

# PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

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December, 2012

Happy Hanukkah, HumanLight, Solstice, Christmas, and Kwanzaa (Festivus, too, if you're in a Grinchy mood). Whatever, Happy Holidays. Especially happy this year for our (mostly) liberal readers, who can ponder political portents herein (not all good), consider Christian privilege here and abroad and the big (really, big!) reason we live in cities, count more of us pioneers than ever, review ridiculous religious ideas, and round out our slate for the next big election – the Dumbths. – JR

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## HOW SWEET IT IS

John Rafferty

Are you still celebrating? Have you come down off your November 6 high yet? Wow, what a shock it was at only a few minutes after 11 on Election Night to be jolted into victory – a surprisingly decisive victory all the more delicious because we had been so nail-bitingly worried it might not happen.

But.

Let's not ignore the fact that the vote for President on November 6 was essentially a tie. Half the country voted for a man with no more convictions than his Oedipal need to achieve what his father could not, who told whatever audience he was in front of whatever it wanted to hear, whose business career was described by leaders of his own party as "vulture capitalism", whose contempt for 47 percent of Americans was caught on tape, and who represented what has best been described as "a 'Mad Men' party in a 'Modern Family' America".

No, this election has not transported us to "a new and sunlit shore", but it has shown us at least a glimpse of a better America ahead, one the elder George Bush called "a kinder, gentler America". Half a million more Americans voted for Democratic Congressional nominees than for Republicans, who essentially hold their commanding majority in the House because of gerrymandering by Republican-controlled state legislatures. But district lines don't affect statewide ballot initiatives, and in state after state on November 6, Americans halted the country's 30-year rightward march



and took an abrupt left turn.

The lesson of liberal and progressive victories across the country – for marriage equality and women's reproductive and choice rights, rolling back anti-union legislation and even decriminalizing marijuana, while electing more women, minorities, gays, non-Christians and even Nones to the House, the Senate, and state legislatures across the country ("This election signaled the last where a white Christian strategy is workable", said religious right leader Robert P. Jones) – was not so much a victory for middle-of-the-road Obama, as it was for us. As Maureen Dowd wrote in the *Times* November 11:

*Last time, Obama lifted up the base with his message of hope and change; this time the base lifted up Obama, with the hope he will change. He has not led the Obama army to leverage power, so now the army is leading Obama.*

*If 2008 was about exalting the One, 2012 was about the disenchanted Democratic base deciding: "We are the Ones we've been waiting for."*

So, what are we waiting for? What do we want President Obama to do? And what should *we* be doing? Over the next few issues of PIQUE, I will welcome your brief essays on what SHSNY (and our partners in the Reasonable New York coalition) should be doing to help achieve that better America.

But to begin ...

## YOUR "FIRST 100-DAYS" OPINIONS, PLEASE

Let's start with what we want the President to do. What should he propose in his Second Inaugural Address, and what should he work like hell to accomplish in his second First Hundred Days? E-mail your suggestions/screeds/rants (no untoward language, and 100-word maximum, please) to [editor@shsny.org](mailto:editor@shsny.org) (or post to the P.O. Box below).

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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.

## WRITE YOUR REP: SAY “NO” TO THE PRAYER CAUCUS

(From AHA Humanist Network News – 11/07/2012)

In a letter sent by the American Humanist Association (AHA) to all members-elect of the U.S. House of Representatives, the AHA is asking them “not to join the Congressional Prayer Caucus and to actively work to ensure that the wall of separation between church and state is strengthened and maintained”.

“Members of the Congressional Prayer Caucus have repeatedly introduced and supported legislation that many secular Americans feel is unconstitutional and often favors Christianity above all other religions,” writes AHA Executive Director Roy Speckhardt.

The Congressional Prayer Caucus was founded in 2005 by Representative J. Randy Forbes (VA) to “preserve the presence of religion, faith, and morality in the marketplace of ideas”. According to the caucus website, current issues for the Caucus include “supporting the freedom of school boards to open meetings with prayer”, “urging the President to preserve religious hiring rights”, and “affirming America’s rich spiritual heritage”.

Members of the Prayer Caucus have supported legislation that called on the President to designate 2010 as “The National Year of the Bible” and “acknowledge the importance of the Bible in American society”. Prayer Caucus members have also signed on to *amicus curiae* briefs in court cases in support of Christian crosses on public land.

“Incoming House members should know that approximately one in five of their constituents are not religiously affiliated”, Speckhardt continues, “and even more insist on maintaining the wall of separation between church and state. Secular Americans are ready to work with all members of the 113th Congress, regardless of their personal beliefs, if they agree on this basic constitutional principle.”

*Comment: I’m not worried that my rep, Carolyn Maloney, would join the Caucus, but I wrote her anyway (as an individual citizen and as President of SHSNY) – and you should write yours. – JR*

## THE BULLET WE DODGED

We are not going to have, as President, a man who once led a mob of friends to run down a scared gay kid to hold him down and forcibly cut his hair off with a pair of scissors while that kid cried and screamed for help – and there was no apology, not ever. – Rachel Maddow

## ON THE OTHER HAND ...

As I draft this ten days after the election, the right-wing media machine is spinning conspiracy theories about the election, Tea Partiers still have a stranglehold on the Republican majority in the House, loonies in all 50 states are circulating secession petitions (100,000 signatures so far in Texas – where can I sign?), Mitt Romney believes that he lost because minorities were bribed and college-age women traded their votes for “free contraception”, and Paul Ryan is certain the ticket lost because too many “urban voters”

(wink-wink) turned out. And so the next web of right-wing myth is woven.

Jon Hubbard, Charlie Fuqua, and Loy March – the Larry, Moe, and Curly of the Arkansas House, whom we profiled last month because they all think slavery was a pretty neat idea – were all re-elected. So was Congressman Paul Broun (R-GA), a medical doctor who avows that “evolution, embryology, and big bang theory [are] lies straight from the pit of Hell”. He ran unopposed, but 4,000 of his constituents in Athens-Clarke county wrote in the name “Charles Darwin”. And right here at home, congressman Michael Grimm of Staten Island, tangled in immigration fraud and under investigation for illegal contributions (PIQUE, November), won re-election handily, thank you very much. – JR

## A CHRISTMAS CAROL WE CAN SING

(Transcribed from a YouTube video by The Second City Network, and forwarded by Aidan Rafferty)

Merry Christmas, neighbors,  
although we don’t believe in Jesus Christ  
or God above, which frankly seems naïve.

And though that may sound harsh,  
we can’t change how we feel.

So what we’ll do this holiday  
is pretend that God is real.

