

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

May, 2012

What are liberals missing when they talk to conservatives, why don't the religious want our votes, and what can they teach us about politics? Can we really test the YouKnowWho hypothesis, and should we compromise with theists on evolution? We trash this month's three stupidest states, continue our good-without-God discussion, and accept Sam Spade as our personal moral savior. It's a science-and-skepticism Q&A issue, and we start by celebrating a couple of birthdays. – JR

DAVID HUME: A SKEPTIC'S SKEPTIC

Walter Balcerak

I seldom read philosophy. But I recently came across a passage by 18th Century philosopher David Hume that made me want to shout "bravo!"

Hume is a noted 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 by experience. Thus Hume questions the assertions of religion, most of which are based on faith and dubious testimony.



May 7, 1711 - August 25, 1776
Happy 301st Birthday!

What turns me off about much philosophy is the abstractness of many concepts, the frequent nitpicking over semantics, and the ventures into Cloud Cuckoo Land such as Plato's concept of ideal forms. Here's what Hume says about such thinking: "When we entertain . . . any suspicion, that a philosophical term is employed without any meaning or idea (as is but too frequent), we need but enquire, *from what impression is that supposed idea derived?*" (his italics).

Hume's word "impression" is synonymous with "experience", so he is implying that valid ideas are derived solely from experience. He states this more directly when he writes: "[I]t is impossible for us to think of any thing, which we have not antecedently *felt*, either by our external or internal senses" (his italics).

I came upon the Hume passage in an interesting online

course—Is Jesus Dead?—that was offered by the Center for Inquiry. The reading can be found in Hume's 1739 book, *Treatise of Human Nature, Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*. (It is available online at davidhume.org.)

In one part of the treatise, Hume takes on the subject of miracles. No testimony, he says, "is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavors to establish. ..." In other words, would lying about the resurrection be more miraculous than Jesus rising from the dead? No way. Hume makes the point more succinctly this way: "[N]o human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle."

In addition to being a brilliant thinker and a clear, jargon-free writer, Hume was a gifted ironist. According to a Wikipedia article, when asked if he was an atheist, "Hume would say he did not have enough faith to believe there is no god".

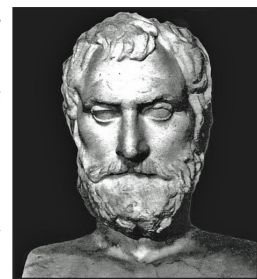
HAPPY BIRTHDAY, SCIENCE, TOO

On May 28, science will be 2598 years old. On that date in 585 BCE, Thales of Miletus predicted that a total solar eclipse would occur, and was spot-on right. Aristotle himself considered Thales, who rejected supernaturalism and contended that every observable effect has a physical cause, the father of science.

And in the 20th century Bertrand Russell pronounced that "Western philosophy begins with Thales".

Pretty good references.

How about a new holiday? *Science Day, May 28!*



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THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD AND FALSIFIABILITY

Brian Lemaire

At the Reason Rally in Washington in March, one woman carried a sign that read, “Want to argue for Creationism? Write up your evidence. Have it peer-reviewed. Then collect your Nobel Prize.”

I love that sign. It expresses an important concept so concisely. When a religious person argues that we all follow a set of beliefs, that science has no monopoly on the truth, I would answer that, Yes, I believe in certain things. I don't have the ability to personally confirm things like the existence of galaxies, the age of the Earth or the universe, the fact that the universe is expanding, and that that expansion is (amazingly) accelerating at a dizzying rate. Yes, I believe all these things without confirming them myself. They were discovered by people using the scientific method. The components working together to form the scientific method, evolving mainly over the last five centuries, include:

A reliance on *observation*, even observations that don't seem to comport with common sense, e.g., the observations on which quantum theory is built.

Experiments designed to prevent biases on the part of researchers from skewing results. In research involving human observers, the “double blind” method has become standard procedure.

Theory and observation. A scientist invents a hypothesis which can be tested, and then submits it to practical tests. And theories must give way if new evidence falsifies them.

Peer review. Other scientists in the same field must be able to replicate the experiment's results.

Concerning scientific papers, it is only in attempts to explain work to *somebody who has not done it* that scientists can acquire the discipline of *clear and reasoned communication* which, too, is part of scientific method.

Scientific objectivity depends on this social nature of the endeavor. Others must weigh in on one's work. Articles published in a scientific journal, which subjects the material to peer review, receive the imprimatur of acceptance as a scientific finding. If those peers find it useful it enters the general body of scientific knowledge, until some later findings wholly or partially supplant these findings.

All scientific findings are therefore tentative, and scientists succeed when they find error or incompleteness in previously accepted ideas - or just get a better idea. Even Newton's findings about gravity were partially supplanted by some of Einstein's theories. As Adam Gopnick has written in *The New Yorker*, “It was one of the greatest achievements of our time when Einstein showed that, in light of experience, we may question and revise our presuppositions regarding even space and time”.

So when one individual contributes a significant tweak to the scientific method, he moves us forward in an important way and deserves our cheers.

In the 1950s an Austrian named Karl Popper contributed the notion of falsifiability. At least he was the first to name the concept, and to focus on its importance.

Carl Sagan gives a hilarious example of the falsifiability

concept in his story of the invisible dragon in his garage (<http://godlessgeeks.com/LINKS/Dragon.htm>). If people believe in an invisible dragon, a flying spaghetti monster, Thor, or Jehovah, and the believers cannot describe any observation which, if made, would dis-confirm (falsify) such belief, then that belief is not falsifiable and does not belong in the body of scientific knowledge.

Popper laid out his tenet of falsifiability in the books *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* and *The Philosophy of Science*. It is, he explained, the conscious, purposeful search for falsifications, and the survival of theories in the face of them, that allowed science to proceed and objective knowledge to grow. Science gives us knowledge we can rely on because science itself is never sure. Science isn't the name for knowledge that has been proved true, it is the name for guesses that could be, but haven't yet been, proved false.

