

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

November, 2014

As we lurch into the Hallogivingmas season, let's pause to consider ourselves: Are atheists sexist, liberals Islamophilic and Americans warmongers? Should human needs trump animal rights, or religious qualms the facts of evolution? How about real estate over democracy? Herein we consider consciousness, atheism's pope, religion's Answer Wheel, humanist chaplains, and North Carolina's clueless governor. But first, a 501(c)3 non-recommendation in the upcoming election. – JR

AN ELECTION NON-ENDORSEMENT

John Rafferty

(Based on and excerpted from "Cuomo Calls for A 'Faith-Based Office' in State Government", by Jillian Jorgensen, in The New York Observer, 10/09/2014).

As a 501(c)3 tax-exempt entity, SHSNY is prohibited by law from making political endorsements and/or campaigning for or against any political candidate. The same rules that fundamentalist Christian churches across the country are flouting apply to us, too.

Fair enough, but we can report the news.

As reported in the October 9 edition of *The New York Observer* (and nowhere else that I am aware of), New York Governor Andrew Cuomo told a gathering of Baptist leaders at the Mt. Neboh Baptist Church in Harlem that he would "look to create a 'faith-based office' in state government if re-elected to a second term in Albany".

Governor Cuomo didn't spell out the details, but his campaign later said that "an 'Office of Faith-Based Services' ... would be part of the governor's new State Nonprofit Coordinating Unit, and would help connect faith-based groups with grant opportunities [*i.e., be granted taxpayer money - Ed.*] to work with government agencies to get resources [*more money*], and connect them with the Empire State Development Corporation to encourage the development of faith-based businesses [*some of which will certainly discriminate in hiring and insurance coverage, using even more taxpayer money, in direct contravention of the letter and the spirit of the First Amendment.*]"

Humanists, rationalists, atheists, agnostics and other freethinkers in New York State are apprised.

ATHEISTS SHOW THEIR SEXIST SIDE

Katha Pollitt

(Reprinted from The Nation, 10/13/2014, forwarded by Martine Reed)

Here's a great way to make a movement: have your most famous and powerful public figures obsess over Henry Higgins's famous question, "Why can't a woman be more like a man?" Why aren't they more into critical thinking, argument, logic? more rational? Why do they accuse a man of sexual harassment when he's just trying to chat them up in an elevator at 4 in the morning?

Why do they get drunk and then accuse men of rape? Then, having alienated a huge number of actual and potential members, to whom you sound arrogant, vain, sexist and clueless, look around and wonder, Gee, where are the women? They must be even less rational than we thought!

Atheism is having a moment. Rigid, reactionary Christianity may

have captured the Republican Party, but it's turned off millions. According to Pew, some 20 percent of Americans have no religious affiliation, including 32 percent of those 18 to 29—there are more "nones" than there are white evangelicals. True, only 2.4 percent describe themselves as atheists (up from 1.6 in 2007), but that still means there are more self-identified atheists than there are Jews, Muslims or Mormons. It's the perfect time to put our best godless foot forward—to connect with other progressive movements, and to put out the welcome mat for all those millions of new-made unbelievers. And that means looking in the mirror in order to broaden a movement that has historically been white, male, middle-class and culturally rather

WE HAVE A NEW WEBSITE

It's a beaut, more helpful, informative, useful than ever. Check it out at the same old address – www.shsny.org – and see if your picture is on the Membership page.

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Articles published in PIQUE are archived in www.shsny.org. They may be reprinted, in full or in part, in other newsletters. SHSNY is an Affiliated Local Group of the Council for Secular Humanism, a Charter Chapter of the American Humanist Association, and an Affiliate Member of Atheist Alliance International.

narrow.

But that would be way too, um, rational. Instead, organized atheism is having a sexist tantrum. As Mark Oppenheimer recently described on BuzzFeed, women who say they have been sexually harassed—or, in one case, raped—at conferences by powerful older men have been mocked, told to be quiet, and dismissed as sluts and liars. When Rebecca Watson, who blogs as Skepchick, expressed annoyance after a man accosted her in an elevator late at night at the 2011 World Atheist Convention in Dublin, Richard Dawkins wrote a parody letter, “Dear Muslima”, contrasting the liberty of Western women with the oppression of women under Islam. Sexual harassment: not as bad as female genital mutilation. (Just so you know, I would not appreciate a come-on in an elevator either. Alone, enclosed space, stranger, late night. My anxiety level rises just thinking about it.) At the 2013 Women in Secularism conference, Ron Lindsay, CEO of the Center for Inquiry, gave what was regarded as a condescending lecture to the women in attendance, accusing them of feminist bullying. (After a huge outcry, he apologized. That was good.)

At the grassroots level, women who speak up against harassment or sexism in the movement have been the target of disgusting attacks online, the sort of vicious obscenity and violent threats notoriously visited upon Anita Sarkeesian and other women in the gaming and tech worlds. If a recipient becomes angry or upset, that just proves she was weak and crazy to begin with. Let me tell you, I’ve seen a tiny sample of the missives directed at Melody Hensley, executive director of the Center for Inquiry-DC, and I can see why she suffers from PTSD. “I receive harassment all day long every day on social media. I also receive threats daily. I have had dozens of videos made about me, harassing me,” she says. “Everything I write online is compiled by my harassers. Even though I know the Internet is public, it’s eerie being watched every moment. I have had people call my home and tell me that they were going to kill me.”

I don’t think it’s healthy for the secular movements to be so focused on a handful of male stars, but here is where some firm leadership might be useful. Instead, Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris talk as if their obnoxious fanboys were all that stood between the values of the Enlightenment and the barbarous darkness of feminist fascism. And they’re happy to make common cause against feminists with whoever’s available. As Dawkins tweeted on September 7, “The ‘Big Sister is Watching You’ Thought Police hate @CHSommers’ Factual Feminism, and you can see why.” That’s the same Christina Hoff Sommers who has a mutual admiration society with noted Enlightenment philosopher Rush Limbaugh. If she’s spoken up against the misogyny and willful ignorance of the Christian right, I’ve missed it.

In July, Dawkins and Ophelia Benson, who blogs at Butterflies and Wheels and is not just smart but wise, signed a joint statement calling for civility and reasonable discourse instead of threats and harassment. Three days later, Dawkins was giving Twitter a lesson in logic: “Date rape is bad. Stranger rape at knifepoint is worse. If you think that’s an

endorsement of date rape, go away and learn how to think.” Dawkins’s Twitter feed is a hilarious, ongoing train wreck, [tweeting] that it’s “immoral” not to abort a fetus with Down syndrome and told women, “If you want to be in a position to testify and jail a man, don’t get drunk.”

