

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

October, 2012

Only five weeks left in the quadrennial circus, so let's have an Election Issue. Sure, your mind's made up, but pages 8-10 are worth looking into. This month we also tip our hat to compassionate bikers, thumb our nose at "outraged" Muslims, tweak silly Buddhists, condemn local Catholics, play with our money, nominate an Anti-Dumbth, welcome back Touchdown Jesus (and his new BFF, Ronald McDonald) and invite one and all to a hundred-year lunch. But first, sad news. – JR

WE LOST ONE OF THE BEST OF OUR OWN IN BENGHAZI

(Excerpted from "Glen Doherty, Security Officer Killed In Libya Attack, Fought Religious Proselytizing In Military", on *HuffingtonPost.com*, 9/13/2012, forwarded by Paul Kurtz.)

Glen Doherty, 42, a former Navy SEAL, was one of the four diplomats who died September 11. ... Doherty's sister, Katie Quigley, told *The Boston Globe* that her brother "was on security detail and he was protecting the ambassador and also helping the wounded" when he was killed.



Although U.S. officials now suspect the attack was a planned terrorist operation and not a spontaneous reaction to the anti-Islamic video—itsself now thought to be the work of a Coptic Christian in California—Doherty himself had a history of opposing religious intolerance.

Doherty was an "extremely active" member of the advisory board of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF), an advocacy group that fights inappropriate religious proselytizing inside the armed forces, said founder Mikey Weinstein, a retired Air Force lawyer. "He confirmed for me how deeply entrenched fundamentalist Christianity is in the DoD Spec Ops world of the SEALs, Green Berets, Delta Force, Army Rangers USAF ... and contractors like the former Blackwater." Doherty "helped me on many MRFF client cases to facilitate assistance to armed forces members abused horribly by fundamentalist Christian proselytizing."

According to Doherty's bio on the MRFF website, he was a veteran of multiple combat deployments during his nine years as a "highly decorated" Navy SEAL. He had

attended the 18 Delta Special Forces Combat Medical School and the SEAL sniper course. He was the co-author of *The 21st Century Sniper*, a guide to the latest advances in clandestine shooting.

Doherty left the Navy in 2005 and, according to MRFF, "spent four years working as a security and intelligence specialist for US Government Agencies conducting operations in high threat regions", including Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan and Afghanistan. ...

Weinstein said his "irreplaceable" friend was passionate about maintaining the wall of separation between the military and religion. "Glen told me he took criticism from both current and former SEALs for being a part of MRFF [but] also received much support for doing so from other former and current SEALs", Weinstein said. "He was also a close friend to me and my family. He will be sorely missed by us all. No dry eyes out here."

ON THE FREEDOM TO OFFEND AN IMAGINARY GOD

Sam Harris

(Excerpted from www.samharris.org/blog, 9/19/2012)

The latest wave of Muslim hysteria and violence has now spread to over twenty countries. The walls of our embassies and consulates have been breached, their precincts abandoned to triumphant mobs, and many people have been murdered—all in response to an unwatchable Internet video titled "Innocence of Muslims". Whether over a film, a cartoon, a novel, a beauty pageant, or an inauspiciously named teddy bear, the coming eruption of pious rage is now as predictable as the dawn. This is already an old and boring story about old, boring, and deadly ideas. And I fear it will be with us for the rest of our lives.

Our panic and moral confusion were at first sublimated

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SHSNY, P.O. Box 7661, F.D.R. Station, New York, NY 10150-7661 / 212-308-2165 / www.shsny.org

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

in attacks upon the hapless Governor Romney. I am no fan of Romney's, and I would find the prospect of his presidency risible if it were not so depressing, but he did accurately detect the first bleats of fear in the Obama administration's reaction to this crisis. Romney got the timing of events wrong—confusing, as many did, a statement made by the U.S. Embassy in Cairo for an official government response to the murder of Americans in Libya. But the truth is that the White House struck the same note of apology, disavowing the offending speech while claiming to protect free speech in principle. It may seem a small detail, given the heat of the moment—but so is a quivering lip.

Our government followed the path of appeasement further by attempting to silence the irrepressible crackpot Pastor Terry Jones, who had left off burning copies of the Qur'an just long enough to promote the film. The administration also requested that Google remove "Innocence of Muslims" from its servers. These maneuvers attest to one of two psychological and diplomatic realities: either our government is unwilling to address the problem at hand, or the problem is so vast and terrifying that we have decided to placate the barbarians at the gate.

The contagion of moral cowardice followed its usual course, wherein liberal journalists and pundits began to reconsider our most basic freedoms in light of the sadomasochistic fury known as "religious sensitivity" among Muslims. Contributors to *The New York Times* and NPR spoke of the need to find a balance between free speech and freedom of religion—as though the latter could possibly be infringed by a YouTube video. As predictable as Muslim bullying has become, the moral confusion of secular liberals appears to be part of the same clockwork.

Consider what is actually happening: Some percentage of the world's Muslims—Five percent? Fifteen? Fifty? It's not yet clear—is demanding that all *non-Muslims* conform to the strictures of Islamic law. And where they do not immediately resort to violence in their protests, they threaten it. Carrying a sign that reads "Behead Those Who Insult the Prophet" may still count as an example of peaceful protest, but it is also an assurance that infidel blood would be shed if the imbecile holding the placard only had more power. This grotesque promise is, of course, fulfilled in nearly every Muslim society. To make a film like "Innocence of Muslims" anywhere in the Middle East would be as sure a method of suicide as the laws of physics allow.

