thing to do.

And consider that elderly woman who called the sign posting "a private thing". In other words, "We're exempt from your society and its irrelevant laws." The city has laws against posting on trees. The Hasids post on trees. The city takes down the postings (but doesn't arrest or fine anyone). The Hasids are outraged, outraged! "Where in hell do the eight million other citizens of New York get the idea that law applies to us?" - JR

THE BARMAID CAN'T FOLLOW JESUS'S AND MO'S LOGIC

(Transcribed from jesusandmo.net/2011/10/05/must)

Mohammed: Okay, Barmaid, one more time. It's really not that complicated.

Jesus: Everything that has a beginning must have a cause.

Barmaid: Mm ...

Mo: The universe has a beginning, so it must have a cause.

Barmaid: Therefore ...?

Mo: Therefore no bacon.

Jesus: Or gay sex.

Mo: And cover up your damned hair.

Barmaid: I'm sorry, you've lost me again.

STAY HUNGRY. STAY FOOLISH Steve Jobs, 1955 - 2011

(Excerpted from the commencement address delivered at Stanford University, June, 2005)

When I was 17, I read a quote that went something like: "If you live each day as if it was your last, someday you'll most certainly be right." It made an impression on me, and since then, for the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself: "If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?" And whenever the answer has been "no" for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something.

Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Because almost everything - all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure - these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart.

About a year ago I was diagnosed with cancer. I had a scan at 7.30 in the morning and it clearly showed a tumor on my pancreas. I didn't even know what a pancreas was. The doctors told me this was almost certainly a type of cancer that is incurable and that I should expect to live no longer than three to six months. My doctor advised me to go home and get my affairs in order, which is doctor's code for "prepare to die". It means to try to tell your kids everything you thought you'd have the next 10 years to tell them in just a few months. It means to make sure everything is buttoned up so that it will be as easy as possible for your family. It means to say your goodbyes.

I lived with that diagnosis all day. Later that evening I had a biopsy, where they stuck an endoscope down my throat, through my stomach and into my intestines, put a needle into my pancreas and got a few cells from the tumor. I was sedated, but my wife, who was there, told me that when they viewed the cells under a microscope the doctors started crying because it turned out to be a very rare form of pancreatic cancer that is curable with surgery. I had the surgery and I'm fine now.

This was the closest I've been to facing death, and I hope it's the closest I get for a few more decades. Having lived through it, I can now say this to you with a bit more certainty than when death was a useful, but purely intellectual, concept:

No one wants to die. Even people who want to go to heaven don't want to die to get there. And yet death is the destination we all share. No one has ever escaped it. And that is as it should be, because death is very likely the single best invention of life. It is life's change agent. It clears out the old to make way for the new. Right now the new is you, but some day not too long from now, you will gradually become the old and be cleared away. Sorry to be so dramatic, but it is quite true.

Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma – which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And, most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.

When I was young, there was an amazing publication called the *Whole Earth Catalog*, which was one of the bibles of my generation. It was created by a fellow named Stewart Brand not far from here in Menlo Park, and he brought it to life with his poetic touch. This was in the late 1960s, before personal computers and desktop publishing, so it was all made with typewriters, scissors and Polaroid cameras. It was sort of like Google in paperback form, 35 years before Google came along; it was idealistic, and overflowing with neat tools and great notions.

Stewart and his team put out several issues of the *Whole Earth Catalog*, and then, when it had run its course, they put out a final issue. It was the mid-1970s, and I was your age. On the back cover of their final issue was a photograph of an early morning country road, the kind you might find yourself hitchhiking on if you were so adventurous. Beneath it were the words "Stay hungry. Stay foolish". It was their farewell message as they signed off. Stay hungry. Stay foolish. And I have always wished that for myself. And now, as you graduate to begin anew, I wish that for you.

Stay hungry. Stay foolish.

THE FIRST THANKSGIVING: FORGET THE PICTURE-BOOK CLICHES.

Nathaniel Philbrick

(Excerpted from *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War*, Mr. Philbrick's history of the Plymouth colony.)

We do not know the exact date of the celebration we now call the First Thanksgiving, but it was probably in late September or early October [1621], soon after their crop of corn, squash, beans, barley, and peas had been harvested. It was also a time during which Plymouth Harbor played host to a tremendous number of migrating birds, particularly ducks and geese, and [Governor William] Bradford ordered four men to go out "fowling". It took only a few hours for Plymouth's hunters to kill enough ducks and geese to feed the settlement for a week. Now that they had "gathered the fruit of our labors", Bradford declared it time to "rejoice together ... after a more special manner."

The term Thanksgiving, first applied in the nineteenth century, was not used by the Pilgrims themselves. For the Pilgrims a thanksgiving was a time of spiritual devotion. Since just about everything the Pilgrims did had religious overtones, there was certainly much about the gathering in the fall of 1621 that would have made it a proper Puritan Thanksgiving. But as [memoirist Edward] Winslow's description makes clear, there was also much

about the gathering that was similar to a traditional English harvest festival – a secular celebration that dated back to the Middle Ages in which villagers ate, drank, and played games.