Alas, the ability to take such instruction is in good part something Sam Harris thinks women sadly lack. “There’s something about that critical posture that is to some degree intrinsically male and more attractive to guys than to women,” said the bestselling author of *The End of Faith*. “The atheist variable just has this—it doesn’t obviously have this nurturing, coherence-building extra estrogen vibe that you would want by default if you wanted to attract as many women as men.” It seems to me, judging from recent events, that atheist men are the fragile flowers here—they, not women, are the ones wilting under criticism. Perhaps they can’t stand it that women are withholding that “extra estrogen vibe” that used to make conferences so much fun. (Amanda Marcotte, of the steel-trap mind, has a fine time slapping Harris around at Pandagon. Remind me never to get into a fight with her.)

Why would women join a movement led by sexists and populated by trolls? If this is atheism, I’m becoming a Catholic.

AND SOME GOOD OL’-FASHIONED SEXISM FROM EXACTLY WHERE YOU’D EXPECT IT

Lura Klawson

(Excerpted from *Daily Kos* 9/25/2014)

The “keeping it classy” Fox News chore wheel has apparently spun from perennial favorite *Fox & Friends* to *The Five*, with some toally freaking hilarious sexist jokes about bombing.

It all started with one of the show’s female hosts having a little girl power moment over a woman leading a team of UAE bombers over Syria. Because *whoo*, extra humiliation: “I hope that hurt extra bad ... because in some Arab countries, women can’t even drive.” Then the men got started.

“After she bombed it, she couldn’t park it.”

“Would that be considered boobs on the ground?”

Wow, guys. Way to prove that no woman is ever immune to the particular sexism of the 12-year-old boy. A woman serving as a fighter pilot bombing the people you want bombed and you’re still aiming not one but two different kinds of crude sexism at her. Ha ha ha! Women sure are incompetent, even when they’re incredibly skilled! And also, boobs! OMG, boobs—always funny, on Fox News!

DAWKINS’ SIN

Joel Galker

What the hell are we thinking when Richard Dawkins says something that most everybody we know disagrees with or finds offensive or provokes us to anger? [“What the Hell is Richard Dawkins Thinking?” and “Richard Dawkins *Was My Hero*”, both PIQUE, October] It’s not as if we expect his remarks on date

rape and pedophilia, and about those who might be born with disabilities, to increase the incidence of sexual assault or to impede the progress of enlightenment and empathy for the afflicted. Dawkins just isn't that important.

Is it possible to disagree with Dawkins' remarks while acknowledging they are nothing like an unqualified pass for such acts or advocating that they should be tolerated or decriminalized? It seems rather that his main sin was to suggest a measure of moral relativism in a climate where moral absolutism is the test of righteousness and tough talk is an acceptable trope of civic discourse.

Dawkins recently came to New York on a book tour, and appeared at an event that drew several times more than the usual number for a secular evening. Among those I expected to see there were many who were new to me. No doubt the Pope or the Dali Lama or even Deepak Chopra would have drawn a bigger crowd, but Dawkins might be the biggest name, the closest we've got to a celebrity, an evaluation borne out in the excitement generated by his appearance. Not believing in his infallibility or that irrefutable moral precepts are handed down from a supreme being or nature, I won't depend on Dawkins or any other putative heroes to show me the way. I'll defer to doing what we usually do with everything else, battling out the laws of god and man in society.

Perhaps reaction from the secular movement comes from the fear that Dawkins' remarks will be used to attack our godless philosophy as immoral. It's an old claim that convinces no one - neither the godless, the believers or nonbelievers, the humanists, the rabble with pitchforks or the fence-sitters - to turn toward or against us, our values and our social and political goals. When Dawkins agrees or disagrees with my views it's not because he's the Pope of Atheism or because he doesn't know the irrefutable truth that I know.

I'm not going to take right and wrong on faith.

IN AMERICA IN THE 21ST CENTURY: REAL ESTATE: 1. DEMOCRACY: 0.

J.T. Eberhard

(Excerpted from *patheos.com*, 10/1/2014)

I knew that Tom Monaghan, the founder of Domino's Pizza, was a bit a religious loon, but I had no idea to what extent. This man built an entire town just so he could, among other things, deny birth control of any sort within its borders.

The Town of Ave Maria, Florida, is not your normal town, primarily because Tom Monaghan and his developers lobbied, and got the Florida State Legislature to pass, a law that Monaghan wrote which allows him and his developer to govern the entire town *forever*. Governor Jeb Bush signed Monaghan's bill into law in 2004.

The law turns the town from a normal one, with a mayor, etc., to a "Special Interest" town whereby the landowners have zero say in the laws Monaghan enacts.

The Naples (FL) News reported:

"The law makes landowners, not registered voters, the ultimate authority in Ave Maria. The law ensures Monaghan and Barron Collier Cos., as the largest landowners, can control Ave Maria's government forever. ... The law allows the executive committee, controlling the votes of the largest landowner, to choose at least three out of the five seats on the board forever."

And as Monaghan exulted to *The Wall Street Journal*:

"We will be able to control what goes on there. You won't be able to buy a Playboy or Hustler magazine in Ave Maria Town. We're going to control the cable television that comes in the area. There is not going to be any pornographic television in Ave Maria Town. If you go to the drug store and you want to buy the pill or the condoms or contraception, you won't be able to get that in Ave Maria Town."

The *Journal* also reported that Monaghan gloated that he would remain the "largest landowner" so he could retain all control the lifestyle of people who live within the Town of Ave Maria. ... Because the Constitution is great and everything until that whole democracy thing starts to infringe on the freedom of the religious to be exempted from pretty much everything it stands for.

This is real theocracy.

JESUS AND MO DISCUSS THE OPPRESSION OF CHRISTIANS

(Transcribed from *jesusandmo.net/2014/07/23/used/*)

Jesus: It's really hard to be a Christian in this country these days - we're oppressed.

Mohammed: How so?

Jesus: We used to have free speech and freedom of conscience.

Mo: You still have those things, don't you?

Jesus: It's different now.

Mo: In what way?

Jesus: Now everyone else has them, too.

Mo: Yeah, that is pretty oppressive.