What exactly was in the film? Who made it? What were their motives? Was Muhammad really depicted? Was that a Qur'an burning, or some other book? Questions of this kind are obscene. Here is where the line must be drawn and defended without apology: We are free to burn the Qur'an or any other book, and to criticize Muhammad or any other human being. *Let no one forget it.*

At moments like this, we inevitably hear—from people who don't know what it's like to believe in paradise—that religion is just a way of channeling popular unrest; the true source of the problem can be found in the history of western aggression in the region; it is our policies, rather

than our freedoms, that they hate. I believe that the future of liberalism—and much else—depends on our overcoming this ruinous self-deception. Religion only works as a pretext for political violence because many millions of people actually believe what they say they believe: that imaginary crimes like blasphemy and apostasy are killing offenses.

Most secular liberals think that all religions are the same, and they consider any suggestion to the contrary a sign of bigotry. Somehow, this article of faith survives daily disconfirmation. Our language is largely to blame for this. As I have pointed out on many occasions, "religion" is a term like "sports": Some sports are peaceful but spectacularly dangerous ("free solo" rock climbing, street luge); some are safer but synonymous with violence (boxing, mixed martial arts); and some entail little more exertion or risk of serious injury than standing in the shower (bowling, badminton). To speak of "sports" as a generic activity makes it impossible to discuss what athletes actually do, or the physical attributes required to do it. What do all sports have in common, apart from breathing? Not much. The term "religion" is scarcely more useful. ...

[*Ed: Here Mr. Harris goes into a longish critique of Mormonism, which you can read at the website. I think it's off the point here.*]

The point, however, is that I can say all these things about Mormonism, and disparage Joseph Smith to my heart's content, without fearing that I will be murdered for it. Secular liberals ignore this distinction at every opportunity and to everyone's peril. Take a moment to reflect upon the existence of the musical *The Book of Mormon*. Now imagine the security precautions that would be required to stage a similar production about Islam. The project is unimaginable—not only in Beirut, Baghdad, or Jerusalem, but in New York City.

The freedom to think out loud on certain topics, without fear of being hounded into hiding or killed, *has already been lost*. And the only forces on earth that can recover it are strong, secular governments that will face down charges of blasphemy with scorn. No apologies necessary. Muslims must learn that if they make belligerent and fanatical claims upon the tolerance of free societies, they will meet the limits of that tolerance. And Governor Romney, though he is wrong about almost everything under the sun (including, very likely, the sun), is surely right to believe that it is time our government delivered this message without blinking.

Do not believe in anything simply because you have heard it. Do not believe in anything simply because it is spoken and rumored by many. Do not believe in anything simply because it is found written in your religious books. Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders. Do not believe in traditions only because they have been handed down for many generations. But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it.

— *Gautama Siddharta (the Buddha)*

JUST IN CASE YOU STILL THINK BUDDHISM IS “THE RATIONAL RELIGION”

James Hookway

(Excerpted from “Thai Group Says Steve Jobs Reincarnated as Warrior-Philosopher, in The Wall Street Journal Southeast Asia, 8/31/2012.)

When Apple Inc. founder Steve Jobs died after a long fight with cancer last year, software engineer Tony Tseung sent an email to a Buddhist group in Thailand to find out what happened to his old boss now that he’s no longer of this world.

This month, Mr. Tseung received his answer. Mr. Jobs has been reincarnated as a celestial warrior-philosopher, the Dhammakaya group said in a special television broadcast, and he’s living in a mystical glass palace hovering above his old office at Apple’s Cupertino, California headquarters. ...

Some of Mr. Jobs’s admirers in Malaysia later gathered on a tropical island and in a religious ceremony each took a bite from an apple before flinging the fruit into the sea in a bid to speed up his reincarnation.

Now, Phra Chaibul Dhammajayo, abbot at the Dhammakaya Temple just north of Bangkok, claims Mr. Jobs has already been reborn.

“After Steve Jobs passed away, he was reincarnated as a divine being with a special knowledge and appreciation for science and the arts”, the Dhammakaya leader said in the first of a series of sermons beamed to hundreds of thousands of the group’s followers around the world. ...

Apple’s mantra of using technology to bring people closer together also dovetails neatly with the teachings of the orange-robed monks. They preach a worldly, tech-savvy form of Buddhism which instructs worshipers that it isn’t a sin to grow rich, as long as they contribute a chunk of their earnings to the Dhammakaya cause.

An Apple spokeswoman declined to comment.

READERS RESPOND TO SEPTEMBER PIQUE

To the Editor: Much to contemplate in September PIQUE, to say the least! Great stuff, and of course, provocative. Progressive religion/liberal congregations – really? Some interesting points brought up in Robinson article (“Six Reasons We Can’t Change the Future Without Progressive Religion”) but seems to ignore various realities. None of the major religions – all patriarchal – have ever put women on an equal footing (some Protestant progress notwithstanding). Armed with their toxic, irrational dogmas, they have always been – and remain – a major force behind denying the equal humanity and dignity of those of us in the LGBT community.

Separately, I’ll want to remember that Appleman paragraph (“Precious, Beautiful, Priceless: Us”). I will discuss the Humanism 101 course with you shortly.

– Mike Weiss

To the Editor: Good stuff. Thanks.

– Steve Yothment, President, Atlanta Freethought Society

To the Editor: TERRIFIC!! – Gretchen Robinson, Attleboro, MA

To the Editor: Re: Bill Chapman (“On Atheist Strategy”) and Sara Robinson articles, I am in general agreement with Chapman that the atheist/humanist movement, such as it is, has bigger fish to fry than, for example, engaging in protests over an obscure street in Brooklyn renamed “Seven in Heaven” in honor of firefighters who died on 9/11; restaurant discounts for people with church bulletins; Christmas displays on public property, the occasional singing of Christmas Carols in public schools, and the like. I would also add that I regard the litigation over the so-called “Ground Zero Cross” to be extremely counterproductive. Like it or not, this crossbeam was part of the remnant of the WTC and did provide inspiration to many of the rescue and debris removal workers. It has a legitimate place in the Ground Zero Museum and I do not feel that my civil rights as an atheist are in any way jeopardized by its presence. To regard it as a violation of the establishment clause is utter nonsense.