Popper drew on the earlier work of David Hume and his “problem of induction”, that the picture we think of as reality must always be haunted by a small, permanent ghost of uncertainty. In the textbook example, if a postulate states that “All swans are white” you can count white swans for centuries but still not know that all swans are white, not for sure. Science relies on an *asymmetry* to decide which theories are correct: no number of white swans can tell you that all swans are white, but a single black swan could tell you that all swans were not.

I believe in things found out through the scientific method, not in things found through faith. One set of ideas allows for revision, the other does not. More of our science curriculum at all levels, grade school through college, should devote time to learning about the scientific method.

“A pilgrimage to Popper”, by Adam Gopnik, appearing in *The New Yorker* of 4/1/2002 was the source for some of the material in this article.

GOD IS A TESTABLE HYPOTHESIS

Victor J. Stenger

(Reprinted from *New Scientist magazine (UK)* 3/19/2012)

The party line among scientists—believers and non-believers alike—is that science and religion are what Stephen Jay Gould called “non-overlapping magisteria”. In 1998 the U.S. National Academy of Sciences issued a statement asserting, “Science can say nothing about the supernatural. Whether God exists or not is a question about which science is neutral”.

Yet according to a survey the same year, 93 per cent of the members of the academy do not believe in a personal god. Since about the same percentage of all U.S. citizens say they *do* believe in a personal god, it makes one wonder what, if not their science, leads the elite of U.S. scientists to differ so dramatically from the general population.

A majority of scientists at all levels do not believe in any god. Yet most are unwilling to challenge the religious beliefs of others. I am a physicist who, along with others dubbed the New Atheists, is willing to challenge religious belief. The gods worshipped by billions either exist or they do not. And those gods, if they exist, must have observable

consequences. Thus, the question of their existence is a legitimate scientific issue that has profound import to humanity.

We can consider the existence of God to be a scientific hypothesis and look for the empirical evidence that would follow. Many of the attributes associated with the Judaic-Christian-Islamic God have specific consequences that can be tested empirically. Such a God is supposed to play a central role in the operation of the universe and the lives of humans. As a result, evidence for him should be readily detectable by scientific means.

If a properly controlled experiment were to come up with an observation that cannot be explained by natural means, then science would have to take seriously the possibility of a world beyond matter.

Such experiments have been attempted. Scientists have empirically tested the efficacy of intercessory prayer – prayers said on behalf of others. These studies, in principle, could have shown scientifically that some god exists. Had they found conclusively, in a double-blind placebo-controlled trial, that intercessory prayers heal the sick, it would have been difficult to find a natural explanation.

They did not.

Similar tests have been done on near-death experiences. Some people having an NDE during surgery have reported floating above the operating table and watching everything going on below. Whether this is a real experience or a hallucination can be tested easily by placing a secret message on a high shelf out of sight of the patient and the hospital staff. This has been tried, and no one reporting an NDE has yet to read the message.

Just as science can design experiments to test the existence of God, it can also seek evidence against a god's existence in the world around us. Here we must be clear that we are not talking about evidence against any and all conceivable gods. For example, a deist god that creates the universe and then just leaves it alone would be very hard to falsify. But no one worships a god who does nothing.

If God is the intelligent designer of life on Earth, then we should find evidence for intelligence in observations of the structure of life. We do not. The Intelligent Design movement failed in its effort to prove that the complexity found in some biological systems is irreducible and cannot be explained within Darwinian evolution. Life on Earth looks just as it should look if it arose by natural selection.

Most religions claim that humans possess immaterial souls that control much of our mental processing. If that were true, we should be able to observe mentally induced phenomena that are independent of brain chemistry. We do not.

If God is the source of morality, then we should find evidence for a supernatural origin in human behavior. We do not. People of faith behave on average no better, and in some cases behave worse, than people of no faith. History shows that the moral and ethical guides that most of us live by did not originate with the monotheistic religions, as proponents of those religions would have us believe.

Instead, moral behavior appears to have evolved socially.

Again, if God answers prayers, we should see miraculous effects of prayer. With millions of prayers having been said every day for thousands of years, we would expect some to have been answered by now in a verifiable way. They have not.

If God has revealed truths to humanity, then these truths should be testable. Over the millennia many people have reported religious or mystical experiences in which they have communicated with one god or another. By now, we should have seen some confirming evidence for this, such as a verifiable fact that could not have been in the person's head unless it was revealed to them. We have not.

If God is the creator of the universe, then we should find evidence for that in astronomy and physics. We do not. The origin of our universe required no miracles.

Furthermore, modern cosmology suggests an eternal "multiverse" in which many other universes come and go. If humans are a special creation of God, then the universe should be congenial to human life. It is not. Theists claim that the parameters of the universe are fine-tuned for human life. They are not. The universe is not fine-tuned for us. We are fine-tuned to the universe. After evaluating all the evidence, we can conclude that the universe and life look exactly as they would be expected to look if there were no God.

Finally, I would like to comment on the folly of faith. When faith rules over facts, magical thinking becomes deeply ingrained and warps all areas of life. It produces a frame of mind in which concepts are formulated with deep passion but without the slightest attention paid to the evidence. Nowhere is this more evident than in the US today, where Christians who seek to convert the nation into a theocracy dominate the Republican party.

Blind faith is no way to run a world.

GOOD MINUS GOD: Part 2

Louise M. Antony

(Reprinted from The Stone in The New York Times Opinionator blog, 12/18/2011. The Stone "is a forum for contemporary philosophers on issues both timely and timeless". – Part 1 of this essay appeared in April PIQUE.)

The problem I'm pointing to is an ancient one, discussed by Plato. In his dialogue "Euthyphro", the eponymous character tries to explain his conception of piety to Socrates: "the pious acts", Euthyphro says, are "those which are loved by the gods". But Socrates finds this definition ambiguous, and asks Euthyphro: "Are the pious acts pious because they are loved by the gods, or are the pious acts loved by the gods because they are pious?"

What's the difference? Well, if the first reading is correct, then it's the gods' loving those particular acts that *makes* them count as pious acts, that *grounds* their piousness. "Pious", in this alternative, is just shorthand for "something the gods love". *Whatever* the gods happen to love – bingo! – that's pious. If the gods change their preferences on a whim – and they did, if Homer knew his stuff – then the things that are pious change right along

with them. In contrast, on the second reading, pious acts are presumed to have a distinctive, substantive property in common, a property in virtue of which the gods love them, a property that *explains* why the gods love them.

