

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

June, 2012

What's "traditional" about marriage? Not much. How "catholic" is the Church? Not very. Why does religion get a free ride? No good reason. This month we define some terms, and humanism (again), wonder if maybe we *do* have free will, and why there's a universe. We congratulate Norway, revisit one philosopher, meet another, welcome a new Board member, and have some fun with the Bible.

But first, there's nothing funny about betraying children in the name of religion. – JR

A SHANDEH

John Rafferty

We have many times in these pages lamented the out-of-proportion power of religious voting blocs in this city, and this Editor is proud to say that when it comes to calling out the unearned privileges and evasions of New York's tax-exempt religious establishments, PIQUE has been an equal-opportunity attacker.

I offer those above *bona fides* for the same cautious reason that Michael Leshner did in the *New York Post* on April 30, when he began his Op-Ed column (forwarded by Dennis Middlebrooks) ...

"If anyone had dared to suggest that Brooklyn District Attorney Charles Hynes' office has an official policy giving preferential treatment to Orthodox Jewish sex criminals, the critic would probably be knee-deep in editorials charging him with anti-Semitism".

But facts are facts, and no amount of "anti-Semite" mud-slinging or phony appeals to "religious liberty" can stand up against them.

1. The sexual abuse of both boys and girls in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities of Brooklyn has gone unchecked and largely unreported for years, even decades.

2. Many of the religious leaders of those communities have both suppressed reports of abuse and shielded the abusers from civil authorities. There is no record of any child molester *ever* being voluntarily turned over to the police by those "leaders".

3. Perhaps even worse, those same religious leaders have encouraged their followers to shun and even attack the *mosers* (informers) who dare to seek justice, or even help, outside the community.

4. And the office of Brooklyn DA Charles Hynes has, at best, ignored the seriousness of all of the above.

Case in point: As reported in an extensive expose in the May 11 *New York Times*, David Zimmer was arrested for raping a 10-year-old girl and groping another 9-year-old. He confessed and was indicted on 24 counts. But his lawyer, who is married to one of Hynes' aides, cut a deal whereby Zimmer pled guilty to one count and got probation. Ten years later, Zimmer is back in jail, held on a million-dollar bond, for abusing four girls ages six to ten.

Case in point: Rabbi Yehuda Kolko is "a grade-school teacher at a Flatbush yeshiva who had been the subject of complaints to rabbinical authorities about sexual abuse for more than 30 years". The *Times* reports that "Mr. Hynes reduced two felony counts of sexual abuse to a single misdemeanor charge of endangering the welfare of a child. The rabbi received three years' probation and was not required to register as a sex offender."

Case in point: Whistle-blower Leshner, a self-described "Orthodox Jewish lawyer", describes in his *Post* Op-Ed, "my legal efforts to uncover the record of the official failure to extradite (from Israel) one notorious indicted child abuser, Rabbi Avrohom Mondrowitz ... [yet] the DA's spokesman insists he's protecting 'the identity of [the] victims and their families from harassment' – even though I've told three courts that I don't want any information that identifies the victims. ...

"Hynes' refusal to disclose almost any information about the arrest or prosecution of alleged sex offenders from the politically powerful Orthodox community is not only discriminatory; it's also a cynical insult to the victims his office is pledged to support. ... the discrimination is no mere allegation; it's a matter of record. ... Assistant DA Morgan Dennehy explicitly affirmed that his boss' policy for suppressing information about sex abuse is 'unique' to the 'Hasidic' community."

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About that "unique" policy, guess which raging anti-Semite said this:

"This community does not deserve ... any preferential treatment, and he [Hynes] should treat them exactly as he would anyone else. It's just dead wrong. And there's no explanation to make it right in any way."

Thank you, Ed Koch.

Of course, DA Hynes has offered an explanation, not in the *Times* or the *Post*, but in what he probably hoped would be a neutral medium, the *Daily News*. (*It wasn't. In a facing editorial the same day, the News concluded that Hynes was "... in dangerous territory because intermediaries have no place standing as a routine matter between crime victims and law enforcement."*)

In that May 16 *Daily News* Op-Ed titled "We work to protect all Brooklyn kids", Hynes trumpeted his *Kol Tzedek* (Voice of Justice) program to "address this problem".

"From when I took office as district attorney in 1990 until the creation of Kol Tzedek [2009], my prosecutors handled only a few cases a year of sex abuse in that community. Since the inception of Kol Tzedek, we have made 95 arrests; 53 cases have been adjudicated, with a conviction rate of 72%."

"I stand by these numbers."

Mr. Hynes ignored the findings of the *Times*' reporters Ray Rivera and Sharon Otterman, who were able to identify 47 of those 95 cases through court records, and concluded that "... in 47 of the 95 cases attributed to the *Kol Tzedek* program ... more than half of the 47 seemed to have little to do with the program Some did not involve ultra-Orthodox victims ... many came in through standard reporting channels, like calls to the police." And at least four of the 47 cases were of adult-on-adult molestation.

What's more, District Attorney Hynes did not address the critical accusation that was the lead in the lengthy *Times* article: that last summer Rabbi Chaim Dovid Zweibel, a powerful leader of an ultra-Orthodox advocacy group, Agudath Israel of America, delivered a message to DA Hynes personally. His group, the rabbi said,

"... was instructing adherent Jews that they could report allegations of child sexual abuse to district attorneys or the police only if a rabbi first determined that the suspicions were credible."

The *Times* article continued:

"The pronouncement was a blunt challenge to Mr. Hynes' authority. But the district attorney 'expressed no opposition or objection', the rabbi ... recalled."

New York State law lists 35 different professions whose practitioners are "mandated reporters" of child abuse – people who, by law, *must* report any suspicion of abuse that comes their way. Who? Social workers, doctors, teachers, cops, and thirty-one more, including "any employee or volunteer in a residential care program for youth, or any other child care or foster care worker".

Must. But no, you *must not*, the rabbi told all those mandated reporters who were Jewish. Break the law, he said. And the district attorney didn't blink.

Well, maybe winning as much as 84 percent of the vote in Brooklyn's ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods in 2005, when he barely won reelection by an overall 42 to 37 percent, had some bearing on Mr. Hynes' thinking. You think?

Sucking up to those lock-step voters, however reprehensible, might explain Charles Hynes' motivation. But what reason could the rabbis possibly have for protecting the sick bastards who rape 10-year-old girls?