THE "HARD PROBLEM OF CONSCIOUSNESS" ISN'T REALLY SO HARD

Flash Light

Deepak Chopra has made a video in which he offers skeptics a one million dollar prize to solve the "hard problem of consciousness". View it at: <http://truththeory.com/2014/10/08/deepak-chopras-one-million-dollar-challenge-to-the-skeptics/>

This is clever because Deepak seems to offer a scientific challenge to skeptics. However, there is a debate about whether the "hard problem of consciousness", a term coined by David Chalmers, is a real problem. When you see a sunset over the ocean, your optic nerve sends electrical impulses to your brain, which trigger neurons, and those neurons produce the sensation of light in your visual cortex, which you recognize as the sun. When you remember that sunset,

neurons fire again, and produce that image in the mind's eye. Those neurons firing is what Deepak calls "the neural correlate of consciousness". Deepak maintains that seeing and remembering that sunset involves something more than those neurons firing. The "hard problem of consciousness", maintains something happens beyond those neurons firing to produce the sensation of seeing, and the hard problem is figuring out what that is. The implication is that it might be something beyond the physical realm.

However, a skeptical view is that nothing more is required. Those neurons firing in the brain are like pixels turning on on a monitor screen. The brain gets the signal that neurons have turned on, identifies that as a pattern; other neurons match that pattern to the pattern of a sunset stored by still other neurons holding memories, and those signals trigger still other neurons which recall the word, "sunset", etc. Just as logical positivists would say the idea of god is a nonsensical imaginary idea, they might say the "hard problem of consciousness", is a nonsensical imaginary idea, and therefore can never be verified nor "falsified". By the way, it was Karl Popper who suggested changing the logical positivist theory that an idea had to be "verifiable" to be meaningful, to an idea having to be "falsifiable". I've always thought Popper was right, so I'm pleased to see Deepak adopted this criterion.

While it might be impossible to verify or falsify that something more than the "the neural correlate of consciousness" is involved in remembering a sunset, it seems quite easy to demonstrate that nothing more is necessary. One only has to look at computer image-recognition software, which is used by the post office to read addresses, and by banks to read checks, to realize that seeing and recognizing an image, storing an image as a memory, and later recalling it, requires nothing beyond mechanistic means. Deepak could easily falsify this idea by proving there are actually humans living inside the ATM machines who read those checks.

Therefore, by Occam's Razor, the theory which requires the least assumptions wins, and that theory is nothing more is required than neurons firing in the brain to account for remembering a sunset.

Deepak, if you're willing to admit this answers your challenge, and if you're willing to consider PIQUE a peer review journal for skeptics (I assume my peers will publish any disagreements in the next issue), please make out your check for one million dollars to SHSNY.

Comment: Or, Deepak, for convenience's sake, you can simply make it out to "Editor, SHSNY".

ON HUMANISM AND ANIMAL RIGHTS Chic Schissel

While I approve of Beth Zucker's position that humans should treat animals kindly ["Should Humanism Extend to Animal Rights?" PIQUE, October], I disagree with much of her take on science and morality. Evolution has designed some animals to be herbivores, feeding on plants. Other animals (like my cat)

are carnivores, eating mainly meat. Humans are omnivores; we eat both. Our teeth, jaws, and digestive apparatus are designed, for our species' survival, to eat both animals and vegetables. To convert humanity to eat only plants would be impossibly inconvenient as well as unscientific.

Carnivorous and omnivorous animals are just as willing to eat us as most of us are willing to eat them. Some years ago, at the Bronx Zoo, a wise-guy kid climbed a fence to play with the polar bears. He was promptly killed by a bear that started eating him (the bear had to be shot before he could finish his meal). Our moral conjectures didn't modify the bear's evolved nature.

The Animal Right's position on animal experimentation is based on emotion, not reason. Both my wife and I have had serious cancer operations. The medications and techniques that saved our lives were largely derived from experiments on animals. Sacrificing a few animal lives has saved millions and millions of human lives, and has doubled our life expectancy.

Surely we should treat animals with kindness, but valuing human existence is pre-eminent.

NOT DUMBTH, JUST BLINDINGLY INSENSITIVE AND STUPID John Rafferty

Nikki Haley is the Governor of South Carolina and a Tea Party favorite running for re-election. Recently, her Democratic challenger suggested that the Confederate flag be removed from the statehouse grounds.

Gov. Haley, whose state is home to more than 1.3 million African-Americans - 28 percent of the total population - almost all of whose ancestors were enslaved under that stars-and-bars banner, demurred.

*"I can honestly say I have not had one conversation with a single CEO about the Confederate flag."
Oh, CEOs! Well, okay!*

IT'S TIME - WAY PAST TIME - FOR HUMANIST CHAPLAINS IN THE MILITARY

(Transcribed - lightly edited - from an American Humanist Association/Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers infographic, forwarded on Facebook by Eileen Regan)

Why Humanist Chaplains? (Other than "Why not?")

3.6 percent of the military identifies as humanist, and there are more atheists in the military than any non-Christian denomination.

23 percent of U.S. military soldiers claim "no religious preference", thus indicating a secular values system.

Evangelicals are represented in the Chaplain Corps at over 3 times the rate of the general population.

150 Democrats in the House supported a bill that would allow Humanist Chaplains in the military.

The Netherlands have 38 Humanist Chaplains in their military, out of a total of 150.

Foxhole Atheists serve in over 20 countries, all 50 states, and over 100 military installations and ships.

*Why a Humanist Chaplain rather than
a military psychologist?*

Because Humanist Chaplains have good answers to “ultimate questions” such as “What happens when you die?” or “How do I find meaning in life?”

Because meeting with a Humanist Chaplain will be fully confidential and will not appear on service member’s military record.

Comment: And because it’s the decent thing to do. – JR

**WE’RE NUMBER ONE!
WE’RE NUMBER ONE!
WAIT ... NUMBER ONE IN WHAT?**

Lawrence Wittner

*(Reprinted from “The U.S. Is Number One -- But in What?,”
from History News Network, on AlterNet, 10/14/2014)*

American politicians are fond of telling their audiences that the United States is the greatest country in the world. Is there any evidence for this claim?

Well, yes. When it comes to violence and preparations for violence, the United States is, indeed, Number 1. In 2013, according to a report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the U.S. government accounted for 37 percent of world military expenditures, putting it far ahead of all other nations. (The two closest competitors, China and Russia, accounted for 11 percent and 5 percent respectively.) From 2004 to 2013, the United States was also the Number 1 weapons exporter in the world. Moreover, given the U.S. government’s almost continuous series of wars and acts of military intervention since 1941, it seems likely that it surpasses all rivals when it comes to international violence.

This record is paralleled on the domestic front, where the United States has more guns and gun-related deaths than any other country. A study released in late 2013 reported that the United States had 88 guns for every 100 people, and 40 gun-related deaths for every 400,000 people, the most of any of the 27 economically developed countries surveyed. By contrast, in Britain there were 6 guns per 100 people and 1 gun-related death per 400,000 people.