Translated into contemporary terms, the question Socrates is asking is this: are morally good actions morally good simply *in virtue* of God's favoring them? Or does God favor them because they are—independently of His favoring them—morally good? DCT [Divine Command Theory — the view that what is morally good is constituted by what God commands] picks the first option; it says that it's the mere fact that God favors them that makes morally good things morally good.

Theories that endorse the second option—let's call any such theory a "Divine Independence Theory" (DIT)—contend, on the contrary, that the goodness of an action is a feature that is independent of, and antecedent to God's willing it. God could have commanded either this action or its opposite, but in fact, He commands only the good one.

Both DCT and DIT entail a perfect correspondence between the class of actions God commands and the class of actions that are good (or rather, they do so on the assumption that God is perfectly benevolent). The two theories differ, however, on what accounts for this congruence. DCT says that it is God's command that explains why the good acts are "good" — it becomes true *merely by definition* that God commands "good" actions. "Goodness", in this view, becomes an empty honorific, with no independent content. To say that God chooses the good is like saying that the Prime Meridian is at zero degrees longitude, or that in baseball, three strikes makes an out. DIT, on the other hand, says that it is a substantive property of the acts—their goodness—that explains why God commanded them. Indeed, it says that God's goodness consists in His choosing all and only the good. DIT presumes that we have an independent grasp of moral goodness, and that it is because of that that we can properly appreciate the goodness of God.

DCT is arguably even more radical and bizarre than the Hobbesian nihilism I discussed earlier. On the nihilistic view, there is no pretense that a sovereign's power would generate moral obligation — the view is rather that "morality" is an illusion. But DCT insists both that there is such a thing as moral goodness, and that it is defined by what God commands. This makes for really appalling consequences, from an intuitive, moral point of view.

DCT entails that anything at all could be "good" or "right" or "wrong". If God were to command you to eat your children, then it would be "right" to eat your children. The consequences are also appalling from a religious point of view. If all "moral" means is "commanded by God", then we cannot have what we would otherwise have thought of as moral reasons for obeying Him. We might have prudential reasons for doing so, self-interested reasons for doing so. God is extremely powerful, and so can make us suffer if we disobey Him, but the same can be said of tyrants, and we have no moral obligation (speaking now in ordinary terms) to obey tyrants. (We might even have a moral obligation

to disobey tyrants.) The same goes for worshipping God. We might find it in our interest to flatter or placate such a powerful person, but there could be no way in which God was deserving of praise or tribute.

This is the sense in which I think that it is a more pious position to hold that morality is independent of the existence of God. If the term "good" is not just an empty epithet that we attach to the Creator, who or whatever that turns out to be, then it must be that the facts about what is good are independent of the other facts about God. If "good" is to have normative force, it must be something that we can understand independently of what is commanded by a powerful omnipresent being.

So what about atheism? What I think all this means is that the capacity to be moved by the moral dimension of things has nothing to do with one's theological beliefs. The most reliable allies in any moral struggle will be those who respond to the ethically significant aspects of life, whether or not they conceive these things in religious terms. You do not lose morality by giving up God; neither do you necessarily find it by finding Him.

I want to close by conceding that there are things one loses in giving up God, and they are not insignificant. Most importantly, you lose the guarantee of redemption. Suppose that you do something morally terrible, something for which you cannot make amends, something, perhaps, for which no human being could ever be expected to forgive you. I imagine that the promise made by many religions, that God will forgive you if you are truly sorry, is a thought would that bring enormous comfort and relief.

You cannot have that if you are an atheist. In consequence, you must live your life, and make your choices with the knowledge that every choice you make contributes, in one way or another, to the only value your life can have. Some people think that if atheism were true, human choices would be insignificant. I think just the opposite — they would become surpassingly important.

WHAT ATHEIST GROUPS LEARNED FROM THE CHRISTIAN COALITION

Herb Silverman, President

The Secular Coalition for America

(Reprinted from *The Separationist*, newsletter of the *Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry (SC)*, April, 2012)

Here was an interesting distinction between Christians and secularists: Christians had the same unifying word, but fought over theology; secularists had the same unifying theology, but fought over words.

At least our wars were only verbal.

I give credit to the Christian Coalition. Though I disagreed with everything they stood for, they had a terrific model: put aside minor theological differences, work together on important political issues, and grab media attention. That was their plan to change the culture and make politicians take notice. Their strategy of demonizing atheists and secular humanists, while moving this country

closer to a theocracy, worked all too well. I'm willing to learn from anyone who has something to teach us.

I joined a number of secular organizations in the 1990s because each was working on causes I supported. But these organizations saw themselves as competing with one another for funds from what they viewed to be a fixed pie of donors. The organizations were spending too much time arguing about labels (atheist, agnostic, humanistic, freethinker, etc.) and too little time showing strength in numbers and cooperating on issues that affect all secular Americans. I knew we needed to grow the pie to benefit all these groups and the secular movement as a whole.

There were lessons to be learned from the Christian Coalition and its religious right successors, who now argue less about dogma and cooperate more on political goals: preventing women access to all reproductive health care, promoting that evolution is just a myth and contending that our country was founded as a Christian nation that allows freedom of religion, but not freedom from religion.

The Secular Coalition for America was formed in 2002 to help break down walls and build bridges among atheist and humanist organizations. As a result, we now cooperate on the 95 percent we have in common, rather than argue about the 5 percent that distinguishes us from one another.

The Secular Coalition has grown to eleven national member organizations, and covers the full spectrum of nontheists. Since each member organization has strict limits on lobbying, the Secular Coalition incorporated as a political advocacy group to allow unlimited lobbying on behalf of secular Americans. For too long, our nontheistic community has been considered politically inconsequential. There are over 50 million such Americans, and the Secular Coalition advocates for those millions without god beliefs.