The Yiddish word for public shame, for disgrace and scandal, is *shandeh*, and it seems that the black-hatted guardians of ultra-Orthodox morality will break any laws, even endanger any number of their own children, rather than allow any evil within their own community to become public knowledge, to be "a *shandeh* to the gentiles".

Shame. Shame on *them*, for enabling and protecting the pedophiles who prey on the children of their own community, perhaps of their own families. In their "stiff-necked" and blinkered zeal to protect their communities from outside scorn, they do themselves even greater harm. And their children the greatest harm of all. They care about the image of their communities; I, and every decent human being – of course including Orthodox Jews – care about 10-year-old girls.

Shame!

What can be done? How can we in the larger community – especially humanists and other freethinkers unbound by any "respect" for religious authority when it is undeserved – do about protecting children whose own elders can't or won't? We can join Ed Koch, to whom I give the last word.

"Unless District Attorney Hynes announces that he will release the names of all defendants, including those of ultra-Orthodox Jews charged with child abuse, sexual or otherwise, and will pursue criminally anyone who engages in obstruction of justice, advising someone not to assist the police in their investigation of a child abuse incident, the governor should supersede him in these cases and appoint a special prosecutor to handle them."

Yes. Contact the governor at governor.ny.gov/contact – or phone 518-474-8390 – or write to Governor Andrew M. Cuomo, NYS State Capital Building, Albany, NY 12224, with a letter like this ...

May 20, 2012

Dear Governor Cuomo:

Recent reports in *The New York Times*, *New York Post* and *Daily News* indicate that the office of the Brooklyn District Attorney has allowed leaders of certain religious sects in that borough to interfere with the laws that require mandatory reporting of instances of child abuse. I ask you to open an investigation of those charges and, if necessary, appoint a special prosecutor to supersede the local authority.

John Rafferty

Update: The *New York Times* reported on May 19 that DA Hynes "... is setting up a panel of prosecutors and investigators to crack down on witness intimidation in child sexual abuse cases in [Brooklyn's] ultra-Orthodox Jewish

community." Ed Koch called it "long overdue".

And, in a letter to the *Times* the same day, Rabbi Zwiebel argued that "... the role of the rabbi in cases of suspected abuse is not to dissuade the individual from reporting to the secular authorities, but simply to ascertain that the suspicion meets a certain threshold of credibility."

Comment: DA Hynes dodges the core issue: his collusion with Rabbi Zwiebel to allow religious "leaders" to interfere with the investigation and prosecution of the law.

And the rabbi obfuscates, at best, ignoring the facts that, 1) he has no legal standing, and no damn business "ascertaining" anything pertaining to civil law; and 2), that he is directing observant Jews to break the law and thereby protect pedophiles. - JR

AND ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FAITH AISLE

Maureen Dowd

(Excerpted from "Here Comes Nobody" in *The New York Times*, May 19)

I always liked that the name of my religion was also an adjective meaning all-embracing. I was a Catholic and I wanted to be catholic, someone engaged in a wide variety of things. As James Joyce wrote in *Finnegans Wake*: "Catholic means 'Here comes everybody.'"

So it makes me sad to see the Catholic Church grow so uncatholic, intent on loyalty testing, mind control and heresy hunting. Rather than all-embracing, the church hierarchy has become all-constricting.

It was tough to top the bizarre inquisition of self-sacrificing American nuns pushed by the disgraced Cardinal Bernard Law. Law, the former head of the Boston archdiocese, fled to a plush refuge in Rome in 2002 after it came out that he protected priests who molested thousands of children.

But the craziness continued when an American priest, renowned for his TV commentary from Rome on popes and personal morality, admitted last week that he had fathered a child with a mistress. The Rev. Thomas Williams belongs to the Legionnaires of Christ, the order founded by the notorious Mexican priest Marcial Maciel Degollado, a pal of Pope John Paul II who died peppered with accusations that he sexually abused seminarians and fathered several children and abused some of them.

The latest kooky kerfuffle was sparked by the invitation to Kathleen Sebelius, the health and human services secretary, to speak at a graduation ceremony at Georgetown University on Friday. The silver-haired former Kansas governor is a practicing Catholic with a husband and son who graduated from Georgetown. But because she fought to get a federal mandate for health insurance coverage of contraceptives and morning-after pills, including at Catholic schools and hospitals, Sebelius is on the hit list of a conservative Catholic group in Virginia, the Cardinal Newman Society, which militates to bar speakers at Catholic schools who support gay rights or abortion rights.

The Society for Truth and Justice, a fringe Christian

anti-abortion group, compared Sebelius to Himmler, and protesters showed up on campus to yell at her for being, as one screamed, "a murderer".

"Remember, Georgetown has no neo-Nazi clubs or skinhead clubs on campus, nor should they," Bill Donohue, the Catholic League president, said on Fox News. "But they have two - two! - pro-abortion clubs at Georgetown University. Now they're bringing in Kathleen Sebelius. They wouldn't bring in an anti-Semite, nor should they. They wouldn't bring in a racist, nor should they. But they're bringing in a pro-abortion champion, and they shouldn't."

Washington's Cardinal Donald Wuerl called the invitation "shocking" and upbraided the Georgetown president, John DeGioia. But DeGioia, who so elegantly defended the Georgetown law student Sandra Fluke against Rush Limbaugh's nasty epithets, stood fast against dogmatic censorship.

Speaking to the graduates, Sebelius evoked J.F.K.'s speech asserting that religious bodies should not seek to impose their will through politics. She said that contentious debate is a strength of this country, adding that in some other places, "a leader delivers an edict and it goes into effect. There's no debate, no criticism, no second-guessing."

Just like the Vatican. ...

Absolute intolerance is always a sign of uncertainty and panic. Why do you have to hunt down everyone unless you're weak? The church doesn't seem to care if its members' beliefs are based on faith or fear, conviction or coercion. But what is the quality of a belief that exists simply because it's enforced?

"To be narrowing the discussion and instilling fear in people seems to be exactly the opposite of what's called for these days," says the noted religion writer Kenneth Briggs. "All this foot-stomping just diminishes the church's credibility even more."

This is America. We don't hunt heresies here. We welcome them.