And at your Christmas dinner

we’ll act like we are praying,

while deep inside our conscious minds  
we’re bemused by what you’re saying.

‘Cause if God could answer prayers  
there’d be no famine, greed, or war.

But we’ll buy your bulls\*\*t for one day,  
‘cause that’s what friends are for.

We’ll recognize your ancient laws  
as we gather every year.

It’s better to be loved than to make a point,  
and enjoy some f\*\*king Christmas cheer.

So we’ll pretend that God is real  
in the spirit of the season.

Soon you’ll return to judging us  
and we’ll go back to being heathen.

## A POLITICALLY CORRECT CHRISTMAS

John Leo

(Reprinted from *ThisIsTrue.com* 12/23/2011)

And Joseph went up from Galilee to Bethlehem with Mary, his espoused wife, who was great with child. And she brought forth a son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. And the angel of the Lord spoke to the shepherds and said, “I bring you tidings of great joy. Unto you is born a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.”

“There’s a problem with the angel”, said a Pharisee who happened to be strolling by. As he explained to Joseph, angels are widely regarded as religious symbols, and the stable was on public property where such symbols were not

allowed to land or even hover.

“And I have to tell you, this whole thing looks to me very much like a Nativity scene”, he said sadly. “That’s a no-no, too.”

Joseph had a bright idea. “What if I put a couple of reindeer over there near the ox and ass?” he asked, eager to avoid sectarian strife.

“That would definitely help”, said the Pharisee, who knew as well as anyone that whenever a savior appeared, judges usually liked to be on the safe side and surround it with deer or woodland creatures of some sort. “Just to clinch it, throw in a candy cane and a couple of elves and snowmen, too. No court can resist that.”

Mary asked, “What does my son’s birth have to do with snowmen?”

“Snowpersons!” cried a passing woman, changing the subject before it veered dangerously toward religion.

Off to the side of the gathering crowd, a Philistine was painting the scene. Mary complained that she and Joseph looked too tattered and worn in the picture.

“Artistic license,” he said. “I’ve got to show the plight of the haggard homeless in a greedy, uncaring society in winter”, he explained.

“We’re not haggard or homeless. The inn was just full”, said Mary.

“Whatever”, said the painter.

Two newly-arrived women began to argue fiercely. One said she objected to Jesus’ birth “because it privileged motherhood”. The other scoffed at virgin births, but said that if they encouraged more attention to diversity in family forms and the rights of single mothers, well, then, she was all for them.

“I’m not a single mother”, Mary started to say, but she was cut off by a third woman who insisted that swaddling clothes are a form of child abuse, since they restrict the natural movement of babies.

With the arrival of ten child advocates, all trained to spot infant abuse and manger rash, Mary and Joseph were pushed to the edge of the crowd, where arguments were breaking out over how many reindeer (or what mix of reindeer and seasonal sprites) had to be installed to compensate for the infant’s unfortunate religious character.

An older man bustled up, bowling over two merchants who had been busy debating whether an elf is the same as a fairy and whether the elf/fairy should be shaking hands with Jesus in the crib or merely standing to the side, jumping around like a sports mascot.

“I’d hold off on the reindeer”, the man said, explaining that the use of asses and oxen as picturesque backdrops for Nativity scenes carries the subliminal message of human dominance. He passed out two leaflets, one denouncing manger births as invasions of animal space, the other arguing that stables are “penned environments” where animals are incarcerated against their will. He had no opinion about elves or candy canes.

Signs declaring “Free the Bethlehem 2” began to appear, referring to the obviously exploited ass and ox. Someone

else said the halo on Jesus’ head was elitist.

Mary was exasperated. “And what about you, old mother?” she said sharply to an elderly woman. “Are you here to attack the shepherds as prison guards for excluded species, maybe to complain that singing in Latin identifies us with our Roman oppressors, or just to say that I should have skipped patriarchal religiosity and joined some dumb new-age goddess religion?”

“None of the above,” said the woman, “I just wanted to tell you that the Magi are here.”

Sure enough, the three wise men rode up.

“They’re all male!” the crowd gasped. “And not very multicultural!”

“Balthasar here is black”, said one of the Magi.

“Yes, but how many of you are gay or disabled?” someone shouted. A committee was quickly formed to find an impoverished lesbian wise-person among the halt and lame of Bethlehem.

A calm voice said, “Be of good cheer, Mary, for you have done well and your son will change the world.”

At last, a sane person, Mary thought. She turned to see a radiant and confident female face. The woman spoke again: “There is one thing, though. Religious holidays are important, but can’t we learn to celebrate them in ways that unite, not divide? For instance, instead of all this business about “*Gloria in excelsis Deo*”, why not just “Season’s Greetings?”

Mary said, “You mean my son has entered human history to deliver the message, ‘Hello, it’s winter?’”

“That’s harsh, Mary,” said the woman. “Remember, your son could make it big in midwinter festivals, if he doesn’t push the religion thing too far. Centuries from now, in nations yet unborn, people will give each other pricey gifts and have big office parties on his birthday. That’s not chopped liver.”

“Let me get back to you,” Mary said.

## **RICHARD DAWKINS WISHES THE BRITISH PRIME MINISTER A HAPPY CHRISTMAS**

**Richard Dawkins**

*(Excerpted from “An open letter to the Rt. Hon David Cameron, MP, from the New Statesman’s Christmas 2011 guest editor, Richard Dawkins”, 12/14/2011).*

*[Ed. Note: The background to this “holiday” essay by Dawkins is the controversy in the UK over the funding of “faith schools” – not unlike that on this side of the pond over “faith-based initiatives” and “vouchers”. – JR]*

Dear Prime Minister:

**M**erry Christmas! I mean it. All that “Happy Holiday Season” stuff, with “holiday” cards and “holiday” presents, is a tiresome import from the US, where it has long been fostered more by rival religions than by atheists. A cultural Anglican (whose family has been part of the Chipping Norton Set since 1727, as you’ll see if you look around you in the parish church), I recoil from secular carols such as “White Christmas”, “Rudolph the Red-Nosed

Reindeer” and the loathsome “Jingle Bells”, but I’m happy to sing real carols, and in the unlikely event that anyone wants me to read a lesson I’ll gladly oblige – only from the King James Version, of course.

Token objections to cribs and carols are not just silly, they distract vital attention from the real domination of our culture and politics that religion still gets away with, in (tax-free) spades. There’s an important difference between traditions freely embraced by individuals and traditions enforced by government edict. Imagine the outcry if your government were to require every family to celebrate Christmas in a religious way. You wouldn’t dream of abusing your power like that. And yet your government, like its predecessors, does force religion on our society, in ways whose very familiarity disarms us.