Discrimination still exists against blacks, women, gays, and Jews, but neither as overtly nor permissibly as it once was. Politicians pay attention to these groups because they know these groups have well-organized advocates and constituencies. Now it is our turn to seek that respect.

For too long, our nontheistic constituency has been considered politically inconsequential. We may be the last minority against whom intolerance and discrimination are not only permitted, but also sometimes promoted by political leaders at every level. Improving the public perception of secular Americans is as important to many of us as pursuing a particular political agenda. Politicians think they are being tolerant when they express support for all faiths; instead, we expect to hear them publicly express support for all faiths *and none*, in light of the freedom of conscience for all people have.

We have learned from the Christian Coalition's successes and failures, and we plan to benefit from both. The atheist and humanist community will show its strength in numbers at the Reason Rally [*Ed. note: It did.*]. We want to increase the visibility of, and respect for, nontheistic viewpoints. We want to protect and strengthen the secular character of our government. The Reason Rally, I hope, will be a tipping point to accomplish these goals.

WHY WE LIVE IN NEW YORK #71, #72, & #73

Remember Roy Moore? He's the former chief justice of the *Alabama* Supreme Court who had a 5,000-pound granite sculpture of the Ten Commandments illegally installed in the Montgomery courthouse, then defied a federal order to remove it, all of which caused a state ethics panel to remove him from office in 2003.

Well, he's back. He's just easily won the Republican nomination for his old job, and is the odds-on favorite in the general election in that very Republican state.

His Democratic opponent? One Harry Lyon, who has run for different offices ten times and never won, has been fined for illegally pulling a gun on a neighbor, and once joked that illegal immigrants should be publicly executed. *So, whom to vote for? Well, on one hand ...*

In an attempt to return to the glory days of the 1925 Scopes trial, the *Tennessee* state Senate passed a bill in March that protects teachers who allow students to question and criticize "controversial" scientific theories like evolution.

"Protects teachers"? Yes, so that Bible-blinkered instructors (who, of course, are not allowed to waste class time) can't be prevented from (or chastised or disciplined for) allowing 12-year-old middle-school fundamentalist zombies to waste class time "contradicting" Darwin, the National Academy of Science, the entire worldwide scientific establishment, and 200 years of overwhelming physical evidence for evolution.

The Senate voted 24-8 for SB 893, to allow teachers to help students "understand, analyze, critique and review in an objective manner the scientific strengths and scientific weaknesses of existing scientific theories" like "biological evolution, the chemical origins of life, global warming and human cloning". In other words, any science.

By the way, according to results of the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress, a federal test known as the Nation's Report Card, less than half of U.S. Fourth, Eighth and Twelfth grade students were proficient in science.

We can only wonder why. - JR

But for sheer anti-science lunacy, *Arizona* will not allow itself to be out-crazied by any upstart states. In April, Governor Jan Brewer signed into law a statute outlawing abortion after 20 weeks of pregnancy.

So what's new? Under the new law, the state now says the starting point of the life of a fetus begins on the first day of the mother's last menstrual period, establishing that life begins before that is biologically possible. (The idea, of course, is to reduce the allowable time for a legal abortion - *Damn that Supreme Court!* - by another two weeks.)

Let me simplify: in *Arizona*, life begins about two weeks before a potential mommy and daddy have sex.

So, if conception has actually begun two weeks before Bubba and Cindy Sue actually have sex, and they use a condom to prevent that little "pre-born" homunculus/ovule/egg/whatever-the-hell from joining up with a sperm cell ... isn't that an abortion? - JR

SHSNY CALENDAR: MAY - JULY 2012

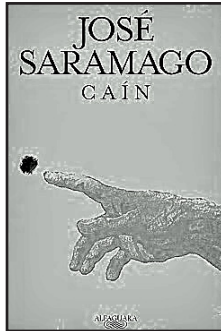
SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURSDAY, MAY 3, 6:30 pm
 in the front room of
THE COMMUNITY CHURCH
OF NEW YORK

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

We'll discuss
CAIN

by Jose Saramago

In this, his last novel, Saramago has daringly reimagined the characters and narratives of the Old Testament in a "cheeky modernist update to a timeworn biblical tale" that



runs from the Garden of Eden, when God realizes he has forgotten to give Adam and Eve the gift of speech, to the moment when Noah's Ark lands on the dry peak of Ararat.

Condemned to wander forever after he kills his brother Abel, Cain makes his way through the world in the company of a personable donkey. He is a witness to and participant in the stories of Isaac and Abraham, the Tower of Babel, Moses and the golden calf, the trials of Job. The rapacious Queen Lilith takes him as her lover.

Again and again, Cain encounters a God whose actions seem callous, cruel, and unjust. He confronts Him, he argues with Him. "And one thing we know for certain," Saramago writes, "is that they continued to argue and are arguing still."

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, JUNE 7, 6:30 pm
 at Community Church of NY
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 tell us that free will is an illusion.

Sam 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.

Paper and e-book editions available.

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

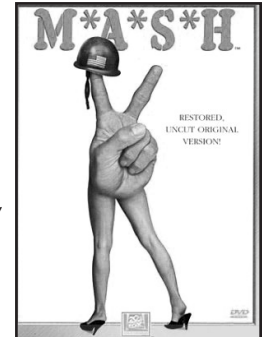
Can there be freedom and free will in a deterministic world? Philosopher Daniel Dennett emphatically answers "yes!", showing how we alone among the animals have evolved minds that give us free will and morality.

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.

MONDAY, MAY 14, 7:00 pm
SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)
"M*A*S*H"

The one-and-only original – and more anti-war, anti-religion, and hard-drinking, pot-smoking rowdy-raunchy than the TV series



could ever hope to be. Set in the 1950-53 Korean "conflict", Robert Altman's satire was really the first mainstream anti-Vietnam War film.

Starring Elliot Gould, Donald Sutherland, Tom Skerrit, Robert Duvall, Sally Kellerman, and Cary Burghoff (the only actor - "Radar" - who crossed over to the TV show), with an Oscar-winning script and score. This is going to be a fun evening - 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.shsnyc.org and at humanism.meetup.com/515; reasonablenewyork.org/ and 212-308-2165

SHSNY CALENDAR: MAY - JULY 2012

BRUNCH!