Yet, in a great many other areas, the United States is not Number 1 at all. Take education. In late 2013, the Program for International Student Assessment released a report on how 15-year old students from 65 nations performed on its tests. The report showed that U.S. students ranked 17th in reading and 21st in math. An international survey a bit earlier that year by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development found that the ranking was slightly worse for American adults. In 2014, Pearson, a multinational educational services company, placed the United States 20th in the world in “educational attainment”, well behind Poland and the Slovak Republic.

American healthcare and health fare even worse. In a 2014 study of healthcare (including infant mortality, healthy life expectancy, and mortality from preventable conditions) in 11 advanced industrial countries, the Commonwealth Fund concluded that the United States

ranked last among them. According to the World Health Organization, the U.S. healthcare system ranks 30th in the world. Other studies reach somewhat different conclusions, but all are very unflattering to the United States, as are studies of American health. The United States, for example, has one of the world’s worst cancer rates (the seventh highest), and life expectancy is declining compared to other nations. An article in *The Washington Post* in late 2013 reported that the United States ranked 26th among nations in life expectancy, and that the average American lifespan had fallen a year behind the international average.

What about the environment? Specialists at Yale have developed a highly sophisticated Environmental Performance Index to examine the behavior of nations. In the area of protection of human health from environmental harm, their 2014 index placed the United States 35th in health impacts, 36th in water and sanitation, and 38th in air quality. In the other area studied, protection of ecosystems, the United States ranked 32nd in water resources, 49th in climate and energy, 86th in biodiversity and habitat, 96th in fisheries, 107th in forests, and 109th in agriculture.

These and other areas of interest are dealt with by the Social Progress Index, which was developed by Michael Porter, an eminent professor of business (and a Republican) at Harvard. According to Porter and his team, in 2014 the United States ranked 23rd in access to information and communications, 24th in nutrition and basic medical care, 31st in personal safety, 34th in water and sanitation, 39th in access to basic knowledge, 69th in ecosystem sustainability, and 70th in health and wellness.

The widespread extent of poverty, especially among children, remains a disgrace in one of the world’s wealthiest nations. A 2013 report by the United Nations Children’s Fund noted that, of the 35 economically advanced countries that had been studied, only Rumania had a higher percentage of children living in poverty than did the United States.

Of course, the United States is not locked into these dismal rankings and the sad situation they reveal about the health, education, and welfare of its citizens. It could do much better if its vast wealth, resources, and technology were employed differently than they are at present.

Ultimately, it’s a matter of priorities. When most U.S. government discretionary spending goes for war and preparations for war, it should come as no surprise that the United States emerges Number 1 among nations in its capacity for violence and falls far behind other nations in providing for the well-being of its people.

Americans might want to keep this in mind as their nation embarks upon yet another costly military crusade.

Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. This is not a way of life at all in any true sense. – *Dwight D. Eisenhower*

SHSNY CALENDAR: NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2014

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURS, NOV 6, 7-8:30 pm
THE COMMUNITY CHURCH
OF NEW YORK

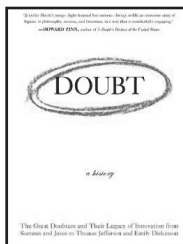
28 East 35 St. (Park-Mad)
(3 doors West of the church - red door)

We'll discuss

DOUBT: A HISTORY

*The Great Doubters and
Their Legacy of Innovation*
Jennifer Michael Hecht

Yes, this is a second evening devoted to this marvelous book; the October Book Club participants simply wanted more time to explore its riches.



Poet, historian, and our knock-'em-dead Freethought Day speaker, Hecht champions doubt as one of the great, if unheralded, intellectual traditions that distinguish the Western mind.

This is an account of the world's greatest "intellectual virtuosos", and of their attempts to reconcile the seeming meaninglessness of the universe with the human need for meaning ... ranging from the early Greeks and such Hebrew figures as Job and Ecclesiastes, to modern critical thinkers like Schopenhauer, Darwin, Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, the existentialists. — *All formats.*

Join us even if you haven't finished reading.

The SHSNY Book Club is open to all ... and free!

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MEET US ON MEETUP

www.meetup.com/shsnny-org/

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SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURS, DEC 4, 7-8:30 pm
Community Church of New York
NATURE'S GOD:

*The Heretical Origins of the
American Republic*
Matthew Stewart

The radicals who founded America set their sights on a revolution of the mind. Derided as "infidels" and "atheists" in their own time, they wanted to liberate us from the tyranny of supernatural religion. "Stewart's lucid and passionate investigation surprises, challenges, enlightens, and entertains at every turn." — *All formats.*

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURS, JAN 8, 7-8:30 pm
Community Church of New York
WAKING UP:

*A Guide to Spirituality
Without Religion*
Sam Harris

Harris's new book is a guide to meditation as a rational spiritual practice informed by neuroscience and psychology. He argues that there are important truths to be found in those experiences and more to understanding reality than science and secular culture generally allow. — *All formats.*

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 The Pullman Kitchen

Great Lectures: 4th Wednesday
at Stone Creek Lounge.

Studying Humanism: Last Monday
at the Community Church of NY
More info: www.shsnny.org,
and/or 646-922-7389

BRUNCH & CONVERSATION

New venue - new time!

SUN, NOV 16, at 11:30am
CASUAL SUNDAY BRUNCH
The Pullman Kitchen
959 2nd Ave, at 51 St.

The amplified noise at Stag's Head just got to be too much, so we're going round the corner to our own back room and a half-hour earlier starting time. Check out the menu at www.thepullmankitchen.com, and join 15-20 other freethinkers and humanists for fun and well-fed conversation.

After-Brunch Discussion:

The Midterm Elections - Part 2

MON, NOV 17 at 7:00 pm

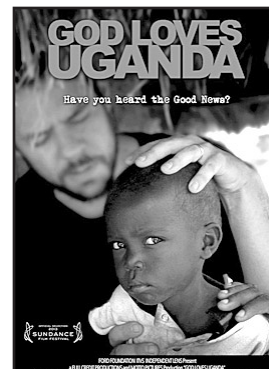
SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT

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

GOD LOVES UGANDA

(Have you heard the good news?)

Academy Award-winning filmmaker Roger Ross Williams explores the role of the American Evangelical movement in fueling



Uganda's terrifying turn towards biblical law and the death penalty for homosexuality in this enlightening but shocking exposé. Thanks to charismatic religious leaders and a well-financed campaign, these draconian new laws and the politicians that peddle them are winning over the Ugandan public.