Picayune protests and fist-waving over such trifles play right into the hands of the Religious Reich, which highlights such cases as examples of how atheists and secular humanists are unpatriotic, rude, intolerant and, as Chapman aptly puts it, “another goddamned, militant, touchy minority that exudes a sense of entitlement and a victim mentality” (just like the Religious Reich, come to think of it).

As for Sara Robinson, I nominate this of hers for the 2012 Dumbth Award:

“Churches and temples have always been the first and most natural places Americans turn to when it’s time to have serious cultural conversations about value and meaning about the future they desire. If we’re serious about changing the national story and bending the future in our preferred direction, then that’s where we need to be.”

Her first assertion is demonstrably false, as “serious cultural conversations” are not what we normally can expect to find in houses of worship, either now or in the past. Yes, there were churches that did speak out against slavery, but there were far more that defended or ignored it. And true, there were churches that supported civil rights, but there were many that preached white superiority and segregation or were silent on the issue. Robinson seems to be unaware of the importance of such institutions as town hall meetings, political parties and organizations, newspapers and periodicals, and private organizations such as the ACLU and the NAACP in mobilizing Americans to engage in “serious cultural conversations”. Churches and temples have historically been places of indoctrination and regression.

As for her claim that atheists need to join progressive religious groups in order to “bend the future in our preferred direction”, in my view Robinson grossly overstates the significance of these groups as the “primary promoter of progressive values throughout the culture” and “America’s

most credible and aggressive front-line defender of non-market value against the onslaught of capitalism and greed". So much for academia, labor unions and organizations, left-wing newspapers and magazines, the film and TV industry, literature, the theatre, the New Deal, the Progressive Party, the Socialist Labor Party, etc.

In case Robinson is unaware, humanists already account for about 70 percent of the membership in the Unitarian-Universalist Association, and 100 percent of the membership in the various Ethical Culture societies and Humanistic Judaism congregations, without having any demonstrable impact on the nation's "serious cultural conversations".

What humanists can expect to achieve by joining other more religiously oriented "progressive" religious groups (none of which Robinson deigns to identify), is unclear, although I suspect that openly non-religious people would be as welcome in these groups as ants at a picnic. I say let these "progressive religious groups" reach out to us, instead of the reverse. We "secular progressives" are over 10 percent of the nation's population and it is high time we mobilized as secularists and not as accommodationists with supernaturalists who may share some of our goals.

– DennisMiddlebrooks

To the Editor: Thanks for lobbing us a nice, fat softball and inviting us to hit it out of the park. There is much to take issue with in the Sara Robinson article. Probably some common ground as well – mainly when she voices support for the progressive viewpoint. Just taking one paragraph almost at random, let me lay out her assertions and my responses:

Second, religious narratives center people in the long arc of history, telling them where they came from, who they are, what they are capable of, and what kind of future is possible.

Reading and educating ourselves can also tell us these things. If anything, basing our understanding of the big picture on the myths of a desert tribe 2000 years ago would be my last choice. She continues ...

History does this, too; but religion does it at a deeper, mythic level that gives these stories extra emotional and cognitive resonance.

Neil deGrasse Tyson, Carl Sagan, and Richard Dawkins have adequately described and explained how the universe is enough to inspire awe, without needing to add any supernatural stuff. More ...

For most of human history, in fact, the task of imagining a different future and giving people the inspiration and courage to reach for it has been the primary role of religious prophets. (So has the job of warning the people that they're wandering into grave error or betraying their own values, and must change their ways or face disaster.)

The fact that we looked to religious seers for most of human history is a pretty weak reason to go on doing it. We also subjugated women and had slaves for a good deal of human history. The biggest error we are wandering into now is that we are over-populating this planet. Are religious prophets taking the lead in helping people to see this? Finally ...

Religion is the native home of the prophetic voice – the voice

that calls people to transformative change. Throughout America's history, our most evocative political prophets – both Roosevelts, all the Kennedys, Martin Luther King, Cesar Chavez, Van Jones, Barack Obama – have invariably been people who spent a lot of time in the pews, learning to speak the kind of language that calls us to a better place.

For most of these fine leaders, their religion was not their defining or main focus. I venture that JFK, then, and Obama, now attended church mostly to forestall their critics and avoid being labeled as atheists. But it's getting better. At least Obama gave a shout-out to us non-believers in that rousing speech he gave in Springfield, Illinois, just before he took office. – Brian Lemaire

To the Editor: A line of reasoning, however well-conceived and presented, can be rendered suspect by a single ill-considered statement. Bill Chapman's article, "On Atheist Strategy", is an unfortunate example. After presenting a strongly worded and reasonable case for easing up on unnecessarily extreme and non-productive anti-religion action, especially around Christmas, he then says "there are better times to complain such as when Israelis spend US tax dollars harassing and killing people to assert their claim to the West Bank, a claim which makes no sense unless you believe in their religion".

This regrettable statement, totally devoid of reality and smacking of a static mind-set, casts doubt on his judgment, and questions whether his viewpoints deserve serious consideration. – Chic Schissell

Editor's Note: *Mea culpa. I should have challenged or excised Bill Chapman's line about Israel's West Bank policy. It doesn't matter whether I (or any reader) agree with him or not, the comment went over the line in terms of pure politics in PIQUE. So much so that it generated a (forgive me, Al) intemperate response from long-time and well-respected member Al Henick, the first third (and non-offensive) of which, along with Al's closing paragraph is printed below.*

The proper place to vent on the subject? Bill asked for comments to his blog: <http://tinyurl.com/bljc149>, and at Movie Night September 17 repeated that he would welcome debate there. Go to it, Al.