SUNDAY, MAY 20, 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!

**MONDAY, MAY 7, 12 NOON
CENTER FOR INQUIRY - NYC
presents**

**FREETHOUGHT IN BLACK
HISTORY & CULTURE
Gould Library Auditorium
Bronx Community College
University Ave. & 181 St.**

Explore the roots, progress, legacy, current state, and future of freethought in Black America, with a distinguished panel moderated by Prof. Marc Barnhill.

Co-sponsored by the Bronx Community College Secular Humanist Club, Harlem Humanists, African Americans for Humanism, and Black Atheists of America.

**SUNDAY, MAY 13, 11 a.m.
BROOKLYN SOCIETY FOR
ETHICAL CULTURE
53 Prospect Park West
Platform Address by
HERB SILVERMAN**

The "Candidate Without a Prayer" is the founder and President of the Secular Coalition for America.

GREAT LECTURES ON DVD

WED, MAY 23, 7:00 pm

**THE GOD DELUSION
DEBATE**

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



One year after the publication of Richard Dawkins' best-selling *The God Delusion*, fellow Oxford Professor and Christian theologian John Lennox met Dawkins in Alabama to put his assertions to the test in a clash between two of the greatest minds in the science-religion debate.

The riveting debate was filmed before a sold-out crowd at the University of Alabama-Birmingham and broadcast live to a global audience of over one million.

*Yes, this is a Wednesday
instead of the "usual" Tuesday!
Great Lectures Night is FREE*

**MONDAY, MAY 21, 7:00 pm
CENTER FOR INQUIRY - NYC**

**Voices of Reason:
BENJAMIN RADFORD:
THE TRUTH ABOUT
PSYCHIC DETECTIVES
University Settlement
(Speyer Hall) 184 Eldridge St.
(at Rivington)**

Drawing on a decade of investigations and case studies, Radford will reveal a side to psychic detectives that you won't see on Medium or Larry King Live.

Radford will join in discussion with Massimo Pigliucci, and a reception with wine will follow.

Admission \$5 at the door; paid CFI members and students free.

OTHER REASONABLE NEW YORK EVENTS

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

NY Society for Ethical Culture: Fri., May 4, 7 pm - Ethics in Film: "2001: A Space Odyssey". Popcorn and beer, 6:30. \$5.

Mon., May 21, 1:00-3:00 pm - Ethics in Film, Documentaries: "Forgiving Dr. Mengele" (2006). \$5.

Dinner & Philosophy Now: Mon, May 7, 7 pm, Bamiyan, 358 Third (at 26 St): "How to be a Philosopher". \$2 entry fee, plus dinner.

CFI-NYC. Mon., May 14, 10 pm. Googie's Lounge (Upstairs at the Living Room), 154 Ludlow St. "Skeptics on the Mic Karaoke".

New York Philosophy. Tue, May 22, Irish Rogue, 356 W. 44 St.

"Numb", discuss world-weariness. **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. Info: 212-802-7427.

May 15: *Problems of Women in the Workplace, 1930-1940*

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

HUMANISM 101: EVOLUTION

John Rafferty

Giles Kelly, a dear and valued friend (and one of our Washington, D.C., subscribers), who is exploring the pathways of his own beliefs, recently emailed me “to lean on you for secular humanist answers to three questions”. Always happy to spread the gospel, I interleaved my responses, and offer them here, as well.

Giles: How does the humanist explain the development of today’s complicated human physical form rising from the first single cell of life? Would humanists just say it is by “natural selection”?

John: The explanation of “today’s complicated human physical form rising from the first single cell of life” is not a philosophical/humanist question – it’s science. It doesn’t need any more explanation than arithmetic. How life got started we haven’t completely figured out yet – how life developed is no longer a question.

“Natural selection” is/was a convenient term to illustrate how the process works. Everybody in the mid-19th century understood biological change through man-made selection – farmers had been doing it with crops for thousands of years, as had breeders with horses, cattle, and dogs. The key to understanding evolution is adaptation. Farmers and breeders force plants and animals to change, adapting them to the farmer/breeders’ own needs by, say, cross-pollinating different types of corn or wheat or whatever to get bigger or richer yields, or force-mating the biggest and most muscular horses to get strong plow-pullers. Evolution isn’t forced, and it has no bigger-better-smarter goals – it simply rewards successful adaptation with more life.

Think of a simple multi-celled organism, say, that thrives in a damp environment and gets its nutrients from the water. Now change that environment (for whatever reason) to less damp. There’s less water, fewer nutrients, which means the environment will support fewer of the organisms. Lots of the little buggers will die off without ever reproducing, but the ones who – for whatever reason(s) – can adapt to/live in the dryer environment will be more likely to live long enough to reproduce, and they will pass along their can-live-in-less-water genes to the next generation. Eventually, that strand of organism will be the norm in that environment – perhaps while their cousins in the unchanged tidal pool a mile down the shore haven’t changed at all.

Real-life example: Small birds – starlings or wrens or something – in the midlands cities of England changed color in the 19th century, and changed back again in the 20th. When 19th C industrial soot covered the buildings on which the birds nested and gathered, succeeding generations of the birds, which had been sort-of brick colored, became darker and darker. Why? Because those that were closer to soot-colored were harder for predators to spot, and so stood a better chance of living long enough to procreate. When environmental consciousness took over in the mid-20th century and the buildings got cleaned, gradually lighter and lighter generations of birds, their coloration blending in with the buildings, evolved – adapting once again to their

environment. Or as Darwin noticed of the finches in the Galapagos, all related, but subtly different from island to island, having adapted to the different environments of the different islands.

By the way, don’t get hung up on this concept of evolution “rising” up some ladder of creation. One of the big mistakes in teaching evolution has been the image of the “tree”, with one-celled organisms in the tree-trunk bottom, and branches reaching up and up until, finally, wow! Us. Nonsense. A better image is a bush, with branches going up, down, and every-which-way. There are species of plants (some spores and fungi) and even animal life (the tiny garbage processors that live in our guts, for instance) that have not changed in literally millions of years – because they are perfectly adapted to their environments.