After-Film Discussion:

What can we do about it?

SHSNY Movie Night is FREE.

(But put something on the bar beside your elbow.)

SHSNY CALENDAR: NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2014

GREAT LECTURES ON DVD

WED, DEC 3, 7:00 pm

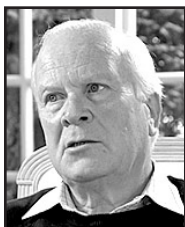
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)

RICHARD DAWKINS

INTERVIEWS

MICHAEL BAUM

For his Channel 4 series, "The Enemies of Reason", on British TV, Dawkins interviewed Michael Baum. Baum is Professor Emeritus



of Surgery at University College London, an eminent British surgical oncologist who has given a good deal of his time attacking homeopathy, naturopathy and other, comparable "cruel deceptions" and delusions. It's a solid, just-under-an-hour review of what's wrong with "alternative" and "complimentary" medicines.

Great Lectures on DVD is FREE.

(But put something on the bar beside your elbow.)

STUDYING HUMANISM

(Previously Humanism 101, 102)

MON, NOV 24, 6:30-8:30

Community Church of New York

28 East 35 Street (red door)

2014-15 Meeting/Discussion #1

First, let's review the basics:

Online at americanhumanist.org/
Edwards: *What is Humanism?*

Book: Paul Kurtz (Ed.): *The Humanist Alternative*

Then, let's plan our studies.

- What humanist subjects shall we cover in 2014-15?
- What do *you* want to read?
- Will you lead a discussion?

Note: Studying Humanism is a study group, not a book club. If you have not done the reading, you may still audit the discussion – all are welcome, definitely including newcomers!

SHSNY MEMBERS ALSO ...

• *Mon, Nov 10, 6:30pm*, John Rafferty will present a new PowerPoint of his "Is America a Christian Nation?" presentation to the Humanists and Freethinkers of Fairfield County, at the Silver Star Diner, 210 Connecticut Ave, Norwalk, CT. *Free*, but buy something.

• *Thur, Nov 13, 6pm*, Mary Bopp and Chamber 16 will present an all-Brahms evening at the Bruno Walter auditorium, Lincoln Center. Tickets are *free* and available (one per person) at 5pm, but get there early - these concerts are popular.

• *Fri, Nov 21, 7pm*, Jonathan Engel will address CFI-Long Island on "Separation of Church and State and the Engel v. Vitale Case", Plainview-Old Bethpage Library, 999 Old Country Road, Plainview, NY. *Free*. Info: Amy Frushour Kelly, akelly@centerforinquiry.net

• *Sat, Dec 20, 4pm*, Bob Murtha and the New York City Community Chorus will perform a concert of eclectic holiday music at Holy Apostles Episcopal Church on the SE corner of 28th St and 9th Ave. The high point of the afternoon will be the World Premier of an Anthem for the 20th Anniversary of the People's Chorus, Music by Felix Mendelssohn from his *Gutenberg Cantata*, words by **Charlotte Pomerantz**, arranged by Thomas Garber. \$12 suggested.

NOTE: If you are a member of SHSNY and *actively* and *personally* involved in an event open to the public, send your info to editor@shsny.org.

By the way, **Dennis Middlebrooks** is giving away a collection of 25 old (1978-89) sci-fi magazines – first to come carries them away. Contact mbrahms26@aol.com

THURS, NOV 20, 6 pm WORLD PHILOSOPHY DAY City College of New York 160 Convent Ave.

UNESCO's World Philosophy Day is sponsored at CCNY by the Philo Dept and organized by Massimo Pigliucci. Linda Alcott, past President of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Assoc., will deliver the keynote: "What philosophy can contribute to the global resistance against rape."

Info: www.reasonablenewyork.org

OTHER REASONABLE NEW YORK EVENTS

www.reasonablenewyork.org

New York Philosophy: Date and place for Nov *Cocktails & Conversation* to be determined. Check www.nyphilosophy.com

NY Society for Ethical Culture:

• Sun, Jul 6, 2 pm, *Sunday Assembly-NYC*. Free.

• Fri, Nov 14, *Sounds of Hope*, for the benefit of the Salaam Bombay Children's Fund. Tickets \$35-\$100. sounds-of-hope.eventbrite.com

See the full RNY calendar at reasonablenewyork.org

PLUS

Agnostic A.A.: Fifteen weekly AA-endorsed meetings in four boros (not Queens). Info at agnosticAAnyc.org/meetings.html

Atheism History Week – With SHSNY's John Rafferty, 5:30 p.m. every Wed, MNN Ch. 1997 in Manhattan, and live streaming at www.mnn.org.

Drinking With Atheists: Every Friday, fun and conversation. meetup.com/GothamAtheists/

Feminist Freethinkers of NY:

Check feministfreethinkers.org
Manhattan History Buffs: Every 3d Tues, 6:00, dinner/talk at Lili's rest, 83-84th/3rd. Nov 18: *The Court of Henry VIII*. 212-802-7427

GOD, DARWIN AND MY COLLEGE BIOLOGY CLASS

David P. Barash

(Reprinted from the OpEd page of The New York Times,
10/27/2014)

Every year around this time, with the college year starting, I give my students The Talk. It isn't, as you might expect, about sex, but about evolution and religion, and how they get along. More to the point, how they don't.

I'm a biologist, in fact an evolutionary biologist, although no biologist, and no biology course, can help being "evolutionary". My animal behavior class, with 200 undergraduates, is built on a scaffolding of evolutionary biology. And that's where The Talk comes in. It's irresponsible to teach biology without evolution, and yet many students worry about reconciling their beliefs with evolutionary science. Just as many Americans don't grasp the fact that evolution is not merely a "theory", but the underpinning of all biological science, a substantial minority of my students are troubled to discover that their beliefs conflict with the course material.

Until recently, I had pretty much ignored such discomfort, assuming that it was their problem, not mine. Teaching biology without evolution would be like teaching chemistry without molecules, or physics without mass and energy. But instead of students' growing more comfortable with the tension between evolution and religion over time, the opposite seems to have happened. Thus, The Talk.

There are a few ways to talk about evolution and religion, I begin. The least controversial is to suggest that they are in fact compatible. Stephen Jay Gould called them "nonoverlapping magisteria," noma for short, with the former concerned with facts and the latter with values. He and I disagreed on this (in public and, at least once, rather loudly); he claimed I was aggressively forcing a painful and unnecessary choice, while I maintained that in his eagerness to be accommodating, he was misrepresenting both science and religion.