To the Editor You asked for comments on the article by Bill Chapman in September PIQUE, and he is certainly deserving of them, but not for the reasons you might think. I agree with most of his feelings about the war on Christmas, but when he gets into politics, he is starting a far more significant war. To my knowledge, PIQUE is not a political forum, essentially, but mainly an arena for free thinking, including atheism, agnosticism, and other forms of religion-related subjects. However, it is also supposed to be "humanist" and as such, various political issues cannot be avoided. An example is the current presidential campaign, and great worldly dilemmas such as the Mideast.

(Ed: *Here's where I cut the next several paragraphs.)*

If you think that a political treatise such as the above

has no place in PIQUE, please remember that SHSNY is, of course, a "humanist" organization, and that the world's treatment of Israel today is one of the most anti-humanist movements ever encountered.

And by the way, anyone who wants to celebrate Christmas in the freest and most unrestricted fashion can do so in Israel, the only country in the Mideast with complete freedom of religion. – *Al Henick*

ONE SMALL SUBVERSIVE ACT FOR SECULARISM

John Rafferty

Greta Christina has an article in the September/October issue of *The Humanist* in which she describes a chancy but successful encounter she had over a small subversive act she does often: she inks out "In God We Trust" on her paper currency.

"If you don't mind my asking", the woman in the coffee shop asked, "why did you do that?"

Ms. Christina, who had been afraid of a confrontation, saw an opportunity instead, and said:

"Because it shouldn't be on the money. Whether you believe in God or not, the government shouldn't be taking sides on the issue. I don't happen to believe in God – it's okay with me if you do, you certainly have that right. But the government shouldn't be telling me that I'm supposed to believe in God. It shouldn't be telling any of us what to think about God. If we want religious freedom for everyone, the government should stay out of that question.

"And she thought about it for a moment, and nodded, and said, 'Yeah, I guess I can see that.'"

Ms. Christina's point is that a little confrontation about our atheist and/or humanist views is necessary, but best leavened with diplomacy. She took a chance, politely, and made a small difference in someone else's thinking. That's a great lesson for all of us.

And I now routinely ink "God" off all my paper money, knowing that as the bills circulate, the message will get across a few times. It's a small, maybe even petty act of subversion, but it's fun, believe me.

I recommend it, just for the fun of it.

NOTICE: *We had a wealth of material (including the preceding letters) for this issue, so I had to do some cutting. Part 2 of Greta Christina's "Eight Atheist and Agnostic Scientists Who Changed the World" will run next month, I promise.* – JR

LARRY SHAW'S NEW PODCAST: TUESDAYS AT EIGHT

SHSNY member Larry Shaw debuted his podcast radio program on September 25. "It's my answer to right wing radio", he says, and promises that "it will be controversial. We'll have live call-ins and Facebook messages, and future shows will have guests."

Give it a try. The website is Talkingalternative.com and the show's name is "Exposing the Nonsense".

HUMANISM 101

FIRST MEETING/DISCUSSION: OCTOBER 29

John Rafferty

Humanism 101 is a new humanist study group, and our first monthly meeting and discussion (there will be six in 2012-13) will be held Monday, October 29.

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

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

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

Each meeting focuses on one book-length assigned text (an optional second for the motivated), and on short online materials in preparation for the discussions. As we proceed, of course, you may suggest additional reading.

I hope to see you October 29. Just show up at CCNY, books and/or notes in hand, ready to go to work. – JR

Meeting/Discussion #1

Monday, October 29, 2012

6:30-8:30 p.m. at

Community Church of New York

28 East 35 Street (red door)

in the 1st floor rear Lounge

Subject: The History of Freethought

Required Reading:

Online at www.americanhumanist.org/Humanism

Fred Edwards: *The Saga of Freethought and Its Pioneers*

Fred Edwards: *What is Humanism?*

Book(s)

Julian Huxley: *Religion without Revelation*

and/or

Susan Jacoby: *Freethinkers*

THIS MONTH'S BIBLE STUDY LESSON

"If a woman have conceived seed, and born a man child: then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean. ...

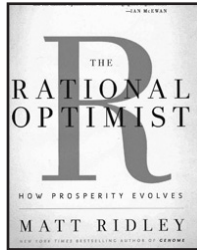
But if she bear a maid child, then she shall be unclean two weeks ... " – *Leviticus 12:2 - 12:5*

Secular multiculturalists are not the enemies of religion. We are its defenders. Unless each religion is kept in check, it threatens the others. ... We are the nursery school teachers who make sure all the children can play in a safe area and not hurt each other. – *Ian Dunt, politics.co.uk*

SHSNY CALENDAR: OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2012

SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURSDAY, OCT. 4, 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
THE RATIONAL OPTIMIST:
How Prosperity Evolves
by Matt Ridley

For two hundred years the pessimists have dominated public discourse, insisting that things are going to get worse. But in fact, life is getting better – and at an accelerating rate. Food availability, income, and life span are up; disease, child mortality, and violence are down all across the globe. Africa is following Asia out of poverty; the Internet, the mobile phone, and container shipping are enriching people's lives as never before. Best-selling author Matt Ridley explains why.



Paperback and Kindle available.

PLANNING AHEAD

The *usual* SHSNY schedule 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: 4th Wednesday
 at Stone Creek Lounge.

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

Plus

Humanism 101: Last Monday
 (See Page 5 for details)

SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURSDAY, NOV. 1, 6:30 pm
 at Community Church of NY
28 East 35 Street (Park-Mad)
AMERICAN GRACE:
How Religion Divides
and Unites Us
by Robert D. Putnam
and David E. Campbell

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

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

Paperback and Kindle available.