One of the idiotic arguments of some of the unsophisticated creationists is, “If humans evolved from monkeys, why are there still monkeys? Ha, answer that!” Aside from the fact that we didn’t evolve from monkeys, there are “still” monkeys because monkeys are doing just fine in their evolutionary niche and their environment (although we’re doing a good job of destroying that).

Giles: What is the humanist response be to a proposed compromise solution with fundamentalists agreeing that, “Evolution is the Work of God”?

John: We know that evolution works; why confound that straightforward science with an unprovable (and improbable) complication, i.e., “god”? Dragging “god” into the narrative is no compromise, it is a prime example of the “god of the gaps” argument. Each time science advances our understanding of our world (the earth revolves around the sun, not the other way around) and our lives (we, and every other living thing on the planet, have evolved), the theists announce that what we still don’t know (how did the first organic molecule happen?) is the handiwork of God. No proof. No evidence. Just what in formal logic is called the Argument from Ignorance: “You can’t explain something, therefore my contention is true.” Neil deGrasse Tyson recently said that religion occupies an ever-shrinking area of human experience, and he’s right. Should we also “compromise” with the flat-Earthers? Sometimes, Giles, there are *not* two sides to a question.

By the way, it’s not fundamentalists who are willing to compromise, but the “liberal” Christian theologians (whose churches are shrinking daily). Fundamentalists believe that the universe was created on an October afternoon in 4004 BCE, and that all living creatures were created, exactly as they are today, during the first week thereafter – except women, of course, who were an afterthought in the divine plan. For fundamentalists, there are no compromises with the Word of God as written in the Bible.

Giles: Does secular humanism accept the possibility that natural forces exist that have not yet been discovered, but are only intuitively thought to exist?

John: Of course there “are more things in heaven and Earth than are dream’t of in [our] philosophy”. Newton couldn’t have conceived of relativity; Darwin knew nothing

of genes; Einstein mistrusted quantum physics. Fifty years ago no one had conceived of a possible eleven dimensions; of the interchangeability of matter and energy; of infinitesimally small things like “strings” perhaps being the basic building blocks of well, everything; of “dark energy” possibly making up most of this universe, and of the possibility of this being only one of an infinity of universes – a multiverse. (If so, did Jesus die for the Gorkians on Theta236X, too?)

What’s around the corner? Probably even greater wonders – all of which we will study and analyze and hope to understand. Not believe – *understand*.

If by “intuitively thought to exist” you mean imagined – imagined as in the precursor to investigation, to reason, to certain knowledge, then sure. Imagination is hugely, supremely important, in science as well as art; it is the beginning of knowledge and of delight.

But if by “intuitively thought to exist” you mean belief without evidence – faith – then no. To those who tell me that I have to keep an open mind about chakras and auras and chi, about ESP and UFOs and cosmic energy, about homeopathy and the I Ching and “the wisdom of the ancients”, along with Carl Sagan I advise them not to keep so open a mind that their brains fall out.

Thanks, Giles, for this exercise.

POLITICS, ODORS, AND SOAP

Nicholas D. Kristof

(Reprinted from The New York Times, 3/21/2012)

Conservatives may not like liberals, but they seem to understand them. In contrast, many liberals find conservative voters not just wrong but also bewildering.

One academic study asked 2,000 Americans to fill out questionnaires about moral questions. In some cases, they were asked to fill them out as they thought a “typical liberal” or a “typical conservative” would respond. Moderates and conservatives were adept at guessing how liberals would answer questions. Liberals, especially those who described themselves as “very liberal,” were least able to put themselves in the minds of their adversaries and guess how conservatives would answer.

Now a fascinating new book comes along that, to a liberal like myself, helps demystify the right – and illuminates the kind of messaging that might connect with voters of all stripes. *The Righteous Mind*, by Jonathan Haidt, a University of Virginia psychology professor, argues that, for liberals, morality is largely a matter of three values: caring for the weak, fairness and liberty. Conservatives share those concerns (although they think of fairness and liberty differently) and add three others: loyalty, respect for authority and sanctity.

Those latter values bind groups together with a shared respect for symbols and institutions such as the flag or the military. They are a reminder that human moral judgments are often about far more than just helping others. Some of Haidt’s most interesting material is his examination of taboos. His team asked research subjects pesky questions. What

would they think of a brother and sister who experimented with incest, while using birth control? Or of a family that, after their pet dog was run over, ate it for dinner? Most respondents were appalled but often had trouble articulating why; we find these examples instinctively disturbing even if no one is harmed. (One lesson of the book: If you see Haidt approaching with a clipboard, run!)

Of course, political debates aren’t built on the consumption of roadkill. But they do often revolve around this broader moral code. This year’s Republican primaries have been a kaleidoscope of loyalty, authority and sanctity issues – such as whether church-affiliated institutions can refuse to cover birth control in health insurance policies – and that’s perhaps why people like me have found the primaries so crazy.

Another way of putting it is this: Americans speak about values in six languages, from care to sanctity. Conservatives speak all six, but liberals are fluent in only three. And some (me included) mostly use just one, care for victims.

“Moral psychology can help to explain why the Democratic Party has had so much difficulty connecting with voters,” writes Haidt, a former liberal who says he became a centrist while writing the book.

In recent years, there has been growing research into the roots of political ideologies, and they seem to go deep. Adults who consider themselves liberals were said decades earlier by their nursery-school teachers to be curious, verbal novelty seekers but not very neat or obedient.

Some research suggests that conservatives are particularly attuned to threats, with a greater startle reflex when they hear loud noises. Conservatives also secrete more skin moisture when they see disgusting images, such as a person eating worms. Liberals feel disgust, too, but a bit less. Anything that prods us to think of disgust or cleanliness also seems to have at least a temporary effect on our politics. It pushes our sanctity buttons and makes us more conservative.

A University of Toronto study found that if people were asked to wash their hands with soap and water before filling out a questionnaire, they become more moralistic about issues like drug use and pornography. Researchers found that interviewees on Stanford’s campus offered harsher, more moralistic views after “fart spray” had been released in the area. At Cornell University, students answered questions in more conservative ways when they were simply near a hand sanitizer station.