We should teach about religion [in the schools], if only because religion is such a salient force in world politics and such a potent driver of lethal conflict. We need more and better instruction in comparative religion (and I’m sure you’ll agree with me that any education in English literature is sadly impoverished if the child can’t take allusions from the King James Bible). But faith schools don’t so much teach about religion as indoctrinate in the religion that runs the school. Unconscionably, they give children the message that they belong specifically to one particular faith, usually that of their parents, paving the way, at least in places such as Belfast and Glasgow, for a lifetime of discrimination and prejudice.

Psychologists tell us that, if you experimentally separate children in any arbitrary way – say, dress half of them in green T-shirts and half in orange – they will develop in-group loyalty and outgroup prejudice. To continue the experiment, suppose that, when they grow up, greens only marry greens and oranges only marry oranges. Moreover, “green children” only go to green schools and “orange children” to orange schools. Carry on for 300 years and what have you got? Northern Ireland, or worse. Religion may not be the only divisive power that can propel dangerous prejudices down through many generations (language and race are other candidates) but religion is the only one that receives active government support in the form of schools.

So deeply ingrained is this divisive ethos in our social consciousness that journalists, and indeed most of us, breezily refer to “Catholic children”, “Protestant children”, “Muslim children”, “Christian children”, even where the children are too young to decide what they think about questions that divide the various faiths. We assume that children of Catholic parents (for instance) just are “Catholic children”, and so on. A phrase such as “Muslim child” should grate like fingernails on a blackboard. The appropriate substitution is “child of Muslim parents”.

I satirized the faith-labeling of children, in the *Guardian* last month, using an analogy that almost everybody gets as soon as he hears it – we wouldn’t dream of labeling a child a “Keynesian child” simply because her parents were Keynesian economists. Mr. Cameron, you replied to that serious and sincere point with what could distinctly

be heard on the audio version as a contemptuous snigger: “Comparing John Maynard Keynes to Jesus Christ shows, in my view, why Richard Dawkins just doesn’t really get it.” Do you get it now, Prime Minister? Obviously I was not comparing Keynes with Jesus. I could just as well have used “monetarist child” or “fascist child” or “postmodernist child” or “Europhile child”. Moreover, I wasn’t talking specifically about Jesus, any more than Muhammad or the Buddha.

In fact, I think you got it all along. If you are like several government ministers (of all three parties) to whom I have spoken, you are not really a religious believer yourself. Several ministers and ex-ministers of education whom I have met, both Conservative and Labour, don’t believe in God but, to quote the philosopher Daniel Dennett, they do “believe in belief”. A depressingly large number of intelligent and educated people, despite having outgrown religious faith, still vaguely presume without thinking about it that religious faith is somehow “good” for other people, good for society, good for public order, good for instilling morals, good for the common people even if we chaps don’t need it. Condescending? Patronizing? Yes, but isn’t that largely what lies behind successive governments’ enthusiasm for faith schools? ...

The latest British Social Attitudes survey, just published, clearly demonstrates that religious affiliation, observance, and attitudes to social issues have all continued their long-term decline and are now irrelevant to all but a minority of the population. When it comes to life choices, social attitudes, moral dilemmas, and sense of identity, religion is on its deathbed, even for many of those who still nominally identify with a religion.

This is good news. It is good news because if we depended on religion for our values and our sense of cohesion we would be well and truly stuck. The very idea that we might get our morals from the Bible or the Quran will horrify any decent person today who takes the trouble to read those books – rather than cherry-pick the verses that happen to conform to our modern secular consensus. As for the patronizing assumption that people need the promise of heaven (or the obscene threat of torture in hell) in order to be moral, what a contemptibly immoral motive for being moral! What binds us together, what gives us our sense of empathy and compassion – our goodness – is something far more important, more fundamental and more powerful than religion: it is our common humanity, deriving from our pre-religious evolutionary heritage, then refined and improved, as Professor Steven Pinker argues in *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, by centuries of secular enlightenment.

A diverse and largely secular country such as Britain should not privilege the religious over the non-religious, or impose or underwrite religion in any aspect of public life. A government that does so is out of step with modern demographics and values. You seemed to understand that in your excellent, and unfairly criticized, speech on the dangers of “multiculturalism” in February this year.

Modern society requires and deserves a truly secular

state, by which I mean not state atheism, but state neutrality in all matters of religion: the recognition that faith is personal and no business of the state. Individuals must always be free to “do God” if they wish; but a government for the people certainly should not.

With my best wishes to you and your family for a happy Christmas ... *Richard Dawkins.*

To many Christians their immense privilege seems invisible. They don't understand how much of our society panders to their unspoken power. The churches on every corner, the holidays and celebrations structured around Christian dates, the pandering of politicians, the ceremonial deism that acts as a placeholder for state-sponsored religion. – *Jason Pitzk-Waters, Patheos*

## HUMANISM 101

### SECOND MEETING/DISCUSSION: JANUARY 28

*Note: Our first meeting, in October, was washed out by Tropical Storm Sandy, and so our schedule has been upended. First Meeting was held November 26; no meeting in December (holiday conflicts); Second Meeting January 28 (see Calendar, page 7).*

The purpose of Humanism 101 is to offer a humanist education program for the membership and friends of SHSNY, for our friends at the Community Church of New York (CCNY), and for the larger NYC freethought community. It is open to all who are interested in studying humanist history, philosophy, ethics, ideas, and ideals.

The program is a course of study, led (not lectured) by me—based on the three-year course I am currently completing at the Humanist Institute—in what I hope will be stimulating Socratic dialog based on readings done by you prior to each session.

While each session is open (and free) to anyone, discussions will be limited to those who have read the materials assigned. If you haven't done the reading, you are welcome to audit the evening – and then, I hope, do the reading for the next month.

Each meeting focuses on one book-length assigned text (an optional second for the motivated), and on short online materials in preparation for the discussions. As we proceed, of course, you may suggest additional reading. Just show up at CCNY, books and/or notes in hand, ready to go to work. – *JR*

For the details of our January 28 Meeting/Discussion #2, please see Calendar, Page 7.

God is an ever-receding pocket of scientific ignorance that's getting smaller and smaller as time moves on. I don't mind, I don't even care, if someone wants to say, “You don't understand that, God did it.” That doesn't even bother me. What would bother me is if you are so content in that answer that you no longer had curiosity to learn how it happened. The day you stop looking, because you're content “God did it”, I don't need you in the lab – you're useless on the frontier of understanding the nature of the world.