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

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

Paperback

MONDAY, OCT. 8, 7:00 pm
SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)
"THE CANDIDATE"

A behind-the-scenes political movie just right for this season. Robert Redford is a political idealist talked into running for the Senate with a promise of absolute integrity in the campaign, since he's bound to lose. But when victory becomes possible, we watch how the machine – ad men, agents, pollsters, and media manipulators (Peter Boyle is a standout) – take over the campaign. The Oscar-winning screenplay is as timely in the 2012 campaign as it was in 1972.



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

BRUNCH!

SUNDAY, OCT. 21, 12 NOON
Gather for our
MONTHLY CASUAL BRUNCH
GET-TOGETHER
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!
October brunch: 10/21

SHSNY CALENDAR: OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2012

GREAT LECTURES ON DVD
WED, OCT. 24, 7:00 pm
PARTICLES TO PEOPLE:

*The Laws of Nature and
the Meaning of Life*

Dr. Sean Carroll

Stone Creek Bar & Lounge

Human beings do not stand outside of nature; we are a part of it. Our knowledge of science allows us to draw strong conclusions about the milieu in which we live. There is no telekinesis, astrology or life after death. Taking the laws of nature seriously opens a vista of possibility, freeing us from outmoded ideas about what it means to be human.

NOTE: Yes, this is a rescheduling of the August event, when the DVD didn't show up.

Great Lectures Night is FREE

DON'T MISS THE FUN!

Thursday, Oct 18, 7-10 pm
Cellar 58

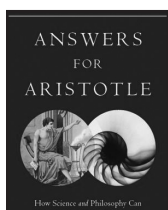
58 Second Ave (3 - 4 Sts)
Launch Party & Signing for
Massimo Pigliucci's book,
Answers for Aristotle: How
Science and Philosophy Can
Lead Us to a More Meaningful
Life

*"... a remarkable guide to discovering
what really matters and why."*

A hundred or more humanists and rationalists from every freethought group in NYC turned out at the same venue a couple of years ago

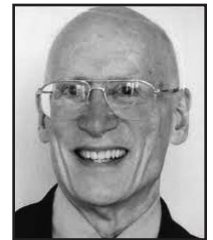


for Massimo's last book (he sold out), and had a great time in this good-time bar. Don't miss this one.



SHSNY FREETHOUGHT DAY CELEBRATION
BRUNCH & LECTURE/CONVERSATION
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 7, at 12 Noon, at
PETE'S TAVERN, 129 EAST 18 St. (Irving Place)
with guest speaker
DR. CHARLES DEBROVNER
Past President, The Humanist Institute
Co-Founder/President, Global Bioethics Initiative
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Tuesdays, 6 pm - *Socrates Cafe*

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Googie's Lounge (Upstairs at the
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[http://www.newyorkphilosophy.](http://www.newyorkphilosophy.me/events/54751312/)

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OBAMA AND ROMNEY ANSWER

14 SCIENCE QUESTIONS

The Editors of Scientific American

(Excerpted from the website: www.scientificamerican.com)

Scientific American partnered with grassroots organization ScienceDebate.org earlier this summer to encourage the two main presidential candidates – Barack Obama and Mitt Romney – to answer 14 questions on some of the biggest scientific and technological challenges facing the nation.

President Obama and Governor Romney have now answered these Top American Science Questions, which you can read below. Editors will grade the candidates' answers for SA's November issue, which will be available on the iPad and in print in mid-October.

Here are the questions:

1. Innovation and the Economy. Science and technology have been responsible for over half of the growth of the U.S. economy since WWII, when the federal government first prioritized peacetime science mobilization. But several recent reports question America's continued leadership in these vital areas. What policies will best ensure that America remains a world leader in innovation?

2. Climate Change. The Earth's climate is changing and there is concern about the potentially adverse effects of these changes on life on the planet. What is your position on cap-and-trade, carbon taxes, and other policies proposed to address global climate change—and what steps can we take to improve our ability to tackle challenges like climate change that cross national boundaries?

3. Research and the Future. Federally funded research has helped to produce America's major postwar economies and to ensure our national security, but today the UK, Singapore, China, and Korea are making competitive investments in research. Given that the next Congress will face spending constraints, what priority would you give to investment in research in your upcoming budgets?

4. Pandemics and Biosecurity. Recent experiments show how Avian flu may become transmissible among mammals. In an era of constant and rapid international travel, what steps should the United States take to protect our population from emerging diseases, global pandemics and/or deliberate biological attacks?

5. Education. Increasingly, the global economy is driven by science, technology, engineering and math, but a recent comparison of 15-year-olds in 65 countries found that average science scores among U.S. students ranked 23rd, while average U.S. math scores ranked 31st. In your view, why have American students fallen behind over the last three decades, and what role should the federal government play to better prepare students of all ages for the science and technology-driven global economy?

6. Energy. Many policymakers and scientists say energy security and sustainability are major problems facing the United States this century. What policies would

you support to meet the demand for energy while ensuring an economically and environmentally sustainable future?

7. Food. Thanks to science and technology, the United States has the world's most productive and diverse agricultural sector, yet many Americans are increasingly concerned about the health and safety of our food. The use of hormones, antibiotics and pesticides, as well as animal diseases and even terrorism pose risks. What steps would you take to ensure the health, safety and productivity of America's food supply?

8. Fresh Water. Less than one percent of the world's water is liquid fresh water, and scientific studies suggest that a majority of U.S. and global fresh water is now at risk because of increasing consumption, evaporation and pollution. What steps, if any, should the federal government take to secure clean, abundant fresh water for all Americans?

9. The Internet. The Internet plays a central role in both our economy and our society. What role, if any, should the federal government play in managing the Internet to ensure its robust social, scientific, and economic role?