Countless Victorian-era engravings notwithstanding, the Pilgrims did not spend the day sitting around a long table draped with a white linen cloth, clasping each other's hands in prayer as a few curious Indians looked on. Instead of an English affair, the first Thanksgiving soon became an overwhelmingly Native celebration when [Wampanoag sachem] Massasoit and a hundred Pokanokets (more than twice the entire English population of Plymouth) arrived at the settlement with five freshly killed deer. Even if all the Pilgrims' furniture was brought into the sunshine, most of the celebrants stood, squatted, or sat on the ground as they clustered around outdoor fires, where the deer and birds turned on wooden spits and where pottages – stews into which varieties of meats and vegetables were thrown – simmered invitingly.

In addition to ducks and deer, there was, according to Bradford, a "good store of wild turkeys" in the fall of 1621. ... The Pilgrims may have also added fish to their meal of birds and deer. In fall, striped bass, bluefish, and cod were abundant. Perhaps most important to the Pilgrims was that with a recently harvested barley crop, it was now possible to brew beer. Alas, the Pilgrims were without pumpkin pies or cranberry sauce. There were also no forks, which did not appear at Plymouth until the last decades of the seventeenth century. The Pilgrims ate with their fingers and their knives.

Neither Bradford nor Winslow mention it, but the first Thanksgiving coincided with what was, for the Pilgrims, a new and startling phenomenon: the turning of the green leaves of summer to the incandescent yellows, reds, and purples of a New England autumn. With the shortening of the days comes a diminishment in the amount of green chlorophyll in the tree leaves, which allows the other pigments contained within the leaves to emerge. In Britain, the cloudy fall days and warm nights caused the autumn colors to be muted and lackluster. In New England, on the other hand, the profusion of sunny fall days and cool but not freezing nights unleashes the colors latent within the tree leaves, with oaks turning red, brown, and russet; hickories golden brown; birches yellow; red maples scarlet; sugar maples orange; and black maples glowing yellow. It was a display that must have contributed to the enthusiasm with which the Pilgrims later wrote of the festivities that fall.

The First Thanksgiving marks the conclusion of a remarkable year. Eleven months earlier the Pilgrims had arrived at the tip of Cape Cod, fearful and uninformed. They had spent the next month alienating and angering every Native American they happened to come across. By all rights, none of the Pilgrims should have emerged from

the first winter alive. Like the French sailors before them, they all might have been either killed or taken captive by the Indians. That it had worked out differently was a testament not only to the Pilgrims' grit, resolve, and faith, but to their ability to take advantage of an extraordinary opportunity.

During the winter of 1621, the survival of the English settlement had been in the balance. Massasoit's decision to offer them assistance had saved the Pilgrims' lives in the short term, but there had already been several instances in which the sachem's generosity could all have gone for naught. Placing their faith in God, the Pilgrims might have insisted on a policy of arrogant isolationism. But by becoming an active part of the diplomatic process in southern New England - by sending Winslow and [Stephen] Hopkins to Sowams [to negotiate trade and land purchases]; by compensating the Nausets for the corn [which soon after landing the near-starving Pilgrims had stolen]; and most important, by making clear their loyalty to Massasoit ... they had taken charge of their own destiny in the region.

In 1620, New England was far from being a paradise of abundance and peace. Indeed the New World was, in many ways, much like the Old - a place where the fertility of the soil was a constant concern, a place where disease and war were omnipresent threats. There were profound differences between the Pilgrims and Pokanokets to be sure—especially when it came to technology, culture,

and spiritual beliefs—but in those early years, when the mutual challenge of survival dominated all other concerns, the two peoples had more in common than is generally appreciated today.

For the Pilgrims, some of whom had slept in a wigwam and all of whom had enjoyed eating and drinking with the Indians during that First Thanksgiving, these were not a despicable pack of barbarians (even if some of their habits, such as their refusal to wear clothes, struck them as "savage"); these were human beings, much like themselves - "very trustworthy, quick of apprehension, ripe witted, just."

THANKSGIVING

F.P.A. (Franklin P. Adams)

(As appeared in The New Yorker, November 1947)

Give thanks for this, give thanks for that;
 Give thanks for your too expensive flat;
 Give thanks for your far too costly board;
 Give thanks for things you can't afford;
 Give thanks for these and those and them;
 Give thanks for the parties, Rep. and Dem.;
 Give thanks for food upon my table,
 To pay for which I am unable;
 For high tuition at school and college
 Where my children get so little knowledge.
 Give thanks for the soaring cost of living,
 And give a thank-you for Thanksgiving.

**The Obama administration,
 dodges Church-State,
 again.
 Page 1**
**Faster than light?
 Not so fast.
 Page 4**
**The real
 First Thanksgiving
 Page 10**

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