WHY DOES RELIGION ALWAYS GET A FREE RIDE? - Part 1

Greta Christina

(Reprinted from *alternet.org*, 4/29/2012)

Why should religion, alone among all other kinds of ideas, be free from attempts to persuade people out of it? We try to persuade people out of ideas all the time. We try to persuade people that their ideas about science, politics, philosophy, art, medicine, and more, are wrong; that they're harmful, ridiculous, repulsive, or simply mistaken. But when it comes to religion, trying to persuade people out of their ideas is somehow seen as horribly rude at best, invasive and bigoted and intolerant at worst. Why? Why should religion be the exception?

I've been writing about atheism for about six years now. In those six years, I've asked this question more times

and not once have I gotten a satisfying answer. In fact, only once do I recall getting any answer at all. Besides that one exception, what I've gotten in response has been crickets chirping and tumbleweeds blowing by. I've been ignored, I've had the subject changed, I've had people get personally nasty, I've had people abandon the conversation altogether. But only once have I ever gotten any kind of actual answer. And that answer sucked. (I'll get to it in a bit.) I've heard lots of people tell me, at length and with great passion, that trying to persuade people out of their religion is bad and wrong and mean. But I haven't seen a single real argument explaining why this is such a terrible thing to do with religion, and yet is somehow perfectly okay to do with all other ideas.

So I want to get to the heart of this matter. Why should religion be treated differently from all other kinds of ideas? Why shouldn't we criticize it, and make fun of it, and try to persuade people out of it, the way we do with every other kind of idea?

In a free society, in the marketplace of ideas, we try to persuade people out of ideas all the time. We criticize ideas we disagree with; we question ideas we find puzzling; we excoriate ideas we find repugnant; we make fun of ideas we think are silly. And we think this is acceptable. In fact, we think it's positively good. We think this is how good ideas rise to the surface, and bad ideas get filtered out. We might have issues with exactly how this persuasion is carried out: is it done politely or rudely, reasonably or hysterically, did you really have to bring it up at Thanksgiving dinner, etc. But the basic idea of trying to convince other people that your ideas are right and theirs are wrong; this is not controversial.

Except when it comes to religion.

Why?

Religion is an idea about the world. Thousands of different ideas, really, but with one basic idea at the core of them all: the idea of the supernatural. Religion is the hypothesis that the world is the way that it is, entirely or in part, because of supernatural beings or forces acting on the natural world. It's an idea about how the world works – every bit as much as the germ theory of disease, or the theory that matter is made up of atoms, or the wacky notion that the Earth revolves around the Sun.

And religion is a very specific kind of idea about the world. Religion is a truth claim. It's not a subjective matter of personal experience or opinion, like, "I'm a one-woman man," or "*Harry Potter* is better than *The Lord of the Rings*". It is a statement about what is and is not literally true in the non-subjective world.

So if we think it's a mistaken idea, why shouldn't we try to convince other people of that? We do this with every other kind of truth claim. If people think that disease is caused by demonic possession, or that global climate change is a hoax, or that deregulating the financial industry will lead to a robustly healthy economy for all levels of society – and we think these people are wrong – we try to change their minds. Why should religion be any different?

Now, of course, religion is more than just an idea. People build communities, personal identities, support systems, coping mechanisms, entire life philosophies, around their religious beliefs.

But people build identities around other ideas, too. People have intense political identities, for instance: people are often deeply attached to their identity as a progressive, a Republican or a libertarian. People build communities around these ideas, and support systems, and coping mechanisms, and life philosophies. And we still think it's entirely valid, and even positively worthwhile, to try to change people's minds about these ideas if we think they're wrong.

Why should religion be any different?

It's also the case that letting go of religious beliefs can be upsetting, even traumatic. In the short term anyway. Most atheists say that they're happy to have let go of their religion, but many do go through a short period of trauma while they're letting go.

But it can be upsetting, and even traumatic, to let go of all kinds of ideas. It can be upsetting and traumatic to learn that the clothes and chocolate and electronics you're buying are made by slave labor; that the food you're feeding your children is bad for them; that you have unconscious racist or sexist attitudes; that driving your car is contributing to global climate change and the possible permanent destruction of the environment.

And yet we still think it's valid, and even positively worthwhile, to try to change people's minds about these ideas if we think they're wrong.

Why should religion be any different?

Yes, there's a tremendous diversity of religious ideas – a diversity that makes up a large part of our complex cultural tapestry. But we have a tremendous diversity of ideas about politics, too, and about science, and race, and gender, and sexuality, and more. When we look at our history, our complex cultural tapestry has included alchemy, and Jim Crow laws, and preventing women from voting, and curing the "disease" of masturbation, and treating yellow fever epidemics by shooting cannonballs into the air. The world is better off without those ideas. We still have a rich cultural tapestry of diverse lifestyles and worldviews without them. And we still think it was entirely valid, and even positively worthwhile, to try to change people's minds about these ideas when we thought they were wrong.

Why should religion be any different?

It's also true that persuading people out of their religion is often seen as proselytizing or evangelizing. Proselytizing or evangelizing about religion has a bad reputation. And there are good reasons for that. Religious evangelists have an ugly history of fearmongering, deception, outright lying, applying economic pressure, using law or force or even violence, to "persuade" people out of their religious beliefs. Not to mention the little matter of knocking on people's doors at eight o'clock on Saturday morning. It's no wonder people are resistant to it.

But if that's not what atheists are advocating? If we're

not advocating any sort of force or coercion, or even any sort of pressure apart from the mild social pressure created by people not wanting to look foolish by hanging onto bad ideas? If what we're advocating is writing blog posts, writing magazine articles, writing books, wearing T-shirts, putting up billboards, getting into conversations with our friends and families, getting into debates on Facebook? If what we're advocating is getting our atheist ideas more widely disseminated and understood, and creating atheist communities so people who share our ideas feel safer expressing them? If what we're advocating is essentially standing up and saying, "The emperor has no clothes" – and offering the best evidence and arguments we can for the emperor's nakedness?

What is so terrible about that? We do that with every other kind of idea. Why shouldn't we do it with religion?

Why should religion be any different?

Ed: Part 2, the conclusion of Ms. Christina's essay, will appear in July PIQUE.