In some ways, Steve has been winning. Noma is the received wisdom in the scientific establishment, including institutions like the National Center for Science Education, which has done much heavy lifting when it comes to promoting public understanding and acceptance of evolution. According to this expansive view, God might well have used evolution by natural selection to produce his creation. This is undeniable. If God exists, then he could have employed anything under the sun – or beyond it – to work his will. Hence, there is nothing in evolutionary biology that necessarily precludes religion, save for most religious fundamentalisms (everything that we know about biology and geology proclaims that the Earth was not made in a day).

So far, so comforting for my students. But here's the turn: These magisteria are not nearly as nonoverlapping as some of them might wish.

As evolutionary science has progressed, the available space for religious faith has narrowed: It has demolished two previously potent pillars of religious faith and undermined belief in an omnipotent and omni-benevolent God.

The twofold demolition begins by defeating what modern creationists call the argument from complexity. This once seemed persuasive, best known from William Paley's 19th-century claim that, just as the existence of a complex structure like a watch demands the existence of a watchmaker, the existence of complex organisms requires a supernatural creator. Since Darwin, however, we have come to understand that an entirely natural and undirected process, namely random variation plus natural selection, contains all that is needed to generate extraordinary levels of non-randomness. Living things are indeed wonderfully complex, but altogether within the range of a statistically powerful, entirely mechanical phenomenon.

A few of my students shift uncomfortably in their seats. I go on. Next to go is the illusion of centrality. Before Darwin, one could believe that human beings were distinct from other life-forms, chips off the old divine block. No more. The most potent take-home message of evolution is the not-so-simple fact that, even though species are identifiable (just as individuals generally are), there is an underlying linkage among them – literally and phylogenetically, via traceable historical connectedness. Moreover, no literally supernatural trait has ever been found in *Homo sapiens*; we are perfectly good animals, natural as can be and indistinguishable from the rest of the living world at the level of structure as well as physiological mechanism.

Adding to religion's current intellectual instability is a third consequence of evolutionary insights: a powerful critique of theodicy, the scholarly effort to reconcile belief in an omnipresent, omni-benevolent God with the fact of unmerited suffering.

Theological answers range from claiming that suffering provides the option of free will to announcing (as in the Book of Job) that God is so great and we so insignificant that we have no right to ask. But just a smidgen of biological insight makes it clear that, although the natural world can be marvelous, it is also filled with ethical horrors: predation, parasitism, fratricide, infanticide, disease, pain, old age and death – and that suffering (like joy) is built into the nature of things. The more we know of evolution, the more unavoidable is the conclusion that living things, including human beings, are produced by a natural, totally amoral process, with no indication of a benevolent, controlling creator.

I conclude The Talk by saying that, although they don't have to discard their religion in order to inform themselves about biology (or even to pass my course), if they insist on retaining and respecting both, they will have to undertake some challenging mental gymnastic routines. And while I respect their beliefs, the entire point of The Talk is to make clear that, at least for this biologist, it is no longer acceptable for science to be the one doing those routines, as Professor Gould and noma have insisted we do.

Despite these three evolutionary strikes, God hasn't necessarily struck out. At the end of the movie version of "Inherit the Wind", based on the famous Scopes "monkey trial" over a Tennessee law prohibiting the teaching of evolution, Spencer Tracy's character, fashioned after the defense attorney Clarence Darrow, stands in the empty courtroom, picks up a Bible in one hand and Darwin's "Origin of Species" in the other, gives a knowing smile and claps them together before putting both under his arm.

Would that it were so simple.

WHY YOU CAN'T RECONCILE GOD AND EVOLUTION: Part 1

Greta Christina

(Reprinted from "4 reasons that 'God made evolution happen' makes no sense", on AlterNet.com, 7/31/2014)

"Of course I believe in evolution.

And I believe in God, too.

I believe that evolution is how God created life."

You hear this a lot from progressive and moderate religious believers. They believe in some sort of creator god, but they heartily reject the extreme, fundamentalist, science-rejecting versions of their religions (as well they should). They want their beliefs to reflect reality - including the reality of the confirmed fact of evolution. So they try to reconcile the two by saying that that evolution is real, exactly as the scientists describe it -- and that God made it happen. They insist that you don't have to deny evolution to believe in God.

In the narrowest, most literal sense, of course this is true. It's true that there are people who believe in God, and who also accept science in general and evolution in particular. This is an observably true fact: it would be absurd to deny it, and I don't. I'm not saying these people don't exist. I'm saying that this position is untenable. I'm saying that the "God made evolution happen" position is rife with both internal contradictions and denial of the evidence. You don't have to deny as much reality as young earth creationists do to take this position -- but you still have to deny a fair amount. Here are four reasons that "God made evolution happen" makes no sense.

1. It contradicts a central principle of the theory of evolution.

According to theistic evolution (the fancy term for "God made evolution happen"), the process of evolution is shaped by the hand of God. God takes the processes of mutation, natural selection, and descent with modification, and uses them to direct life into the forms he wants - including the form of humanity.

But in evolution, there is no direction. At the core of the theory of evolution is the principle that whatever survives, survives, and whatever reproduces, reproduces. Each generation has to survive and reproduce on its own terms: there's no selecting for a particular feature that's harmful now but will be useful ten generations later, after a little more adapting. If a particular trait isn't either beneficial or neutral to these animals, these plants, these bacteria, in this

generation here and now - it's going to be selected out pretty darn quick. Evolution is all about the immediate present and the very near future: it's about surviving, and producing fertile offspring that live long enough to reproduce.

And there's a huge amount of random chaos in the mix. If any of a hundred thousand quirks go a different way, the outcome can be different - sometimes subtly, sometimes dramatically. A flood shifts the course of a river, and a plant's seeds float south-south-east instead of due south, and the seeds sprout on the part of the continent that splits off and becomes South America. An asteroid hits the planet and wipes out the dinosaurs, and these weird rodent-like creatures start reproducing like gangbusters, and in a few hundred thousand years some of their great-great-thousands-of-times-over grandchildren wind up as human beings.

Random stuff happens: if it happens differently, then different living things survive and reproduce, and it all turns out differently. Yes, the particular forms that life takes right now are wildly improbable -- and if things had turned out differently, those forms would be wildly improbable. There's no direction: there's no selecting for life to take any particular form at any point in the future.

So it makes no sense to say that evolution is real, exactly as the scientists describe it -- but that God is guiding it in the direction he wants. If evolution is exactly as the scientists describe it, there's no direction for God to be guiding it in. God hasn't got a thing to do with it.