– *Neil deGrasse Tyson*

## LEON JAROFF

### HONORARY MEMBER OF SHSNY

February 27, 1927 - October 20, 2012

A skeptical science writer and editor who persuaded Time Inc. to start *Discover* magazine in 1980, became its top editor and for many years wrote the popular *Skeptical Eye* column challenging pseudosciences, was elected an Honorary Member of the Secular Humanist Society of New York in the early 1990s. Although we have been out of touch for some years, we mourn his passing.



From the obituary in *The New York Times*:

“Mr. Jaroff was the senior editor in charge of the science, medicine, behavior, and environment sections of *Time* magazine when, after nearly a decade of lobbying, he convinced his corporate bosses that there was a market for a Time Inc. science magazine. ...

“As early as 1971, Mr. Jaroff noticed that newsstand sales of *Time* magazine jumped almost every time a science article was on the cover, and he began presenting the numbers [justifying the launch of *Discover*]. Mr. Jaroff was managing editor of *Discover*, a monthly, for four years, overseeing cover articles on the search for life in space, the evolution of sex, and the secrets of the brain, among other topics. Circulation rose from about 400,000 in the first year to 935,000.

“But after a disagreement with his bosses about expanding coverage of psychology and psychiatry – “I didn't think they were very solid sciences,” he once said – Mr. Jaroff returned to *Time*. ...

“Mr. Jaroff wrote more than 40 cover articles for *Time*, among them “Race for the Moon”, “The Test-Tube Baby”, and “Did Comets Kill the Dinosaurs?”

“His doubts about psychology and psychiatry were in keeping with the wariness he brought to the *Skeptical Eye* columns he wrote for *Discover* and later *Time*. Creationism, astrology, extrasensory perception, U.F.O.s, and alternative medicine were among his targets. But he would also challenge doubters of legitimate advances in health care, like vaccinations.

“In reality, the antivaccine activists demonstrate both medical illiteracy and an appalling ignorance of history”, he wrote in a column in 2000. “What happened to the quarantine notices that were once routinely posted on houses afflicted by measles, mumps or whooping cough? Or the long rows of iron lungs filled with polio victims unable to breathe on their own? Why do the words diphtheria and scarlet fever draw only blank stares from today's kids?

“Because of vaccines, that's why.”

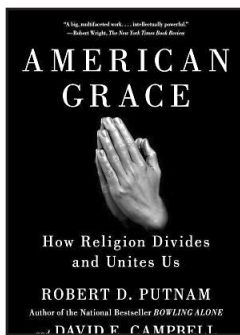
What can be asserted without proof can be dismissed without proof. – *Christopher Hitchens*

# SHSNY CALENDAR: DECEMBER 2012 - FEBRUARY 2013

**SHSNY BOOK CLUB**  
**THURSDAY, DEC 6, 6:30 pm**  
 in the front room of  
**THE COMMUNITY CHURCH**  
**OF NEW YORK**  
 28 East 35 St. (Park-Mad)  
 (3 doors West of the church - red door)

**We'll discuss**  
**AMERICAN GRACE:**  
**How Religion Divides**  
**and Unites Us**  
**by Robert D. Putnam**  
**and David E. Campbell**

**U**nique among nations, America is deeply religious, religiously diverse, and remarkably tolerant. In recent decades, however, the nation's religious landscape has undergone several seismic shocks. *American Grace* is an authoritative, fascinating examination of what precipitated these changes and the role that religion plays in contemporary American society.



Yes, polarization is growing between religious conservatives and secular liberals today, but personal interfaith ties are strengthening. Interfaith marriage has increased, and religious identities have become more fluid.

More people than ever are friendly with someone of a different faith or no faith at all. Putnam and Campbell show how this denser web of personal ties brings greater tolerance, despite the so-called "culture wars".

With running commentary by Forrest Church, this collection informs anyone curious about the original blueprint for our country and its government. — *Paperback*

*Paperback and Kindle available.*  
**Join us even if you haven't finished reading.**  
**The SHSNY Book Club is open to all ... and free!**

**SHSNY BOOK CLUB**  
**THURSDAY, JAN 3, 6:30 pm**  
 at Community Church of NY  
 28 East 35 Street (Park-Mad)  
**THE BEST AMERICAN**  
**SCIENCE WRITING - 2012**  
**Ed. Michio Kaku**

**T**he latest edition of the popular annual series dedicated to collecting the most crucial, thought-provoking, and engaging science writing of the year. From climate change to public health, the origins of the universe to the wiring of the human brain, parallel universes to artificial intelligence, these selections cover the full spectrum of scientific inquiry, all brought together by cofounder of string field theory, theoretical physicist, and *New York Times* bestselling author Michio Kaku.

*Paperback*

**SHSNY BOOK CLUB**  
**THURSDAY, FEB 7, 6:30 pm**  
 at Community Church of NY  
 28 East 35 Street (Park-Mad)  
**THE SEPARATION OF**  
**CHURCH AND STATE:**  
**Writings on a**  
**Fundamental Freedom by**  
**America's Founders**  
**Forrest Church, Ed.**

**T**his concise primer gets past the rhetoric that surrounds the never-ending debate about the founders' intentions, placing their vivid writings on religious liberty in historical perspective. Among other questions it considers: to what degree was "separation" the result of anti-Catholic sentiment?

With running commentary by Forrest Church, this collection informs anyone curious about the original blueprint for our country and its government. — *Paperback*

**MONDAY, DEC 10, 7:00 pm**  
**SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT**  
**Stone Creek Bar & Lounge**  
**140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)**  
**"BREAKING AWAY"**

**F**or the holidays, and one of the best feel-good movies ever, this Peter Yates-directed 1980 Golden Globe Best Picture winner (and Oscar for Best Screenplay) is all about growing up and "what you can do with your high-school diploma".



After graduating from high school, Dave Stohler (Dennis Christopher) dreams of becoming a champion bicyclist. Posing as an exchange student to mask his working-class roots, he frustrates his parents (Paul Dooley and Barbara Barrie, both Oscar-nominated) and charms a local college girl (Robyn Douglass).

Of course it all culminates in a Big Race, when Dave gets a chance to leave his past behind and compete against the Italian riders he worships.

**SHSNY Movie Night is FREE.**  
 Check out the menu and prices at [www.stonecreeknyc.com](http://www.stonecreeknyc.com)

**PLANNING AHEAD**  
**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: 4th Wednesday**  
 at Stone Creek Lounge.  
**Humanism 101: Last Monday**  
 at the Community Church of NY  
 More info: [www.shsny.org](http://www.shsny.org),  
 at [humanism.meetup.com/515](http://humanism.meetup.com/515),  
 and 212-308-2165

# SHSNY CALENDAR: DECEMBER 2012 - FEBRUARY 2013

## BRUNCH!

**SUNDAY, DEC 9, 12 NOON**

**We'll gather for our  
MONTHLY CASUAL BRUNCH  
at BXL East, 210 East 51 St.**

We'll meet at Noon just east of 3rd Avenue for outstanding Belgian fare, with dishes ranging from waffles and crepes to big burgers, cheese-y onion soup, and pots of lots of mussels — \$7 to \$16, plus a prix-fixe Sunday Brunch (including a drink) for \$18.