Our ideologies shape much more than our politics. We even seek pets who reflect our moral outlook. Researchers at YourMorals.org found that liberals prefer dogs that are gentle but not subservient, while conservatives seek dogs that are loyal and obedient. In short, moral and political judgments are complex and contradictory, shaped by a panoply of values, personalities – maybe even smells.

Little of this is a conscious or intellectual process. Indeed, Haidt cites research that a higher I.Q. doesn’t lead people to think through their moral positions in a more balanced, open way (although they are more eloquent in

defending those positions). There's even extensive research finding that professors of moral philosophy are no more moral than other scholars. And do you know what kind of books are disproportionately stolen from libraries?

Books on ethics.

THE REPUBLICAN PARTY'S PROBLEM WITH ... UM, US Steve Chapman

(Reprinted from Reason magazine, 4/5/2012, and forwarded by Remo Cosentino)

One day, in a sardonic jibe at some conservative who was piously claiming the mantle of heaven, I told my wife, "Don't forget, God's a Republican." Without missing a beat, she replied, "But his son's a Democrat."

Between the Old Testament Jehovah and the New Testament Jesus, a Christian can find support for almost any ideological perspective. American religion used to have room for many different political views, and American politics used to feature religious people across the entire ideological spectrum.

At one time, mainstream denominations were just as likely to tilt to the left as to the right. Back during the 1960s, as a teenage Christian conservative, I was continually annoyed by antiwar ministers and priests who admired Che Guevara. At the height of the Cold War, U.S. Catholic bishops called for nuclear disarmament. In 1983, I went to a Lutheran service expecting a sermon commemorating the 500th anniversary of the birth of Martin Luther. Instead, I heard a denunciation of President Ronald Reagan's policy in El Salvador.

Experiences like that drove me from church to church in search of a nonpolitical version of Protestantism. They eventually also helped drive me from religion entirely.

Today, something similar is happening, but the push is coming from the right, not the left.

It may have started in 1979, when Southern Baptist minister Jerry Falwell founded the Moral Majority to mobilize evangelicals behind conservative political causes. Reagan and other Republican leaders were more than happy to make use of religious sentiments to attract votes. It looked like a perfect match: Evangelicals gained political influence, and the GOP acquired a loyal bloc of supporters.

But today, it looks increasingly like a bad bargain that dramatizes the risks of interweaving politics and religion. As these believers became more vocal and visible in the Republican Party, they sent an unmistakable message: If you're not a conservative, you're not a Christian.

So a lot of people who are not conservative but once would have gone to worship services have decided they don't belong. They see the GOP claiming to represent the will of God and run the other way.

"Each year, fewer and fewer Americans identify as secular Republicans or religious Democrats", write political scientists David E. Campbell and Robert D. Putnam in the current issue of *Foreign Affairs*. "Formerly religious

Democrats (except among African Americans) have drifted away from church, and formerly unobservant Republicans have found religion."

That may sound like a reasonable trade for conservative Christians. Who needs skeptics and scoffers anyway? But it has some side effects they may come to regret. One is that they are losing leverage and consideration in one of the two major parties. President Barack Obama's proposal to make religiously affiliated universities and hospitals provide contraceptive coverage to employees might not have occurred if religious folk were more numerous in the Democratic ranks.

Another consequence is that making the Almighty synonymous with political conservatism breeds contempt for faith. Young people now are far more likely alienated from religion than their forebears were. In the 1970s, only 12 percent of people in their 20s disavowed any religious affiliation. Today, 33 percent do.

The change has a lot to do with the fact that "millennials" tend to be liberal or libertarian on social issues. When they hear Republicans invoking the Bible to justify banning same-sex marriage, many deduce that Republicans are too intolerant to bear—and so is the Bible.

The people with no religious affiliation lean strongly Democratic. In 2008, 75 percent voted for Obama, compared to 45 percent of Protestants and 54 percent of Catholics. Even in 2010, a Republican year, 68 percent of them voted Democratic for Congress.

The Republican practice of spurning "none/other" voters (basically, all who don't identify themselves as Christians) could turn out to be a fatal error. The Georgetown University blog Nineteen Sixty-four says they are now so numerous that "Obama could lose both the Catholic and Protestant vote to the Republican nominee—even lose badly—and still win re-election."

As the nonreligious proliferate, the GOP may find it has foreclosed any chance of winning their votes. What it hears from them comes straight from the old country song:

"God may forgive you, but I won't.

Yes, Jesus loves you, but I don't.

*They don't have to live with you,
and neither do I."*

"NOIR" MORAL REALISM FOR TODAY'S YOUNG IDEALISTS

David Brooks

(Reprinted from "Sam Spade At Starbucks", in The New York Times, 4/12/2012)

If you attend a certain sort of conference, hang out at a certain sort of coffee shop or visit a certain sort of university, you've probably run into some of these wonderful young people who are doing good. Typically, they've spent a year studying abroad. They've traveled in the poorer regions of the world. Now they have devoted themselves to a purpose larger than self.

Often they are bursting with enthusiasm for some

social entrepreneurship project: making a cheap water-purification system, starting a company that will empower Rwandan women by selling their crafts in boutiques around the world. These people are refreshingly uncynical. Their hip service ethos is setting the moral tone for the age. Idealistic and uplifting, their worldview is spread by enlightened advertising campaigns, from Bennetton years ago to everything Apple has ever done.

It's hard not to feel inspired by all these idealists, but their service religion does have some shortcomings. In the first place, many of these social entrepreneurs think they can evade politics. They have little faith in the political process and believe that real change happens on the ground beneath it. That's a delusion. You can cram all the nongovernmental organizations you want into a country, but if there is no rule of law and if the ruling class is predatory then your achievements won't add up to much.

Furthermore, important issues always spark disagreement. Unless there is a healthy political process to resolve disputes, the ensuing hatred and conflict will destroy everything the altruists are trying to build.

There's little social progress without political progress. Unfortunately, many of today's young activists are really good at thinking locally and globally, but not as good at thinking nationally and regionally.