10. Ocean Health. Scientists estimate that 75 percent of the world's fisheries are in serious decline, habitats like coral reefs are threatened, and large areas of ocean and coastlines are polluted. What role should the federal government play domestically and through foreign policy to protect the environmental health and economic vitality of the oceans?

11. Science in Public Policy. We live in an era when science and technology affect every aspect of life and society, and so must be included in well-informed public policy decisions. How will you ensure that policy and regulatory decisions are fully informed by the best available scientific and technical information, and that the public is able to evaluate the basis of these policy decisions?

12. Space. The United States is currently in a major discussion over our national goals in space. What should America's space exploration and utilization goals be in the 21st century and what steps should the government take to help achieve them?

13. Critical Natural Resources. Supply shortages of natural resources affect economic growth, quality of life, and national security; for example China currently produces 97 percent of rare earth elements needed for advanced electronics. What steps should the federal government take to ensure the quality and availability of critical natural resources?

14. Vaccination and public health. Vaccination campaigns against preventable diseases such as measles, polio and whooping cough depend on widespread participation to be effective, but in some communities vaccination rates have fallen off sharply. What actions would you support to enforce vaccinations in the interest of public health, and in what circumstances should exemptions be allowed?

The two campaigns have already answered the questions, but SA's editors have not yet evaluated those answers. PIQUE readers can preview the answers, before SA's evaluation, at www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=obama-romney-science-debate&WT.mc_id=SA_WR_20120905

The Election Issue:

12 RULES FOR MIXING RELIGION AND POLITICS

Peter Montgomery

(Excerpted from the People for the American Way website, www.pfaw.org, and forwarded by John Wagner)

(Ed. Note: The full, much longer and more detailed article can be read at: www.pfaw.org/media-centr/publications/12-rules-mixing-religion-and-politics)

ON THE ROLE OF RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS BELIEFS ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND POLICYMAKING

1. There can be no religious test for public office, nor a religious test for participation in the political process.

The Constitution specifies that “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States”. That declaration represents the clearest statement of the intentions of the Constitution’s authors to prevent the government from engaging in religious coercion and to ensure that all Americans are welcome to engage in politics whether or not they share the religious beliefs of the majority.

2. While it is appropriate to discuss the moral dimensions of public policy issues, religious doctrine alone is not an acceptable basis for government policy.

Because government represents all the people, not just those who share the faith of particular government officials, and because the First Amendment prevents the government from establishing religion, it is inappropriate for government policy to be based solely on religious doctrine. Debates over who speaks for God or who has a superior interpretation of scripture should not form the basis for policymaking.

3. Public officials have every right to express their personal religious beliefs, and no right to use the power of their office to proselytize or coerce others to adopt any religious beliefs or practices.

Public officials are free to talk about their faith, the role it plays in their lives, and how it influences their approach to issues, but must not use the power of their office to proselytize or impose particular religious beliefs or practices on others.

ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE INSTITUTIONS OF CHURCH AND STATE

4. Government institutions must show neither official approval nor disapproval of religion, or favor one religion over another.

Government should not take sides when it comes to religion, either to favor one particular religion or to favor religious people generally over nonreligious people. This fundamental principle finds its legal roots in the First Amendment to the Constitution. Former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor stated the principle this way in a 1984 case:

The Establishment Clause prohibits government from making adherence to a religion in any way relevant to a person’s standing in the political community. Government can run afoul of that prohibition in two principal ways. One is excessive entanglement with religious institutions ... The second and more

direct infringement is government endorsement or disapproval of religion. Endorsement sends a message to non-adherents that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community, and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the political community. Disapproval sends the opposite message.

5. Religious institutions may cooperate with government in programs supporting the common good, but public funds must not be used to support proselytizing, religious education, worship or discrimination.

Religious organizations are vital partners with governments in providing many services, including disaster relief, feeding the hungry and housing the homeless, helping millions of needy Americans and individuals around the globe. Some would argue that the principle of church-state separation prohibits any cooperation between government and religious organizations. But People For the American Way has recognized that “faith-based organizations, with the support of federal funds, make an invaluable contribution to our society through the provision of much-needed social services.”

That cooperation, however, must not violate the Constitution’s religious liberty provisions, including the church-state separation. No one’s access to government services should depend on their having to participate in religious activities. Nor should such religious charities allow discrimination to be supported with public funds.

6. Government has a right to demand that religious institutions and individuals comply with reasonable regulation and social policy

The First Amendment’s twin religious liberty clauses provide that, generally speaking, government must neither promote nor interfere with religion. Of course, these principles can come into tension when religious beliefs and institutions are affected by generally applicable laws, such as the tax code, parking regulations, and pollution control laws. Sorting out conflicting constitutional claims regarding the establishment and free expression clauses is often complex. This is an area of law with which Congress and the federal courts have wrestled over the years.

7. Public officials cannot use their religious beliefs as a rationale for failing to uphold the duties of their office.

As individuals, public officials and public employees enjoy the same religious liberty protections as all Americans. It is appropriate, and required by law, for their agencies to make reasonable accommodation for employees’ religious beliefs such as time off to celebrate religious holidays.

However, a public official has no right to cite religious beliefs as a reason for failing to uphold the duties of their office or for discriminating against some constituents in carrying out their official duties.

ON DISCUSSION OF RELIGION IN THE POLITICAL ARENA

8. Political discourse should respect religious pluralism.

Peaceful and respectful religious pluralism is a defining characteristic of the United States of America.

Public officials and others should reject the divisive and historically inaccurate claim that the U.S. is or was founded to be a Christian nation. They should reject equally any suggestions that it is inappropriate for people with strong faith commitments or people with no faith commitment to be engaged in the political process.

In the current political climate, this rule is frequently violated.