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 is welcome.

*Bring friends!*

**Note: This is a schedule change due to Hurricane Sandy.**

## HUMANISM 101

**MONDAY, JAN 28, 6:30-8:30  
Community Church of New York  
28 East 35 Street (red door)**

(1st floor rear Lounge)

**Meeting/Discussion #2**

**Subject:**

*The Philosophies of Humanism*

*Required Reading:*

Online at [www.americanhumanist.org/humanism](http://www.americanhumanist.org/humanism)

*Humanist Manifestos I, II and III*  
*IHEU Minimum Statement on Humanism*

Fred Edwords: *The Humanist Philosophy in Perspective*  
Book(s)

Paul Kurtz (Ed.): *The Humanist Alternative* (Scan and select three or four essays that most interest you) and/or

Louise Antony (Ed.): *Philosophers without Gods* (Essays 1 and 17 mainly; skim the rest, focusing on what interests you)

**Note: If you haven't done the reading, you may audit the discussion — see page 5 — all are welcome!**

## "SANDY" RELIEF

Want to help our neighbors devastated by Hurricane Sandy in a humanist fashion? The SHSNY Board is working on a plan to coordinate efforts toward relief. Stay tuned.

**Note schedule change: Last Wednesday-in-December has been changed to first-Wednesday-in-January.**

**GREAT LECTURES ON DVD  
WED, JANUARY 2, 7:00 pm  
"GODLESS"**

**A Documentary**

**Stone Creek Bar & Lounge  
140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)**



Today in America non belief is fast growing but has stirred up a lot a fear, loathing and distrust among the faithful. What makes us different? A lack of belief. Yet lack of belief is rife. Christians don't believe in Allah or his prophet. Muslims don't accept the Buddha. Jews think Jesus was an uppity Rabbi with an exaggerated sense of self regard. Hardly anyone takes the Norse or Greek pantheons seriously. They are all atheists with regard to everybody else's gods. Growing numbers, however, are taking one more step. They're forsaking all gods and making bold to proclaim it.

So what happens when people find belief unnecessary? Is nonbelief a transient phase or illusion? Might it justify immoral behavior? Is an ethical, worthwhile life possible without gods to define it? *Godless* offers responses from notable humanists, free thinkers, agnostics and atheists to these and other questions

**Great Lectures Night is FREE**

## OTHER REASONABLE NEW YORK EVENTS

Check them out at their websites or [www.reasonablenewyork.org](http://www.reasonablenewyork.org)

**NY Society for Ethical Culture:**  
Fridays, 7 pm - Ethics in Film: Feature films. Snacks & Bevs, \$5.  
Monday (Date TBA) 7 pm - Ethics & the Theater, \$5.  
Tuesdays, 6:30 - *Socrates Cafe*.

**CFI-NYC.** Mon., Dec 10, 10 pm.  
Google's Lounge (Upstairs at the Living Room), 154 Ludlow St.  
*"Skeptics on the Mic Karaoke"*.

**New York Philosophy.** Dec date TBA. 4, 6-10 pm, Harley's Smokehouse, 356 W. 44 St.: *"Roulette: Member-led discussions"*. RSVP: [nyphilosophy.com](http://nyphilosophy.com)

**Drinking With Atheists:** Every Friday, fun and conversation. Details [www.meetup.com/RichiesList/](http://www.meetup.com/RichiesList/)

## PLUS

**Agnostic A.A.:** Nine weekly AA-endorsed meetings in Manhattan, Brooklyn, The Bronx. Schedules: [agnosticAA NYC.org/meetings.html](http://agnosticAA NYC.org/meetings.html)  
**Manhattan History Buffs:** Every 3d Tues, 6:30, dinner and talk at Lili's (Chinese) restaurant, Third Ave., 83-84th. Dec 18: *Florence in the Time of Michaelangelo*. 212-802-7427.

**Atheism History Week** — With SHSNY's John Rafferty, 5:30 p.m. Wednesdays, MNN Ch. 67 and RNN Ch. 110 in Manhattan, and live streaming at [www.mnn.org](http://www.mnn.org).  
**Religion on the Line:** Sundays, 6-9:00 a.m. WMCA, 770AM  
**Equal Time for Freethought:** Sundays 6:30 p.m., WBAI-NY 99.5FM  
**Religion & Ethics Newsweekly:** Sundays, 6:30 p.m., Channel 13

## MORE OF US THAN EVER, AND WE'RE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

*(Excerpted and compiled from "Non-Religious on the rise", Salon.com, and "Protestants no longer majority in US", WashPost, 10/9/2012, forwarded by Lori Rothman-Alee)*

A new report finds atheists on the up and Protestants are in the minority for first time in centuries. The report from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life released October 9 put the number of Protestant adults below 50 percent (at 48 percent) for the first time in polling history. The reason for this is partly attributed to the spike in Americans who claim no religion (20 percent, compared to 15 percent five years ago). The Pew study noted:

"Their ranks [the non-religious] now include more than 13 million self-described atheists and agnostics (nearly 6 percent of the U.S. public), as well as nearly 33 million people who say they have no particular religious affiliation (14 percent) ... The growth in the number of religiously unaffiliated Americans—sometimes called the rise of the "nones"—is largely driven by generational replacement, the gradual supplanting of older generations by newer ones.

More growth in "nones" is expected. One-third of adults under age 30 have no religious affiliation, compared to 9 percent of people 65 and older. Pew researchers wrote that "young adults today are much more likely to be unaffiliated than previous generations were at a similar stage in their lives", and aren't expected to become more religiously active as they age.

"Growth among those with no religion has been a major preoccupation of American faith leaders who worry that the United States, a highly religious country, would go the way of Western Europe, where church attendance has plummeted. Pope Benedict XVI has partly dedicated his pontificate to combating secularism in the West. This week in Rome, he is convening a three-week synod, or assembly, of bishops from around the world aimed at bringing back Roman Catholics who have left the church.

"The trend also has political implications. American voters who describe themselves as having no religion vote overwhelmingly for Democrats. Pew found Americans with no religion support abortion rights and gay marriage at a much higher rate than the U.S. public at large. These "nones" are an increasing segment of voters who are registered as Democrats or lean toward the party, growing from 17 percent to 24 percent over the last five years. The religiously unaffiliated are becoming as important a constituency to Democrats as evangelicals are to Republicans.