Second, the prevailing service religion underestimates the problem of disorder. Many of the activists talk as if the world can be healed if we could only insert more care, compassion and resources into it.

History is not kind to this assumption. Most poverty and suffering — whether in a country, a family or a person — flows from disorganization. A stable social order is an artificial accomplishment, the result of an accumulation of habits, hectoring, moral stricture and physical coercion. Once order is dissolved, it takes hard measures to restore it. Yet one rarely hears social entrepreneurs talk about professional policing, honest courts or strict standards of behavior; it's more uplifting to talk about microloans and sustainable agriculture.

In short, there's only so much good you can do unless you are willing to confront corruption, venality and disorder head-on. So if I could, presumptuously, recommend a reading list to help these activists fill in the gaps in the prevailing service ethos, I'd start with the novels of Dashiell Hammett or Raymond Chandler, or at least the movies based on them. The noir heroes like Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon* served as models for a generation of Americans, and they put the focus squarely on venality, corruption and disorder and how you should behave in the face of it.

A noir hero is a moral realist. He assumes that everybody is dappled with virtue and vice, especially himself. He makes no social-class distinction and only provisional moral distinctions between the private eyes like himself and the criminals he pursues. The assumption in a Hammett book is that the good guy has a spotty past, does spotty things and that the private eye and the criminal are two sides to the same personality. He (or she — the women in these stories

follow the same code) adopts a layered personality. He hardens himself on the outside in order to protect whatever is left of the finer self within.

He is reticent, allergic to self-righteousness and appears unfeeling, but he is motivated by a disillusioned sense of honor. The world often rewards the wrong things, but each job comes with obligations and even if everything is decaying you should still take pride in your work. Under the cynical mask, there is still a basic sense of good order, that crime should be punished and bad behavior shouldn't go uncorrected. He knows he's not going to be uplifted by his work; that to tackle the hard jobs he'll have to risk coarsening himself, but he doggedly plows ahead.

This worldview had a huge influence as a generation confronted crime, corruption, fascism and communism. I'm not sure I can see today's social entrepreneurs wearing fedoras and trench coats. But noir's moral realism would be a nice supplement to today's prevailing ethos. It would fold some hardheadedness in with today's service mentality. It would focus attention on the core issues: order and rule of law. And it would be necessary. Contemporary Washington, not to mention parts of the developing world, may be less seedy than the cities in the noir stories, but they are equally laced with self-deception and self-dealing.

GENESIS: THE CASE FOR BIRTH CONTROL

Art Harris

In my copy of the Bible (I use it for reference and the hot parts) Genesis 2:7 describes how God created Adam and clearly states, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul".

Those who read the Bible in a literal sense choose to ignore that description and claim that a legal medical abortion is the killing of a baby.

An abortion or miscarriage within the first two trimesters destroys not a baby, but forming cells. All human fetuses follow the two-billion-year pattern of evolution — early in development they even have gills like our fishy ancestors — and don't even begin to look human until the third trimester. Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny.

A fetus in the womb receives all sustenance from its mother and does not breathe until it has exited the womb; therefore its life doesn't begin until it becomes a breathing (*remember Genesis*) baby.

Women have been inducing abortions probably ever since ancient wheat farmers (probably women) discovered ergot, a wheat mold that induces labor, and other herbs that cause miscarriage. But since in humans, for many different reasons, three out of five pregnancies are naturally and spontaneously aborted, God has always been — still is — the world's leading abortionist.

A THOUGHT FOR OUR TIMES

Greece is collapsing, the Iranians are getting aggressive, and Rome is in disarray. Welcome back to 430 BCE.

A THOUGHT FOR A FINE MAY MORNING ...

Richard Dawkins

After sleeping through a hundred million centuries we have finally opened our eyes on a sumptuous planet, sparkling with color, bountiful with life. Within decades we must close our eyes again. Isn't it a noble, and enlightened way of spending our brief time in the sun, to work at understanding the universe and how we have come to wake up in it? This is how I answer when I am asked—as I am surprisingly often—why I bother to get up in the mornings.

... WITH WHICH GEORGE CLOONEY AGREES

I don't believe in heaven or hell. I don't know if I believe in God. All I know is that as an individual, I won't allow this life—the only thing I know to exist—to be wasted.

... AS DID ALBERT CAMUS

If there is a sin against life, it consists perhaps not so much in despairing of life as in hoping for another life and in eluding the implacable grandeur of this life.

FINALLY, A THOUGHT FOR THE “EXPERTS” WHO TOOK US INTO “PREVENTIVE WAR” IN IRAQ AND ARE NOW PROMOTING WAR AGAINST IRAN

“**P**reventive war” was an invention of Hitler. I would not even listen to anyone seriously that came and talked about such a thing. – *Dwight D. Eisenhower*

THE WORST ILLITERATE

Bertolt Brecht

(Forwarded by Bob Murtha)

The worst illiterate is the political illiterate. He hears nothing, sees nothing, takes no part in political life. He doesn't seem to know that the cost of living, the price of beans, of flour, of rent, of medicines, all depend on political decisions. He even prides himself on his political ignorance, sticks out his chest and says he hates politics. He doesn't know, the imbecile, that from his political non-participation comes the prostitute, the abandoned child, the robber and, worst of all, corrupt officials, the lackeys of exploitative multinational corporations.

READER: GO THOU AND DO LIKEWISE

To the Editor: One problem that may arise for organizations promoting rationality is that their supporters and patrons may lack the fervor of their counterparts in the worlds of “faith” and “religious piety”. Having said that, I think I can contribute more than the \$40 membership fee and will be putting another \$100 in the mail today.

The fundamentalists may have their Rick Santorums, but I believe that they are becoming a marginalized, albeit zealous, faction of the American public. And with the horrors of theocratic regimes becoming more and more evident in societies around the world, there is no more important time than now to support secular humanism. – *Robert Stein*
Ed: Check happily received, Bob. Thank you.

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morality mentor
Sam Spade as

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each other? (Hint: soap)
conservatives understand
Why can't liberals and

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and Science (2598)
David Hume (301)
Happy Birthday,

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