Now, if the evidence suggested that evolution actually did work in this interventionist way -- if the theory of evolution were based on it having no direction, but there were a bunch of evidence suggesting that it did have a direction, with some outside force pushing things in that direction -- then the "no direction" part of the theory would have to go. And that would be fine. Our understanding of exactly how evolution works has shifted many times over the decades, and if there were a preponderance of evidence pointing to a Divine Tinkerer, we'd simply have to adjust the theory. Which leads me to:

2. There's not a scrap of evidence for it.

If there really were a Divine Tinkerer mucking about with evolution, like civil engineers re-directing a river or kids putting sticks in a stream, we'd see signs of it. When we looked at the fossil record, we'd see human knees suddenly re-shaped to better suit upright bipedal walking. We'd see human female pelvises suddenly re-shaped to better accommodate their infants' larger brains without dying in childbirth. We'd see human brains suddenly re-shaped to better understand long-term cost-benefit analysis. And that's just the humans.

We don't see any of that. When we look at the fossil record -- and the genetic record, and the geological record, and the anatomical record, and every other record from every branch of science that supports the theory of evolution and investigates how it works -- we don't see any signs whatsoever of outside intervention. What we do see is exactly what we'd expect to see if evolution were an entirely

natural process, proceeding one generation at a time.

Now, some adherents of theistic evolution don't think that God is tinkering with the process every day, or even every millennium, or even every epoch. Some theistic evolutionists are really more like deists: they think God set the entire process in motion, four billion years ago at the dawn of the planet, or 13.7 billion years ago at the dawn of the universe. They think God set the parameters way back in the mists of time, knowing how things would turn out, and is just sitting back watching it all unfold. That's what they mean by "God made evolution happen".

But there's not a scrap of evidence for this, either. If your god is so non-interventionist that he's entirely indistinguishable from physical cause and effect -- what reason do you have to think he exists? In all of human history, the supernatural has never turned out to be the right answer to anything: natural explanations of phenomena have replaced supernatural ones thousands upon thousands of times, while supernatural explanations have replaced natural ones exactly never. So why would you think that an invisible god who set the wheels of evolution in motion, in a way that looks exactly like physical cause and effect, is more plausible than simple physical cause and effect?

As Julia Sweeney said in her performance piece "Letting Go of God", "The invisible and the non-existent often look very much alike." Given that there's not one scrap of evidence suggesting that this invisible Divine Tinkerer actually does exist -- and a whole lot of evidence suggesting that he doesn't -- why would you conclude that he does?

Part 2 of Ms. Christina's essay will appear next month.

JESUS AND MO DEFINE THEOLOGY FOR THE BARMAID

(Transcribed from jesusandmo.net/2014/10/15/iron2/)

Barmaid: How would you define theology?

Jesus: *Fides quaerens intellectum.*

Mohammed: "Faith seeking understanding."

Jesus: You start by accepting the truth of several propositions: there is a loving, creator God, for example.

Mo: Who has communicated with us via perfect and immutable holy scripture.

Jesus: Then you try to figure out ways to defend those propositions from charges of implausibility.

Mo: And iron out any inherent contradictions in scripture.

Barmaid: So, basically, theology is the practice of thinking up excuses for believing in bullshit.

Mo: No! It's thinking up excuses for knowing the truth.

READERS RESPOND TO PIQUE

To the Editor: We each create our own meanings of our lives. Philip Appleman's examples ["The Meaning of Life", PIQUE, October], like "I look straight into the eyes of an urban fox", don't cover very much ground, although I share his love of wildlife.

Beyond that, my meaning revolves around my relationships with the people in my life, trying to love and be

loved by them, and to help them. Couple that with finding challenging activities to engage in. And sharing with others the things of beauty that I come across. And participating in something larger than myself. Like attending meetings of a bi-partisan group devoted to campaign finance reform. And like our SHSNY monthly brunches. Each time I come away from one of those brunches I feel like, "Now I have connected with the civilized part of our civilization."

— *Brian Lemaire*

To the Editor: I find the arguments against criticism of Islam in October PIQUE ["On Islamophobia and PIQUE", by Sidney Finehirsh] very disturbing. In my opinion, *any* religion is open to criticism when it perpetrates oppression. Writings in *any* religion's books, be it the Torah, the Talmud, the Christian New Testament, the Book of Mormon, the Vedantas, and even the Koran, should be denounced as should the actions of leaders or practitioners of *any* religion who have in history or do now advocate the second class status of women and non-believers, ritual mutilation, stoning to death for lifestyle choices, censorship of books and media, and beheadings.

PIQUE is a publication whose aim it is, as I understand it, to bring these issues to light and provide a forum for their discussion. PIQUE has included articles on such issues as the killings of gays advocated by Christians in Uganda and elsewhere, and Ultra-Orthodox Jews throwing stones at women for dressing "immodestly" and at secular Jews for not observing the Sabbath and choosing to eat whatever they want.

I know there are certain political reasons why some today feel it is politically incorrect to criticize Islam, although they find no problem in criticizing any other religion. But to use such terms as "disingenuous" and "egregiously stupid and phony" in an essay about Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who has experienced the intolerance and brutality of Islam first hand, is plainly and simply wrong. — *Basha Weiss*

To the Editor: Although I appreciate Sidney Finehirsh's historical defense of Islam, and his outlining of Christian atrocities of the past, I must point out that what is happening *today* in the Muslim world is indefensible.

A lot has happened in the West in recent centuries, for example, the Enlightenment. Yet now, the Islamic nations are filled with dedicated terrorists who are scaring the shit out of everyone.

It is true that all religions discriminate against women, but we'd have to agree that Islam takes the lead on that score -- and *that* is Hirsi Ali's point.

I have just returned from Italy, where past tortures of heretics are well documented. However, in the Campo di Fiore in Florence I watched a svelte fire dancer perform at the foot of the statue of the martyred Giordano Bruno -- without setting anyone present aflame.

It has been centuries since Christians burned anyone at the stake or beheaded anyone in the name of religion.

I rest my case. — *Donna Marxer*

THE ALL-TOO-REAL ISLAMOPHOBIA

John Rafferty

From the Internet — original (dumb) formatting retained:

READ CAREFULLY...

This is so "Unbelievable"

Feel free to share this with others.