NORWAY ABOLISHES THE CHURCH OF NORWAY

Sean Fraser

(Excerpted from digitaljournal.com May 16)

The Norwegian Parliament has voted to abolish the state-sponsored Church of Norway with a constitutional amendment. ... The nation will no longer have an official religion, and the government will not participate in the appointment of church deans and bishops.

Ever since the establishment of Lutheranism in 1536, every citizen of Norway became a member of the Church of Norway upon baptism. 79 percent of Norwegians are registered members, but only about 20 percent make religion a large part of their lives and only two percent attend church regularly, according to 2009 and 2010 data. A 2002 study revealed that 72 percent of Norwegians "do not believe in a personal God".

FAITH, BELIEF, AND KNOWLEDGE: DEFINING OUR TERMS

John Rafferty

What constitutes faith? How is it different from belief? Where is the dividing line between either of them and genuine knowledge? And can we ever – the classic question of epistemology – be absolutely certain that we know?

One of the problems we and the theists have in dialogue is that we only think we're using the same words. Often, we're not. And by "dialogue" I'm talking about those all-too-rare moments when people actually try to understand each other, not one of these scenarios ...

US: "No, you don't know 'Jesus Christ died for your sins', that's your belief, for which you have zero evidence."

THEM: "Faith gave me true knowledge; you'd believe, too, if you'd open your heart instead of closing your mind."

See? That conversation might as well be between a

Bantu and an Eskimo. We need to define our terms.

I don't kid myself that the following vest-pocket definitions would, 1) survive challenges in even an undergraduate course in epistemology, or 2) be accepted without challenge by "them". But here are the definitions I intend to use in dialogue and in these pages. Reader emendations, adaptations, and challenges are invited.

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

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

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

By my simple definitions, belief and faith contradict each other. Your faith in something (there is a Heaven and a Hell; Jesus walked on water) is not a belief, which would require evidence or real-life experience. Similarly, my belief in something for which I have evidence (the overwhelming evidence for evolution) or experience (I believe the sun will rise in the east tomorrow because it has every day of my life) cannot be construed as faith.

In any argument with faithers, insist on the distinction: Your faith that the Rapture is coming October 21 is not on a reality par with my belief that the sun will rise tomorrow.

And don't let them get away with the idiotic claim that science itself is a faith. We believe in science and the scientific method because experience has proven to us, over and over again, that it works.

"Knowledge" is often spuriously claimed by the religious; don't let them get away with it. "I know in my heart ..." and "I have experienced His presence" are subjective experiences that cannot be tested, let alone verified. So are dreams. The multiplication table and the works of Shakespeare can be known – understood in the same way – by everyone.

But what about that absolute certainty mentioned in the opening paragraph? Forget it, it's a chimera. It's always possible that the universe was put together with chewing gum by invisible elves who think our science is hilarious.

WHY WE LIVE IN NEW YORK #93

In April, by a vote of 28-1, the Tennessee Senate passed SB3310, a bill to update the state's abstinence-based sex education curriculum to define holding hands and kissing as "gateway sexual activities".

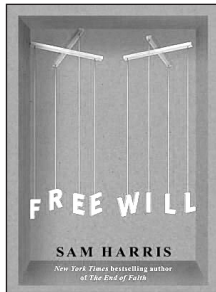
Further, since the bill specifically bans teachers from "demonstrating gateway sexual activity", they are prohibited from even demonstrating what hand-holding is.

And as Daily Kos reported April 12, "Tennessee high schoolers are above the national average when it comes to how many of them are having sex, so it seems this new anti-handholding agenda is coming along at just the right time. Or is much, much too late. Or is just stupid, and yet another demonstration of what bored old cranks think is best for the young 'uns these days, and actual real-world results be damned."

SHSNY CALENDAR: JUNE - AUGUST 2012

SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURSDAY, JUNE 7, 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
FREE WILL
by Sam Harris

A belief in free will touches nearly everything that human beings value. It is difficult to think about law, politics, religion, public policy, intimate relationships, morality – as well as feelings of remorse or personal achievement – without first imagining that every person is the true source of his or her thoughts and actions. But the facts, as Sam Harris sees them, tell us that free will is an illusion.



Harris argues that this truth about the human mind does not undermine morality or diminish the importance of social and political freedom, but it can and should change the way we think about some of the most important questions in life.

“Free will is an illusion so convincing that people simply refuse to believe that we don’t have it. In *Free Will*, Sam Harris combines neuroscience and psychology to lay this illusion to rest at last. ... Read it: you have no choice.” – Jerry A. Coyne, author of *Why Evolution Is True*.

Paper and e-book editions available.

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

SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURSDAY, JULY 5, 6:30 pm
at Community Church of NY
FREEDOM EVOLVES
by Daniel Dennett

Can there be freedom and free will in a deterministic world? Philosopher Daniel Dennett emphatically answers “yes!”, showing how we alone among the animals have evolved minds that give us free will and morality.

Dennett explains in a series of strikingly original arguments – drawing upon evolutionary biology, cognitive neuroscience, economics, and philosophy – that far from being an enemy of traditional explorations of freedom, morality, and meaning, the evolutionary perspective can be an indispensable ally.

Paper edition available.

SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURS, AUGUST 2, 6:30 pm
at Community Church of NY
THE FAITH INSTINCT:
How Religion Evolved, and
Why It Endures
by Nicholas Wade

For the last 50,000 years, and probably much longer, people have practiced religion. Yet little attention has been given to the question of whether this universal human behavior might have been implanted in human nature, a by-product of our evolution.

In this original and thought-provoking work, *New York Times* science writer Wade traces how religion grew to be so essential to early societies in their struggle for survival, how an instinct for faith became hardwired into human nature, and how it provided an impetus for law and government.

Paper, Kindle editions available.

MONDAY, JUNE 11, 7:00 pm
SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)
ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN

It's a presidential election year, so let's follow *Washington Post* reporters Woodward (Robert Redford) and Bernstein (Dustin Hoffman)



as clue-by-clue they uncover the electoral dirty tricks and the blind arrogance of power that brought down Richard Nixon, the first president ever to leave office in disgrace.

Winner of four Oscars, this blockbuster combines the “best elements of newspaper pictures, detective stories, and thrillers rolled into one superb movie.”

Also starring Jason Robards, Hal Holbrook, Jane Alexander, and F. Murray Abraham.

A dynamite film - don't miss it!
SHSNY Movie Night is FREE.
Check out the menu and prices at www.stonecreeknyc.com

PLANNING AHEAD

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

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

Movie Night: Second Monday
at Stone Creek Lounge.