"The data about the falling number of Protestants was collected from a sample of 17,000 people. Similarly, a census report earlier this year found "for the first time" whites were surpassed as the majority in the U.S. Of course before European settlement a few centuries ago the area that's now the U.S. had neither white nor Protestant populations.

Morality is doing what is right, regardless of what you are told. Religion is doing what you are told, regardless of whether it is right. – Al Stefaneli, The God Discussion

## OH PIONEERS! (Oh, that's us.) Brad Wheeler

In terms of human history overall, it's only been the mere blink of an eye that any significant number of human beings have begun to realize that the probability that men created gods (all of them) is immensely greater than the likelihood that any Genesis-ish story is true. Think of it – if we visit the UK, we can still visit Darwin's house! And it was only in the year 2000 that the Catholic Church felt the need to apologize for having been brutal and suppressive twits to Galileo. (In a few hundred years, if there are still popes, maybe one of them will apologize to children.)

Similarly, the period in which people have been able to write and speak out about our non-belief without being, say, burned at the stake is also an historical blink of an eye. Even today, aren't we lucky to live in places like New Mexico and New Zealand and New York and not in places like Saudi Arabia or Indonesia?

So in a very, very, real sense, people like us—non-believers in general, but especially those of us who managed to personally grow out of belief through our own efforts—are pioneers. Think of what it means to be a pioneer of any sort. It is almost by definition a lonely state of affairs requiring a lot of fortitude and determination and a certain attitude of "damn the torpedoes." And especially at the beginning of a pioneer's journey, whether the risks taken will culminate in commensurate rewards will be by no means certain. Still, pioneers are compelled to go forward, no? And where would human progress be without them, and now, if I may be so bold, us?

So, this is where we are in time: A growing minority of human beings have figured out that there aren't any deities to pray to, to fear, or to rely upon. We've realized that we have to make our own lives, our own meaning, and our own fulfillment with the genetic, cultural, and economic tools available to us. In this same general era, fortunately, an "Enlightenment" occurred in which other influential groups of human beings realized that allowing or sponsoring religious persecutions was a really bad idea, and that fostering free speech is a really good idea. Together with advances in science and technology, that combination of circumstances provides the ingredients that allow us to have this conversation. If we consider what an incredibly tiny percentage of human beings in history have enjoyed such fortuitous conditions, aren't we some *very* lucky folk?

Going forward, it's pretty clear that more and more people are going to have the same sorts of realizations we've had about deities. But we live in the early stages of a transitional period—not always easy—in which non-believers are just beginning to speak out, to find each other (as here), and to gather together into any sort of groups at all.

The next really big step, and I think this will only begin to get going in our lifetimes, will be for people to form communities (apart from governmental entities) that will provide the same or better sorts of broad and deep supportive structures, and opportunities to serve and assist



others, that religious groups now offer – but *without* the superstitions, the scapegoating, and the other downsides that are part and parcel of communities built with bronze age screeds as their foundations. If you care to, let your imagination run with that a little bit, with or without John Lennon singing “Imagine” in the background.

This is a step, however, that lots of current non-believers can’t really wrap their minds around. Some are even afraid of, or opposed to, such ideas. But I think it will happen for a number of reasons. Both the hard sciences and the social sciences are beginning to show that such groups and such actions directly promote happy and healthy human individuals. And, of course, many of us know from personal experience that the social, supportive, and service aspects that many religious groups have created and honed (especially in the last century – that’s a fascinating story by itself) are extremely valuable; the baby, one might say, that shouldn’t go out with that stinky primitive bathwater.

*Comment: The above was a post on an Internet forum by long-time SHSNY member and Georgia-based Brad Wheeler, who says “I was replying to a couple of fellows, one in New Mexico and one in New Zealand, who through sincere and courageous study have recently rejected life-long Christian beliefs. Both men are working to maintain happy and healthy families, including children, in which their wives continue to be believing Christians.” The forum, Brad says, is at <http://www.achristianandanatheist.com/> – JR*

## THE “RATIONAL SWISS CHEESE” OF BELIEF

Valerie Tarico

(Excerpted from “The 20 Weirdest Religious Beliefs”, on *Alternet.org* 10/15/2012)

All of the following beliefs are found in respected religions today. They have been long taught by religions that either are considered part of the American mainstream or are home grown, made in the U.S.A., produced here and exported. Some of these beliefs are enshrined in sacred texts. Others are simply traditional. All, at one time or another, have had the sanction of the highest church authorities, and many still do.

How many of them can you match up with a familiar religious tradition? (The answers) follow in the Key.

1. The foreskin of [a holy one] may lie safeguarded in reliquaries made of gold and crystal and inlaid with gems – or it may have ascended into the heavens all by itself. (2)
2. A race of giants once roamed the earth, the result of women and demi-gods interbreeding. (1, 6). They lived at the same time as fire breathing dragons. (1)
3. Evil spirits can take control of pigs. (1)
4. A talking donkey scolded a prophet. (1, 3)
5. A righteous man can control his wife’s access to eternal paradise. (6)
6. Brown skin is a punishment for disobeying God. (6)
7. A prophet once traveled between two cities on a miniature flying horse with the face of a woman and the tail of a peacock. (4)
8. [The Holy One] forbids a cat or dog receiving a blood transfusion and forbids blood meal being used as garden

fertilizer. (7)

9. Sacred underwear protects believers from spiritual contamination and, according to some adherents, from fire and speeding bullets (6)

10. When certain rites are performed beforehand, bread turns into human flesh after it is swallowed. (2)

11. Invisible supernatural beings reveal themselves in mundane objects like oozing paint or cooked food. (2)

12. In the end times, [the Holy One’s] chosen people will be gathered together in Jackson County, Missouri. (6)

13. Believers can drink poison or get bit by snakes without being harmed. (1)

14. Sprinkling water on a newborn, if done correctly, can keep the baby from eons of suffering should he or she die prematurely. (2)

15. Waving a chicken over your head can take away your sins. (3)

16. [A holy one] climbed a mountain and could see the whole earth from the mountain peak. (1, 2)

17. Putting a dirty milk glass and a plate from a roast beef sandwich in the same dishwasher can contaminate your soul. (3)

18. There will be an afterlife in which exactly 144,000 people get to live eternally in Paradise. (8)

19. Each human being contains many alien spirits that were trapped in volcanos by hydrogen bombs. (5)

20. [A supernatural being] cares tremendously what you do with your penis. (1,2,3,4,6,7,8).