9. Political figures and the media should not treat religious constituencies as monolithic; political and religious leaders should not claim to speak for an entire religious community on public policy issues.

Reporters, politicians, and activists from across the political spectrum are often guilty of treating religious communities as monolithic. Some liberals may wrongly portray all evangelical Christians as anti-gay zealots. Conservatives may claim that they speak for the “Christian” position on an issue, or even more broadly that they represent “people of faith” in the political arena. America’s religious landscape is extraordinarily diverse, so no one can credibly claim to speak for all “people of faith” or even all people of a particular faith.

Journalists have a responsibility not to simply accept or repeat, but rather to challenge, any leader’s claims to speak on behalf of an entire faith tradition.

10. Politicians and media should not equate orthodoxy with authenticity.

Journalists and others should avoid falling into the trap of equating religious orthodoxy with religious authenticity. When religious voices are part of a public conversation, it is wrong, for example, to assume or imply that Orthodox Jews are somehow more religiously authentic than Reform Jews, or that “liberal” Christians are somehow less authentically Christian than those who claim to follow a literal interpretation of scripture.

11. Religious and political leaders should not “cry wolf” about religious persecution.

Too many people in American political life make irresponsible claims about religious persecution and threats to religious liberty. The *American Patriot’s Bible*, for example, declares “Our freedom to serve God and to promote the gospel in our land is disintegrating. We are engaged in a great spiritual battle that threatens our country, our families, and our lives.” Some conservatives go so far as to claim that America is on the verge of criminalizing Christianity. During debate over federal hate crimes legislation in 2007 and 2009, some Religious Right leaders declared that the law’s passage would lead to preachers being dragged from their pulpits and thrown into jail if they preached what they believe the Bible says about homosexuality.

12. Religion should not be used as a political club.

Most Americans are accustomed to a significant level of religious language in the public arena. Brian Taylor of James Madison University says, “the candidate talking the most about religion in the general campaign won in every cycle from 1976–2008.” Candidates should feel free to talk about their faith, but should also be free to choose not to

talk about the details of their religious beliefs. Candidates should not denigrate the faith of others.

Americans who support religious freedom – and the pillars of church-state separation and free exercise of religion that uphold religious liberty – are inheritors of principles enshrined by our founders in the Constitution and Bill of Rights. These principles become ever more essential to the health of our civic discourse and the strength of our communities as we continue to become a more diverse and pluralistic nation.

NOT ON SOME ALABAMA CROSSROADS, RIGHT HERE IN THE DIOCESE OF NEW YORK

John Rafferty

Americans United for Separation of Church and State on September 7 asked the IRS to investigate a New York City church that endorsed Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney in its church bulletin.

The Church of Saint Catherine of Siena’s September 2 bulletin contains a column by the Rev. John Farren, a member of the pastoral staff. In direct violation of federal rules governing tax-exempt organizations (like churches and SHSNY), the essay reprints an appeal by several former U.S. ambassadors to the Vatican calling on Catholics to vote for Romney, and concludes:

“We urge our fellow Catholics, and indeed all people of good will, to join with us in this full-hearted effort to elect Governor Mitt Romney as the next President of the United States.”

Saint Catherine’s does not pay a nickel to New York City in property taxes on its East 68 Street real estate, worth multi-millions, and because of the church’s blanket federal tax exemption, the printing and mailing of that church bulletin was paid for with *your* tax dollars.

But what’s really infuriating is that in the laughably unlikely event that the IRS will ever actually do something about this crime (“Obama vs. Church” – *New York Post*), Rev. Farren will be advised, I’m sure, to not do it again.

Learn more at <http://au.org/tags/st-catherine-siena>

“We establish no religion in this country. We command no worship. We mandate no belief, nor will we ever. Church and state are and must remain separate.” – Ronald Reagan

MORALITY CLASH: LEFT vs. RIGHT—Part 3

Walter Balcerak

Why are good people divided by religion and politics? “The answer is not ... because some people are good and others are evil”, psychologist Jonathan Haidt writes in *The Righteous Mind*. “Instead the explanation is that our minds were *designed for groupish righteousness*” (emphasis added).

Those last words summarize Haidt’s analysis. According to him, we’re *designed* by evolution, not a deity. We’re designed for *righteousness* because the morality encoded in our genes fosters group cohesion. We’re

designed for *groupish* righteousness because we tend to act morally within our own group and with hostility toward other groups.

In U.S. politics, that conflict is waged mainly between liberals and conservatives. Indeed, in recent years it has grown so extreme that Congress is virtually paralyzed. The reason for such polarization, Haidt believes, is differing moral perspectives. He divides righteousness into six values, each of which evolved out of our need to tame selfish impulses in order to create successful societies. Those values are liberty, caring, fairness, loyalty, authority, and sanctity.

He says the first three are especially important to liberals. Liberty, for liberals, means freedom from oppression; for conservatives it is freedom from government encroachment. Caring, for liberals, extends to vulnerable people worldwide; for conservatives it is localized. Fairness, for liberals, implies equality; for conservatives it means that people's rewards should be based on their contributions. Liberals tend to question the last three values—loyalty, authority, and sanctity—but those values play a central role in conservative beliefs. Although there's overlap, conservatives usually employ all six values, Haidt asserts, while liberals focus primarily on the first three.

Haidt started out as a liberal, but he moved to the center after deciding that conservative values are needed to create a stable society. He reached this conclusion because conservatives "believe that people need external structures or constraints in order to behave well, cooperate, and thrive. These external constraints include laws, institutions, customs, traditions, nations, and religions."

Haidt stresses that both liberal and conservative viewpoints are needed. He quotes John Stuart Mill: "A party of order or stability, and a party of progress or reform, are both necessary elements of a healthy state of political life."