Brunch: Third Sunday
at BXL East Bistro.

Great Lectures: Fourth Tuesday
at Stone Creek Lounge.

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

SHSNY CALENDAR: JUNE - AUGUST 2012

BRUNCH!

SUNDAY, JUNE 24, 12 NOON
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!

TWO WORTHY EVENTS AT NEW YORK SOCIETY FOR ETHICAL CULTURE

2 West 64 St. (Central Park West)
Sunday, June 3, 1:30 p.m.
Congo Project

The NY Metro branch of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom presents a "Making the Connections" panel discussion to raise awareness of the severe conditions in the Democratic Republic of Congo. — *Free.*

Wednesday, June 6, 6:30 p.m.
**Empty Bowls: An Interfaith
Action On Global Health**

Several groups will come together to celebrate their collective work on global health and poverty.

United Sikhs will provide a traditional Langar meal, served in beautiful bowls that guests can keep as reminders of empty bowls around the world. Live music, and all proceeds to the Sri Guru Nanak Food Bank in Nairobi, Kenya.

Tickets (dinner, bowl, entertainment): \$35 for adults; \$15 for students, children, NYSEC members.

GREAT LECTURES ON DVD
TUESDAY, JUNE 26, 7:00 pm
THE EVOLUTION OF GOD
by **Robert Wright**

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

Evolutionary psychologist Robert Wright is the author of *The Moral Animal*; *Nonzero: The Logic of Human Destiny*; and, of course, *The Evolution of God*.

In this fact-filled and entertaining lecture based on the best-selling book, Wright reveals the hidden patterns that the great monotheistic faiths have followed as they have evolved. Through the prisms of archaeology, theology, and evolutionary psychology, his findings overturn basic assumptions about Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The book has stirred up controversy in both secular and religious circles since its publication, so come and see what all the intellectual fuss is about.

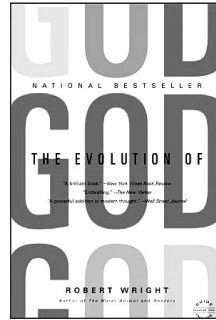
Great Lectures Night is FREE

Check out the menu and prices at www.stonecreeknyc.com

JUNE 21 IS WORLD HUMANIST DAY. WHO KNEW?

In one of the better-kept secrets of the global freethought community, it seems that the summer solstice is also World Humanist Day, created (but not very well promoted) by the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) and our own AHA.

Now that we (belatedly) know, let's plan a celebration next year.



OTHER REASONABLE NEW YORK EVENTS

Check them out at their websites or www.reasonablenewyork.org
NY Society for Ethical Culture offers programs on *Ethics in Film* (screenings, popcorn & beer, \$5); *Ethics and the Theater*; and *Ethics in Literature* every month. Dates and details at nysec.org.

Dinner & Philosophy Now: Mon, June 18, 7 pm, Bamiyan, 358 Third (at 26 St): "What Does it Mean to Be Cool?" \$2 entry fee, plus dinner.

CFI-NYC. Mon, June 11, 10 pm.

Googie's Lounge (Upstairs at the Living Room), 154 Ludlow St.

"Skeptics on the Mic Karaoke".

New York Philosophy. Tue, June 26, 6-10 pm, Irish Rogue, 356 W. 44 St. "The Freedom of Speech". RSVP needed: nyphilosophy.com.

Drinking With Atheists: Every Friday, fun and conversation. Details www.meetup.com/RichiesList/

PLUS

Agnostic A.A.: Nine weekly AA-endorsed meetings in Manhattan, Brooklyn, The Bronx. Schedules: agnosticAAnyc.org/meetings.html
Manhattan History Buffs: Every 3d Tues, 6:30, dinner and talk at Lili's (Chinese) restaurant, Third Ave., 83-84th. For June program: 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.

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

Socrates Cafe: Tuesdays, 6:30 p.m., NY Society for Ethical Culture

REASON AND KARL POPPER

Brian Lemaire

The Reason Rally held in Washington, D.C., in March inspired us to think about the ways in which reason pervades society and our approach to life. Karl Popper, who contributed the idea of falsifiability to the philosophy of science, did some original thinking on this score.

He issued an important book, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, in which he extended his understanding of the nature of science to an understanding of broader society. He saw that political philosophers, from Plato to Marx, had tried to make political philosophy rigorous by making it, like the false idea of science, authoritarian, proceeding from close observations to fixed laws of history.

Once it was apparent that science had no certain truths, the notion that a good theory of the state should begin with fixed solid ideals about virtue, à la Rick Santorum, or with a large-scale view of historical development, à la Karl Marx, had to give way too. A truly scientific political philosophy would be “open” – to criticism even of its own foundations – and so would the societies based on that philosophy. Popper pointed out that Marx, in particular, had made clear predictions – and, as history falsified each one of them the Marxists pretended that they hadn’t been made in the first place.

Popper saw reason under attack in the social and political world from both the left (Marx, class struggle) and the right (Hegel, national interests and traditions), and argued to keep reason alive.

“We could then say that rationalism is an attitude of readiness to listen to critical arguments and to learn from experience. It is fundamentally an attitude of admitting that ‘I may be wrong and you may be right, and by an effort, we may get nearer to the truth.’ It is an attitude which does not lightly give up hope that by such means as argument and careful observation, people may reach some kind of agreement on many problems of importance; and that, even where their demands and their interests clash, it is often possible to argue about the various demands and proposals, and to reach – perhaps by arbitration – a compromise which, because of its equity, is acceptable to most, if not to all. In short, the rationalist attitude, or, as I may perhaps label it, the ‘attitude of reasonableness’, is very similar to the scientific attitude, to the belief that in the search for truth we need cooperation, and that, with the help of argument, we can in time attain something like objectivity.”

In Chapter 24 of *The Open Society and its Enemies*, “The Revolt Against Reason”, Popper lays out his thesis.

“Rationalism in our sense is diametrically opposed to all those modern Platonic dreams of brave new worlds in which the growth of reason would be controlled or ‘planned’ by some superior reason. Reason, like science, grows by way of mutual criticism; the only possible way of ‘planning’ its growth is to develop those institutions that safeguard the freedom of this criticism, that is to say, the freedom of thought.