**Key:** 1-Evangelical or “Bible Believing” Christianity; 2-Catholic Christianity; 3-Judaism; 4-Islam; 5-Scientology; 6-Mormon; 7-Christian Science; 8-Jehovah’s Witness

Each of these beliefs is remarkable in its own way. But the composite goes beyond remarkable to revealing. What it reveals is an underlying belief that is something like this:

*The process that produced this world and human life is best unveiled not by the scientific method but by the musings of iron age herdsmen (1,2,3,4,7,8) or science fiction writers (5), or con artists (6) whose theories are best judged by examining only assertions that cannot be falsified.*

Underlying that belief is a sort of rational Swiss cheese that is going to keep cognitive scientists investigating and arguing for decades. We humans are astoundingly susceptible to handed-down nonsense. Human children are dependent on their parents for a decade or even two, which is why nature made children credulous. ... When parents say Noah put all of the animals into the ark, it is the rare child who asks, “Why didn’t the lion eat the guinea pigs?”

**W**hy am I an atheist? I ask you: Why is anybody not an atheist? Everyone starts out being an atheist. No one is born with belief in anything. Infants are atheists until they are indoctrinated.

I resent anyone pushing their religion on me. I don’t push my atheism on anybody else. Live and let live. Not many people practice that when it comes to religion.

– Andy Rooney

## THE PREACHER

Louis Jenkins

(From *Before You Know It*, Mr. Jenkin's book of poetry, reprinted on *The Writer's Almanac with Garrison Keillor*, 10/24/2012)

When times were hard, no work on the railroad, no work down on the farm, some of my ancestors took to preaching. It was not so much of what was said as the way in which it was said. "The horn shall sound and the dog will bark and though you be on the highest mountain or down in the deepest valley when the darkness comes then you will lie down, and as the day follows the night you will surely rise again. The Lord our God hath made both heaven and earth. Oh, my dear brothers and sisters we know so well the ways of this world, think then what heaven must be like." It required a certain presence, a certain authority. The preacher was treated with respect and kept at a bit of a distance, like a rattler. There wasn't much money in it but it was good for maybe a dozen eggs or a chicken dinner now and then.

## JESUS AND MO DECRY ATHEIST CHILD ABUSE

(Transcribed from [jesusandmo.net/2012/11/14](http://jesusandmo.net/2012/11/14))

*Jesus* (reading newspaper): This is outrageous. These militant atheists are targeting schoolchildren now.

*Mohammed*: Bastards. Let them try.

*Jesus*: Are they so desperate to stamp out faith that they would resort to indoctrinating innocent young minds?

*Mo*: Fear not. Their shallow, godless ideology is no match for true religion. What exactly is their mode of attack?

*Jesus*: They mean to teach children to debate, ask questions, and think critically. It's child abuse, pure and simple.

*Mo*: We're f\*\*ked.

## WHERE GOOD IDEAS COME FROM: HERE

Steve Johnson

(Reprinted from *Where Good Ideas Come From: The Natural History of Innovation*, excerpted on [Delanceyplace.com](http://Delanceyplace.com))

Scientists and animal lovers had long observed that as life gets bigger, it slows down. Flies live for hours or days; elephants live for half-centuries. The hearts of birds and small mammals pump blood much faster than those of giraffes and blue whales. But the relationship between size and speed didn't seem to be a linear one. A horse might be five hundred times heavier than a rabbit, yet its pulse certainly wasn't five hundred times slower than the rabbit's. After a formidable series of measurements in his Davis lab, [Swiss scientist Max] Kleiber discovered that this scaling phenomenon stuck to an unvarying mathematical script called 'negative quarter-power scaling'. If you plotted mass versus metabolism on a logarithmic grid, the result was a perfectly straight line that led from rats and pigeons all the way up to bulls and hippopotami. ...

The more species Kleiber and his peers analyzed, the clearer the equation became: metabolism scales to mass to the negative quarter power. The math is simple enough:

you take the square root of 1,000, which is (approximately) 31, and then take the square root of 31, which is (again, approximately) 5.5. This means that a cow, which is roughly a thousand times heavier than a woodchuck, will, on average, live 5.5 times longer, and have a heart rate that is 5.5 times slower than the woodchuck's. As the science writer George Johnson once observed, one lovely consequence of Kleiber's law is that the number of heartbeats per lifetime tends to be stable from species to species. Bigger animals just take longer to use up their quota. ...

Several years ago, the theoretical physicist Geoffrey West decided to investigate whether Kleiber's law applied to one of life's largest creations: the superorganisms of human-built cities. Did the 'metabolism' of urban life slow down as cities grew in size? Was there an underlying pattern to the growth and pace of life of metropolitan systems? Working out of the legendary Santa Fe Institute, where he served as president until 2009, West assembled an international team of researchers and advisers to collect data on dozens of cities around the world, measuring everything from crime to household electrical consumption, from new patents to gasoline sales.

When they finally crunched the numbers, West and his team were delighted to discover that Kleiber's negative quarter-power scaling governed the energy and transportation growth of city living. The number of gasoline stations, gasoline sales, road surface area, the length of electrical cables: all these factors follow the exact same power law that governs the speed with which energy is expended in biological organisms. If an elephant was just a scaled-up mouse, then, from an energy perspective, a city was just a scaled-up elephant.

But the most fascinating discovery in West's research came from the data that didn't turn out to obey Kleiber's law. West and his team discovered another power law lurking in their immense database of urban statistics. Every datapoint that involved creativity and innovation—patents, R&D budgets, 'supercreative' professions, inventors—also followed a quarter-power law, in a way that was every bit as predictable as Kleiber's law. But there was one fundamental difference: the quarter-power law governing innovation was positive, not negative. A city that was ten times larger than its neighbor wasn't ten times more innovative; it was seventeen times more innovative. A metropolis fifty times bigger than a town was 130 times more innovative.

Kleiber's law proved that as life gets bigger, it slows down. But West's model demonstrated one crucial way in which human-built cities broke from the patterns of biological life: as cities get bigger, they generate ideas at a faster clip. This is what we call 'superlinear scaling': if creativity scaled with size in a straight, linear fashion, you would of course find more patents and inventions in a larger city, but the number of patents and inventions per capita would be stable. West's power laws suggested something far more provocative: that despite all the noise and crowding and distraction, the average resident of a metropolis with a population of five million people was

almost three times more creative than the average resident of a town of a hundred thousand.

## RICHARD MOURDOCK ROUNDS OUT THE SLATE OF CANDIDATES FOR THE 2012 DUMBTH AWARD

By now every reader of PIQUE has undoubtedly read or heard about this colossal stupidity, but we cannot let it pass without a nomination (the final one, this being December PIQUE) for the 2012 SHSNY Dumbth of the Year Award.