A number of Haidt's conclusions are controversial. For example, he says that liberalism and conservatism are genetically determined. But a glance at the red and blue states on a U.S. map suggests it may be more geographic than genetic. The central difficulty is this: If conservatism provides a better overall formula for a healthy society than liberalism does, what accounts for the outstanding success of the left-leaning Nordic countries of Europe? Despite high taxes and pervasive governments, citizens of these stable, secular societies live in vibrant democracies, enjoy cradle-to-grave security and, studies show, are some of the most satisfied people in the world.

The Righteous Mind is full of fascinating information about evolutionary and moral psychology. Taken with a liberal dose of skepticism, it is definitely worth reading.

JESUS CHRIST ON A BIKE!

Martine Reed

We were driving north in Massachusetts on an early September Saturday morning and wondered why there were so many more motorcycles than usual on the road. The next issue of *The Berkshire Eagle* cleared up

the mystery.

A young soldier, killed in Afghanistan, was buried in his home town of North Adams that day, but a few days before the funeral, the hate-mongers of the Kansas-based Westboro Baptist Church had announced their intention to picket the funeral with their "God Hates Fags" signs and insane contention that every soldier killed on active duty is God's punishment on the U.S. for tolerating homosexuality.

Having heard on the Internet of the bigots' intention, the Patriot Guard Riders motorcycle club called on its members to travel to North Adams to protect the mourners. Some 200 riders from six Eastern states showed up to shield the family and friends of the dead soldier from the threats and insults of the Baptists, and the protesters never came.

Who would have thought that a bunch of rough bikers would demonstrate more loving charity and altruism than a so-called Christian church?

RONALD McDONALD TAKES AN ILLEGAL HIT FROM "TOUCHDOWN JESUS"

(As reported in *The New York Post*, and *frigginloon.wordpress.com*, 9/1/2012, and forwarded by Richard Milner.)

Long-time readers will remember the report ("*Statue of Jesus Destroyed by Act of God*", *PIQUE*, July, 2010) of the six-story-tall statue of Jesus that stood beside Interstate 75 near Cincinnati, and was a local tourist attraction until it was struck by lightning and destroyed by the ensuing fire.

Because it depicted Jesus from with the waist up, with his arms raised like a football referee, it was popularly known as "Touchdown Jesus".

Well, somebody paid to have the silly plastic foam and fiberglass thing rebuilt. But while it was being trucked to the Solid Rock Church in Monroe the driver of the flatbed decided he really needed a Big Mac. He tried to pull his rig into a McDonald's drive-thru, but one of Jesus' arms snared a huge statue of the Ronald McDonald clown, and both fictitious characters got wedged between the drive-through window and the McDonaldland kiddie park. Stuck.

One of the McDonalds' staff told reporters, "It was the loudest, craziest, most disturbing thing I have ever seen. One minute I'm typing an order into the computer, the next minute there is a thunderous noise, the building shakes, and the face of Jesus is pressed staring at me through my drive thru window. I'm going to have nightmares."

"I know I should have just parked and gone inside," the trucker said. "But I thought I was going to make it. I just had this feeling that through Him all things are possible."

Two weeks later, nobody has figured out how to unstick Jesus ... without, you know ... again.



**MY NOMINEE FOR ANTI-DUMBTH OF THE YEAR:
BILL NYE, "THE SCIENCE GUY"**

David Rafferty

"I say to the grownups, if you want to deny evolution and live in your world, in your world that's completely inconsistent with everything we observe in the universe, that's fine, but don't make your kids do it because we need them.

"We need scientifically literate voters and taxpayers for the future. We need people that can – we need engineers that can build stuff, solve problems."

SECONDING THE NOMINATION

We're not out of money. We've stopped taxing billionaires and corporations, and we're funding war-preparation so generously that we're sparking a global arms race that will eventually generate some enemies with which to justify the war preparation . . . which will make sense to students who were never taught to put events into chronological order.

Funding teachers doesn't destroy our environment, erode our civil liberties, hollow out our economy, antagonize the world, or kill anyone. – *Davis Swanson*

The tax which will be paid for the purpose of education is not more than the thousandth part of what will be paid to kings, priests, and nobles who will rise up among us if we leave the people in ignorance. – *Thomas Jefferson*

**IF THERE WAS AN AFTERLIFE,
WHOM WOULD YOU INVITE TO LUNCH?**

John Rafferty

The recent deaths of some public people I have admired set me to musing about the afterlife – in which I certainly do not believe. *But if it did ...* Who, among all the billions who have populated the earth, would I want to hang out with in that fantasy eternity? And what to do, how to spend the time when time stretches on forever?

Lunch, I decided. Three-star cuisine in an outdoor setting, say in the soft afternoon shade of the linden trees at *Le Bagatelle* in the Bois de Boulogne. Or maybe at a lobster shack on the water in Bar Harbor in Maine that I remember fondly, where the clams are still pulsing, the breeze has the tang of salt, and the beer is icy cold. Definitely, lunch.

With conversation. What three tablemates could keep me entertained, enlightened, intrigued, surprised, during a hundred-year afternoon in Paradise? Why three? Because of the sage advice of M.F.K. Fisher – who knew a few things about food – that for the best conversation at table: no more than four diners/drinkers/talkers.

So, my fellow and sororal fantasists, who would be *your* guests for years of conversation in Eternity? Send your guest list – no more than three! – to editor@shsny.org, along with any explanation of your choices and/or your topic(s) of conversation. Maximum 100 words, please.

My tablemates? Christopher Hitchens, Gore Vidal, and George Carlin.

**Freethought Day Brunch
at Pete's – Order Now!**

**Let's Do (Eternal) Lunch
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**Honoring One of Our Own
Page 1**

**The Election Issue
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