“My way of using the term ‘rationalism’ may become

a little clearer, perhaps, if we distinguish between a true rationalism and a false or a pseudo-rationalism. What I call the ‘true rationalism’ is the rationalism of Socrates. It is the awareness of one’s limitations, the intellectual modesty of those who know how often they err, and how much they depend on others even for this knowledge. It is the realization that we must not expect too much from reason; that argument rarely settles a question, although it is the only means for learning – not to see clearly, but to see more clearly than before. What I shall call ‘pseudo-rationalism’ is the intellectual intuitionism of Plato. It is the immodest belief in one’s own superior intellectual gifts, the claim to be initiated, to know with certainty, and with authority. ...

“Irrationalism is not bound by any rules of consistency. It lends itself to support a romantic belief in the existence of an elect body, in the division of men into leaders and led, into masters and natural slaves. This fact shows clearly that a moral decision is involved in the choice between it and a critical rationalism. ...

“Rationalism is therefore bound up with the idea that the other fellow has a right to be heard, and to defend his arguments. . . Also the idea of impartiality leads to that of responsibility; we have not only to listen to arguments, but we have a duty to respond, to answer, where our actions affect others. Ultimately, in this way, rationalism is linked up with the recognition of the necessity of social institutions to protect freedom of criticism, freedom of thought, and thus the freedom of men. ...

“Rationalism must encourage the use of imagination while irrationalism must tend to discourage it. The very fact that rationalism is critical, while irrationalism must tend towards dogmatism (where there is no argument, nothing is left but full acceptance or flat denial), leads in this direction. Criticism always demands a certain degree of imagination, whilst dogmatism suppresses it. Similarly, scientific research and technical construction and invention are inconceivable without a very considerable use of imagination; one must offer something new in these fields (as opposed to the field of oracular philosophy where an endless repetition of impressive words seems to do the trick).”

In the area of freedom of thought, of freedom to criticize, magazines and publishing companies can play a role. These institutions can and should keep our conversation open by allowing various points of view to be expressed, various arguments made in public, without attempting to censor the authors. The nation’s universities, once a point of our strength, unfortunately are rapidly becoming the province of corporate America, and doing more of their research to serve purely corporate interests.

At the same time our current administration needs to make more information open to the public. Popper looked to “democratic institutions which alone can guarantee the freedom of critical thought, and the progress of science”.

Not knowing is much more interesting than believing an answer that might be wrong.

– Richard Feynman

SECULAR HUMANISM: SENSE AND GOODNESS

Walter Balcerak

S*ense and Goodness Without God*, by Richard Carrier, is one of the most perceptive books on secular humanism I've ever read. Carrier describes his philosophy as metaphysical naturalism. He explains that "all metaphysical naturalists believe that if anything exists in our universe, it is a part of nature, and has a natural cause or origin, and there is no need of any other explanation".

Philosophy is important to Carrier. Since we are the only rational animals, it is incumbent on us to try to understand our world and universe. "Philosophy is therefore no idle pastime," he writes, "but a serious business, fundamental to our lives." He goes even further: "It should be our first if not our only religion: a religion where worship is replaced with curiosity, devotion with diligence, holiness with sincerity, ritual with study, and scripture with the whole world and the whole of human learning."

Like David Hume (PIQUE, May), Carrier is a skeptic and empiricist. As a skeptic, he accepts no assertion unless it is supported by convincing evidence; as an empiricist, he insists that evidence can be gained only through experience. "The only thing we can trust without evidence is what cannot be denied," he asserts, "and the only thing we cannot deny is that certain experiences exist."

Believers in the supernatural often argue that skepticism and empiricism are based on beliefs, just like theism. Carrier agrees. But he insists we are justified in trusting skepticism and empiricism, because they are the principles of science, which is the only successful method for understanding natural phenomena. He thinks attributing phenomena to other than natural causes is arbitrary and absurd. "The number of false beliefs always vastly outnumbers the true," he points out. "It follows that any arbitrary method of selection will be maximally successful at selecting false beliefs."

For Carrier, metaphysical naturalism leads to a humanistic outlook on life: "In the simplest terms, the meaning of life is a healthy mind in a healthy body, pursuing and manifesting what it can most deeply love: the creation of good works, and the society of good people, in a well-tended world."

He defines secular humanism as "any philosophy that holds to two basic doctrines: that the progress and welfare of all human beings is the greatest good, and that only secular solutions to achieving this end are credible, not supernatural ones."

I first encountered Richard Carrier in "The God That Wasn't There", a documentary in which he questions the historicity of Jesus, and which is available from Netflix and features Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and many others.

In order to be a secular humanist one has to be an atheist or agnostic; but it is possible to be an atheist or agnostic without being a humanist. — *Barbara Smoker* (British humanist), in *Humanism* (5th edition, 2008)

DEFINING HUMANISM? START HERE

In 1996, the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) General Assembly adopted the following resolution. Any organization* wishing to become a member of IHEU is now obliged to signify its acceptance of this statement:

"Humanism is a democratic and ethical life stance, which affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives. It stands for the building of a more humane society through an ethic based on human and other natural values in the spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities. It is not theistic, and it does not accept supernatural views of reality."

*Like the American Humanist Association and the Council for Secular Humanism – SHSNY belongs to both. – JR

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Michael Shermer

(Reprinted from *scientificamerican.com*, April 27)

Why is there something rather than nothing? This is one of those profound questions that is easy to ask but difficult to answer. For millennia humans simply said, "God did it": a creator existed before the universe and brought it into existence out of nothing. But this just begs the question of what created God—and if God does not need a creator, logic dictates that neither does the universe. Science deals with natural (not supernatural) causes and, as such, has several ways of exploring where the "something" came from.

Multiple universes. There are many multiverse hypotheses predicted from mathematics and physics that show how our universe may have been born from another universe. For example, our universe may be just one of many bubble universes with varying laws of nature. Those universes with laws similar to ours will produce stars, some of which collapse into black holes and singularities that give birth to new universes—in a manner similar to the singularity that physicists believe gave rise to the big bang.

M-theory. In his and Leonard Mlodinow's 2010 book, *The Grand Design*, Stephen Hawking embraces "M-theory" (an extension of string theory that includes 11 dimensions) as "the only candidate for a complete theory of the universe. If it is finite—and this has yet to be proved—it will be a model of a universe that creates itself".