In a campaign debate in October, Indiana GOP U.S. Senate candidate **Richard Mourdock** declared that:

*"I think that even when life begins in that horrible situation of rape, that it is something that God intended to happen."*

The remark undoubtedly cost the Tea Party favorite his election (and certainly also cost Mitt Romney, who did not rescind his endorsement of Mourdock, more than a few women's votes), but at least Mourdock gets a chance to win the not-so-coveted horse's-ass statuette at our SHSNY Darwin Day/ Anniversary Dinner in February.

Mr. Mourdock (Thank Zeus not "Senator Mourdock") joins this year's all-star lineup of Dumbth nominees.

Returning champion **Newt Gingrich**, winner of the 2011 Dumbth Award (America is in danger of becoming "a secular atheist country dominated by radical Islamists"), proposed a logic-defying plan in March to track and find illegal aliens wherever they're hiding in America:

*"We send a package [via UPS or FedEx] to everyone who's here illegally and when it's delivered we pull it up in a computer, and we know where they are."*

Pastor **Charles Worley** of the Providence Road Baptist Church in Maiden, North Carolina, earned his nomination on the basis of pure, mean-spirited stupidity. In May he offered this stupefying "solution" to the "homosexual problem" in America.

*"Build a great, big, large fence – 150 or 100 miles long – put all the lesbians in there ... Do the same thing for the queers and the homosexuals and have that fence electrified so they can't get out ... and you know what, in a few years, they'll die out ... do you know why? They can't reproduce!"*

The early-betting favorite is, of course, Representative **Todd Akin**, the Republican Senate candidate from Missouri who gave the American English language a new definition of violent sexual assault, and who may have done more than anyone else in America – including Barack Obama – to sink his party and Mitt Romney in the 2012 election when he said, on camera:

*"From what I understand from doctors [pregnancy caused by rape] is really rare. If it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down."*

But never, ever count out perennial Dumbth hopeful

**Rush Limbaugh**. Always a nominee, never a winner, Rush seems determined this year. When presented with the (bogus) news on an obscure website, chacha.com (really, "chacha"), that "Italian researchers" had found that the size of male genitalia has decreased about 10 percent over the past fifty years, and that air pollution may be the reason, America's Favorite Fathead offered his own explanation:

*"I don't buy this. I think it's feminism. I think if it's tied to the last 50 years, the average size of a member is 10 percent smaller ... it has to be the feminazis."*

Winners all! But only one can take home the silver horse's-ass statuette in February, and *you* will determine who. Balloting – online and by phone – will begin when the above information is summarized in the January issue of PIQUE. Then, celebrators at our Darwin Day/ Anniversary celebration in February will get an additional chance to vote for their dunderhead of choice.

See? Just like Fox News: We report, You decide.

## IN CASE YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT A DUMBTH AWARD IS ...

If you're unsure what the above is all about, either because you're new to SHSNY and PIQUE or because you haven't been paying close attention (There *will* be quizzes!), here's the boilerplate explanation:

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

Who would get a Dumbth Award? Mr. Smith suggested, as an example,

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

Dumbth is logic- or reality-defying stupidity, not just ideas or claims we don't agree with. And, no, there really is no liberal bias in our choices. One conservative PIQUE reader complains every year that we only pick on the right side of the aisle, and every year I ask for instances of liberal dumbth – as I'm doing right now. We have nominated a few liberal chowderheads between 2005 and now, but let's face it, most of the science- and 21st-century-deniers are – again this year, see above – on the (far) right side of the aisle. – JR

## READERS RESPOND TO NOVEMBER PIQUE

*To the Editor:* Thanks for another wonderful PIQUE, which I've been enjoying all afternoon. And thanks for including my poem; it's an honor. – *Phil Appleman*

*To the Editor:* Terrific! Each page grabbed me so I couldn't just skim through. Will be doing a lot of reprinting from this issue. – *Nan Owens*, Editor, *Humanist Common Sense*, Florida

*To the Editor:* Another fine issue. You continue to bat 1000!

Greta Christina's article, "Eight Atheist & Agnostic Scientists Who Changed the World", was excellent and inspiring as well. In a bit of poetic irony, Paul Kurtz, whose passing was eulogized in the issue, can easily be added to this list because the enormity of his work in developing the sum and substance of secular humanism to the world was simply extraordinary. Call him a social scientist, if you will, he certainly "changed the world" by enabling all of its people to better understand what secular humanism is all about, perhaps to a level where they actually could appreciate its many virtues. Appropriately enough, in the last several years, he was strongly articulating the unique message that we should outgrow our identities of national labels and become trans-global citizens of the world, with a genuine concern for the entire planet. What a great "legacy" message that is, truly one we all can aspire to. Best wishes.

– Stan Friedland

*To the Editor:* November PIQUE arrived. Thanks for including my Afterlife Lunch scenario with philosopher Blaise Pascal, atheist Chic Schissel, and artist Chris Twomey. Chris died of her cancer on November 16. She requested a secular memorial service. Her art dealer, Norm Hinsey, said, "I won't end my words with 'RIP', since I'm sure when Chris gets to wherever she is now headed she won't be content unless she is working on a new and exciting project."

Chris may be the first to arrive for that metaphorical lunch, and/or the first to return from it. If at some point

you have occasion to mark my passing, please don't suggest I will rest in peace either. Cheers. – *Flash Light*

### CARL SAGAN ON SCIENCE AND SPIRITUALITY

(From "Cosmos")

The universe is all that is, or ever was, or ever will be. Our contemplations of the cosmos stir us. There's a tingling in the spine, a catch in the voice, a faint sensation as if a distant memory of falling from a great height. We know we are approaching the grandest of mysteries.

The cosmos is within us. We are made of star stuff. We've begun at last to wonder about our origins, star stuff contemplating the stars, organized collections of ten billion billion atoms contemplating the evolution of matter, tracing that long path by which it arrived at consciousness here on the planet Earth and perhaps throughout the cosmos. Our obligation to survive and flourish is owed not just to ourselves but also to that cosmos, ancient and vast, from which we spring.

### ENJOY THE HOLIDAYS ... AND EVERY DAY

If, every day, I dare to remember that I am here on loan, that this house, this hillside, these minutes are all leased to me, not given, I will never despair. Despair is for those who expect to live forever. I no longer do. – *Erica Jong*

"What day is it?" asked Pooh.

"It's today," squeaked Piglet.

"My favorite day," said Pooh.

More of us than ever!  
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Leon Jaroff  
1927 - 2012  
Page 5

Political Christmas:  
Correct and Not-So  
Page 2

Okay, Winners: What do we  
want Obama to do?  
Page 1

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