**In Houston, Texas Harwin Central Mall:
The very first store that you come to
when you walk from the lobby of the
building into the shopping area had
this sign posted on their door.**

[Attachment: an Arabic-language sign in a shop window]

**The shop is run by Muslims. In
case you are not able to read the sign
below, it says,**

**"We will be closed on Friday,
September 11, to commemorate the
martyrdom of Imam Ali."**

**Imam Ali flew one of the planes
into the twin towers.**

**Nice, huh? How long before the attack
on the World Trade Center**

**"NEVER HAPPENED" because it offends
some Muslim?**

**Do not just delete this message; it
will take only a minute to pass this
along. FREEDOM ISN'T FREE ...**

SOMEONE HAD TO PAY FOR IT!

And, of course, the four-alarm message was *not* deleted by thousands of the gullible, but Forwarded to tens of thousands more, one of whom sent it to our own Bob Murtha. Here is Bob's reply ...

Dear Meena:

This is an unbelievably malicious smear of decent people. There was no hijacker named Imam Ali. Imam Ali was a 7th Century Muslim religious figure. He was the son-in-law of Mohammad and the First Imam of Shia Islam, as well as the Fourth Caliph of the Sunnis. He was the father of Hussein and Abbas, who were martyred at Karbala and who are honored every year at Ashura, the 10th day of Moharram.

Ali was attacked by an assassin while praying at a mosque on the 19th Day of Ramadan and died from his wounds on the 21st. Islam goes by a lunar calendar. In 2009, Ramadan 21 fell on September 11.

The store owner must have been mortified when he learned of his terrible mistake. I hope that his little business survives the ongoing smear.

Perhaps you could pass this message along to others who received the original lie. — Bob

Comment: Thank you, Bob, you never cease to impress. The Islamophobia referred to in the title above is xenophobia, rabid racism, willful ignorance and American super-patriotism run amok. — JR

THE COMEDIAN HAS IT RIGHT: THE RULE OF LAW ISN'T JUST DIFFERENT FROM THEOCRACY, IT'S BETTER

Jeffrey Tayler

(Excerpted from "Bill Maher's atheist values: Why progressives must defend enlightenment, critique religious extremism", on salon.com, 10/8/2014

Bill Maher's recent monologue on "RealTime" excoriating self-professed liberals for going soft on Islam — hotly debated again [October 3] with Ben Affleck and Sam Harris ... might well serve as a credo for progressives the world over. He began by introducing a photo, originally posted on a social media site, showing a teenager in Pennsylvania mounting a statue of Jesus Christ in such a way as to create the impression that Jesus was felling him. Noting that it "may not be in good taste", Maher declared that "There's no picture that makes my heart swell with patriotism quite like this one."

Why? He explained that in the United States, with separation of church and state enshrined in the Constitution, the youth, on account of his sacrilegious prank, would not do jail time or face violence because "liberal Western culture is not just different, it's better ... rule of law isn't just different than theocracy, it's better. If you don't see that, then you're either a religious fanatic or a masochist, but one thing you are certainly *not* is a liberal." ...

Maher included Barack Obama among those unwilling to talk straight about Islam, and rebutted the president's repeated statements that ISIS is "not Islamic" by pointing out that "vast numbers of Muslims across the world believe ... that humans deserve to die for merely holding a different idea, or drawing a cartoon, or writing a book." This means, said Maher, that "not only does the Muslim world have something in common with ISIS, it has too much in common with ISIS." ...

What lessons are we to draw from all this televised shouting, name-calling, and unprofessional journalistic capitulation to PC scare tactics meant to deflect attention from what Maher was originally trying to highlight — liberals' failure to stand up for the superiority of law-based societies over theocracy? ...

Can President Obama be pardoned for denying the obvious link between Islam and ISIS's atrocities? After all, if he told the truth, he would ignite a media firestorm, give terrorist recruiters material, and potentially endanger Americans at home and overseas. He would also cast himself into even deeper disfavor with his progressive electorate, where resentment of "Islamophobia" runs high.

It would indeed be useful, though, in the interests of honest public debate, if Obama acknowledged that Islam had at least *something* to do with what ISIS has been up to; after all, hundreds of Westerners (including some Americans) have set off to join the terrorists in the killing fields of Iraq and Syria, motivated, one can justifiably assume, by religion. In the battle for ideas against Islamic extremism, frank talk from the president would be a big help.

The rest of us—I have in mind atheists of all political persuasions—must yield nothing to those advocating faith-based solutions for our ills. As Maher said, we should not be afraid to judge. We must never cede to misguided notions of civility and refrain from criticizing religion, which is, after all, nothing more than hallowed ideology expressed through fantastic fables. People deserve respect; ideologies do not. Doctrines deriving from allegedly divine revelation demand the closest scrutiny.

The very concept of religious revelation — from which Islam, Christianity, and Judaism draw their validity — is an affront to rationalism and reasoned discussion. To further the latter, the word “Islamophobia” should be excised from the lexicon of every thinking individual as pernicious to free speech. It equates racism with criticism of religion, as though Islam, a universalist faith, had only adherents of a single skin color, and provides casuistic cover for those believers who would shield their words from judgment. ...

In talking about religion, Bill Maher has essentially been making some of these same points. Strange that it has fallen to a comedian to do so.

But the more thoughtful controversy he provokes, the greater aid he provides to atheists. In the end, that will help the progressive cause domestically and abroad and hurt ISIS — with no shots fired.

Comment: To borrow and update a well-known trope from James Carville, “It’s the religion, stupid.” — JR

RELIGION’S ANSWER WHEEL

John Rafferty

(Inspired by “Creationist Answer Wheel” in Humanist Society of Santa Barbara’s Secular Circular, August, 2014)

Organized religion—any organized religion—has a set of pat and pre-digested answers for your every existential or even everyday question.

Just picture something like TV’s “Wheel of Fortune” wheel, with answers and admonitions already inscribed in the slots instead of dollar amounts. Ask your priest, minister, rabbi, imam, witch doctor, godman or guru a question about, say, free will in a determinist universe, human suffering and loss, or the reality of evil in God’s divine creation, and your cleric of choice will set the wheel spinning, to land on one of religion’s time-tested, one-size-fits-all answers:

It’s a miracle!

It’s part of God’s divine plan.

It’s a test of your faith.

Everything happens for a reason.

Who are we to question God?

Pray for guidance.

Because.

Shut up.

I would rather have questions that can’t be answered than answers that can’t be questioned. — *Richard Feynman*
(found and forwarded by Brian Rafferty)

Visit our spiffy new website
at www.shsny.org
A non-endorsement in
November’s NY election
Page 1
Is “New Atheism” sexist?
Page 1
Evolution, NOMA, the Bio
Prof and Greta Christina
Page 8
Let’s argue about
Islamophobia some more
Page 10

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