Quantum foam creation. The "nothing" of the vacuum of space actually consists of subatomic spacetime turbulence at extremely small distances measurable at the Planck scale—the length at which the structure of spacetime is dominated by quantum gravity. At this scale, the Heisenberg uncertainty principle allows energy to briefly decay into particles and antiparticles, thereby producing "something" from "nothing".

Nothing is unstable. In his new book, *A Universe from Nothing*, cosmologist Lawrence M. Krauss attempts to link quantum physics to Einstein's general theory of relativity to explain the origin of a universe from nothing: "In

quantum gravity, universes can, and indeed always will, spontaneously appear from nothing. Such universes need not be empty, but can have matter and radiation in them, as long as the total energy, including the negative energy associated with gravity [balancing the positive energy of matter], is zero." Furthermore, "for the closed universes that might be created through such mechanisms to last for longer than infinitesimal times, something like inflation is necessary." Observations show that the universe is in fact flat (there is just enough matter to slow its expansion but not to halt it), has zero total energy and underwent rapid inflation, or expansion, soon after the big bang, as described by inflationary cosmology. Krauss concludes: "Quantum gravity not only appears to allow universes to be created from nothing—meaning ... absence of space and time—it may require them. 'Nothing'—in this case no space, no time, no anything!—is unstable."

The other hypotheses are also testable. The idea that new universes can emerge from collapsing black holes may be illuminated through additional knowledge about the properties of black holes, which are being studied now. Other bubble universes might be detected in the subtle temperature variations of the cosmic microwave background radiation left over from the big bang of our own universe. NASA's Wilkinson Microwave Anisotropy Probe (WMAP) spacecraft is collecting data on this radiation. Additionally, the Laser Interferometer Gravitational Wave Observatory (LIGO) is designed to detect exceptionally faint gravitational waves. If there are other universes, perhaps ripples in gravitational waves will signal their presence. Maybe gravity is such a relatively weak force (compared with electromagnetism and the nuclear forces) because some of it "leaks" out to other universes.

Even if God is hypothesized as the creator of the laws of nature that caused the universe (or multiverse) to pop into existence out of nothing—if such laws are deterministic—then God had no choice in the creation of the universe and thus was not needed. In any case, why turn to the supernatural when our understanding of the natural is still in its incipient stages? We would be wise to heed this skeptical principle: before you say something is out of this world, first make sure that it is not in this world.

FACE IT, FAITHERS: THE BIBLE IS PRO-SLAVERY

Dan Savage

(Excerpted from "Gay-rights activist rips Bible, mocks teens fleeing room" at msn.now April 30)

(Ed: Dan Savage is the founder of the anti-gay-bullying "It Gets Better" movement. The following is a partial transcription of his address to a high-school audience in Seattle, during which Christian students walked out.)

The Bible. People often point out that they can't help it—they can't help with the anti-gay bullying [movement]—it says right there in Leviticus, it says right there in Timothy, it says right there in Romans, that being gay is wrong. We can learn to ignore the bullshit in the Bible about

gay people (*applause, and the walkout starts*) the same way we have learned to ignore the bullshit in the Bible about shellfish, about slavery, about dinner, about farming, about menstruation, about virginity, about masturbation.

We ignore bullshit in the Bible about all sorts of things. The Bible is a radically pro-slavery document. Slaveholders waved Bibles over their heads during the Civil War, to justify themselves. The shortest book in the New Testament is a letter from Paul to a Christian slaveowner about owning his Christian slaves. And Paul doesn't say, "Christians *don't* own people", Paul talks about *how* Christians own people.

We ignore what the Bible says about slavery, and the Bible got slavery wrong. Sam Harris, in *Letter to a Christian Nation*, points out that if the Bible got the easiest moral question that humanity has ever faced wrong, slavery, what are the odds that the Bible got something as complicated as human sexuality wrong? One hundred percent. ...

People are dying because people can't clear this one last hurdle. They can't get past this one last thing in the Bible, the problem of sexuality.

THIS MONTH'S BIBLE STUDY LESSON

"Slaves, obey your earthly masters."

Colossians 3:22 and Ephesians 6:5

TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE: ONE MAN, MANY WOMEN, SOME GIRLS, SOME SLAVES

Jay Michaelson

(Reprinted from religiousdispatches.org May 16)

Well, it's been quite a whirlwind week for same-sex marriage, from North Carolina to Obama to Colorado—and, of course, to the many outraged conservatives concerned with preserving traditional marriage, i.e., the time-honored sacred bond between one man and one woman. Why, just last week, Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council said that marriage has meant just that for over five thousand years.

Huh? Time to break out your Bible, Mr. Perkins! Abraham had two wives, Sarah and her handmaiden Hagar. King Solomon had 700 wives, plus 300 concubines and slaves. Jacob, the patriarch who gives Israel its name, had two wives and two concubines. In a humanist vein, Exodus 21:10 warns that when men take additional wives, they must still provide for their previous one. (Exodus 21:16 adds that if a man seduces a virgin and has sex with her, he has to marry her, too.)

But that's not all. In biblical society, when you conquered another city, tribe, or nation, the victorious men would "win" their defeated foes' wives as part of the spoils. It also commanded levirate marriage, the system wherein, if a man died, his younger brother would have to marry his widow and produce heirs with her who would be considered the older brother's descendants. Traditional marriage!

Later Islamic and Jewish sources, unclear on these parameters (the prophet Muhammad, of course, had several wives), debated whether it is permissible for a man to

marry a three- or four-year-old girl. St. Paul, meanwhile, said that marriage was a compromise between the ideal of celibacy and the unfortunate fact that people like to have sex. Fortunately, we pluralists can appreciate both those religious traditions which advise men to marry little girls and those which tell them not to marry anyone at all.

And of course, even until the present day, traditional marriage has meant arranged marriage. The notion that two adults would enter into a marriage on their own volition is a radical innovation in the institution of marriage, at most two hundred years old.

Oh, and let's not forget that in Europe and North America, marriage was considered a commercial proposition first and foremost—not a romantic one. Princes married princesses not because of fairy tales, but because their parents had political alliances to consider. Further down the economic ladder, people married for a variety of biological, commercial, and genealogical reasons—but rarely for love.

Oh, and that's right, I almost forgot about interracial marriage, which in some parts of America was seen as a crime against nature and God up until the 1960s. (Of course, Moses himself was in an interracial marriage, but the anti-miscegenation crowd overlooked that inconvenient fact.) It's easy today for the likes of Tony Perkins to say that this change was a minor one; but let's remember that a century ago, African Americans were not considered fully human by religious conservatives. Interracial marriage—as much as it's disgusting to even say so today—was seen as an unnatural marriage between different species.

Oh, wait a minute, I forgot the most laughable part of this whole ludicrous spectacle: that it's the Mormon Mitt Romney who's insisting that marriage has “always” been between one man and one woman. Right—except that Romney's own great-grandfather had five wives, before the LDS church, under massive pressure and persecution, reversed its doctrine on polygamy.

So, let's see if I can total all this up. Traditional marriage is one man with multiple wives, multiple concubines, wives conquered in war and wives acquired in levirate marriage, possibly including girls under the age of ten, but definitely not including anyone of a different ethnic group, in an arranged marriage with disposition of property as its purpose. That seems very different from “one man, one woman,” does it not?

Of course, it's easy to say that marriage as an institution evolves—but then, if we admit that, we have to admit that sanctioning loving, same-sex unions is just another step in that evolution. Perhaps this is why the Tony Perkinses of the world simply ignore the Bible when it doesn't suit their purposes, instead preferring to make pseudo-scientific (and wholly unsupported) claims about what's best for children and society.

The Bible's truths are just too inconvenient.

One of the greatest tragedies of human history was the hijacking of morality by organized religion.

– Sir Arthur C. Clarke

TEN REASONS TO BAN GAY MARRIAGE

(Forwarded by Eileen Regan)

1. Being gay is not natural. Real folks reject unnatural things like eyeglasses, polyester, and air conditioning.
2. Gay marriage will encourage people to be gay, just as hanging around tall people will make you tall.
3. Legalizing gay marriage will lead to all kinds of crazy behavior. People may even wish to marry their pets because a dog has legal standing and can sign a marriage contract.
4. Straight marriage has been around a long time and hasn't changed at all; women are still property, blacks still can't marry whites, and divorce is still illegal.
5. Straight marriage will be less meaningful if gay marriage is allowed; the sanctity of Brittany Spears' 55-hour just-for-fun marriage would be destroyed.
6. Straight marriages are valid because they produce children. Gay couples, infertile couples, and old people shouldn't be allowed to marry because our orphanages aren't full yet, and the world needs more children.
7. Obviously, gay parents will raise gay children, since straight parents only raise straight children.
8. Gay marriage is forbidden by religion. In a theocracy like ours, the values of our religion are imposed on the entire country. That's why we have only one religion in America.
9. Children can never succeed without a male and a female role model at home. That's why we as a society expressly forbid single parents to raise children.
10. Gay marriage will change society; we could never adapt to new social norms. Just as we haven't adapted to cars, the service-sector economy, or longer life spans.

LIMBAUGH IS OUTRAGED!

IT'S “WAR” ON TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE!

On his May 9 radio show, Bloviator-in-Chief Rush Limbaugh responded predictably to the news that President Obama was about to announce his support for marriage equality. “We've arrived at the point where the president of the United States is going to lead a war on traditional marriage!”

Mr. Limbaugh's first, second, third, and fourth wives were unavailable for comment.

JESUS AND MO DENOUNCE “BIGOTOPHOBIA”

(TranscribeD from jesusandmo.com)

Jesus: Tsk. A marriage registrar [in the UK] was dismissed for refusing to perform civil ceremonies. She is being persecuted for her Christian convictions.

Mohammed: And what about people campaigning against sharia courts just because a woman's testimony is worth half that of a man? Our beliefs aren't being respected.

Jesus: It seems that bigots are the one group in society that it's still okay to discriminate against.

Mo: Bigots are the new Jews.

Jesus: First they came for the bigots, but I did not speak out because I was not a bigot.

Mo: It's bigotophobia, pure and simple.

THE BEST SHORT-FORM ARGUMENT FOR FREE WILL I'VE EVER HEARD

John Rafferty

In an interview in the April/May issue of *Free Inquiry*, philosopher Daniel Dennett – author of such game-changing books as *Consciousness Explained*, *Freedom Evolves*, and *Breaking The Spell* – makes quite clear that the science behind his concept of free will is – and should be – biology, not, as neuroscientist/skeptic Sam Harris (and most determinists) argues, physics.

Dennett agrees with Harris that “metaphysical free will ... somehow sort of insulated from causality is ... just a preposterous idea”, but argues that “the whole issue between determinism and indeterminism in physics is a red herring as far as free will is concerned. The science that you need to understand free will is not physics; it’s biology. ...

“You can make something living out of parts that are not living. You can make something colored out of parts that aren’t colored. You can make something conscious out of parts that aren’t conscious. Neurons aren’t conscious. ...

“You can make something free out of parts that aren’t free – ‘free’ in the important sense, in the same way as being alive and being conscious and being red – these are macroscopic properties that are not shared by their microscopic parts.

“The same thing is true of freedom. ... And it isn’t illusory, any more than being red or being alive is illusory.”

Makes sense to me.

MIKE WEISS JOINS THE SHSNY BOARD

Mike Weiss has been a member of SHSNY since 2009, recently helped represent us at the Reason Rally in Washington and, at an April 24 meeting, was unanimously elected to the Board.



Mike’s a long-time East Sider, and a recently retired business insurance broker. He was a founder of his company’s LGBT Employee Resource Group, and represented the company at the Out & Equal workplace diversity seminars.

Mike had a gradual transition to atheism in adulthood, but the call of rationality – and humanism – did win out over an all-Catholic education. He started with the Sisters of Charity (a seven-year choir boy at all-Latin High Mass, no less!), followed by the Irish Christian Brothers at Iona Prep, ultimately graduating from the Jesuits’ Fordham University. No wonder he carries one of our Get-Out-of-Hell-Free cards at all times. Mike is looking forward to working with the SHSNY board in contributing to our future growth.

Imagine a world in which generations of human beings come to believe that certain films were made by God or that specific software was coded by him.

Imagine a future in which millions of our descendants murder each other over rival interpretations of *Star Wars*. Could *anything* be more ridiculous? And yet, no more ridiculous than the world we are living in. – *Sam Harris*

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