

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

June, 2015

The weather warms up and so do the arguments. How far can/should Free speech go (or those other speech varieties, Hate and But)? Should Parisian cartoonists and Bangladeshi bloggers just cool it? Should Bill Maher just shut up? We get serious about same-sex, laugh at a Dumbth, consider animal rights, celebrate a familiar-face Good Guy, welcome a visitor from the UK, welcome another back to these pages, and envy Brits their politicians. But first, why do we care about prayer? — JR

WHY DID WE HAVE / WHY DO WE NEED A NATIONAL DAY OF REASON?

John Rafferty

Because there is a National Day of Prayer. And because that Day—which was supposed to be a harmless, if constitutionally questionable non-denominational celebration of faith for the religious of all creeds, as had been dozens of other “days of prayer” in our history—has been hijacked by the religious right. Some history ...

There have been many days of prayer and/or fasting and/or thanksgiving in the nation’s history. The various colonies prior to the Revolution were doing it all the time. At the outset of the Revolution in 1775 the Continental Congress designated “a time for prayer in forming a new nation” ... and in 1779 Washington, not yet the President but as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, decreed one to celebrate the victorious end of that late unpleasantness with the UK.

Except for Jefferson—who wrote in 1808 that “... civil powers alone have been given to the President of the United States and no authority to direct the religious exercises of his constituents” —and Andrew Jackson, another separation absolutist, every president since has at least put out a Day or Prayer and/or fasting and/or thanksgiving proclamation —yes, including the current White House resident—and some have even held ceremonies, *not* including the current resident.

So national days of prayer came and went, with no organization, for a century-and-a-half. Until 1952, when we were involved in another unpleasantness, the Korean War. The first big-time televangelist, Billy Graham—probably the most popular man in America at the time—called for a nationwide day of prayer “at this hour of peril”. Taking their cue from Graham, an overwhelmingly conservative

Congress passed a joint resolution calling for an annual National Day of Prayer, “on which the people of the United States may turn to God in prayer and meditation at churches, in groups, and as individuals”.

Harry Truman, boxed in, signed a bill those conservatives crafted proclaiming that a National Day of Prayer *must* be declared by each following president at an appropriate date of that executive’s choice.

Again, things ambled along with no particular direction until in 1982 a National Prayer Committee was authorized by Congress and formed to coordinate and implement a fixed commemorated day of prayer.

In 1988, Ronald Reagan amended the law, decreeing that the National Day of Prayer should be held on the first Thursday of May. A claimed intention of the NDP was that it would be a day when members of *all* faiths could pray together, each in their own way.

Okay, so what? Why should we care? Because that committee, created by a blundering Congress to coordinate an ecumenical event, immediately turned around and created a new *non*-governmental organization called The National Day of Prayer Task Force, with the specific purpose of making the NDP an evangelical Christian event.

Based in Colorado Springs, the “task force” works out of the facilities of the right-wing Focus On The Family, of anti-gay, anti-feminist, anti-science fame. Shirley Dobson, wife of Focus On The Family founder James Dobson, heads the Task Force, whose website says:

“Americans of all faiths are encouraged to participate in the [National Day of Prayer] according to their own traditions. However, the Task Force provides promotional materials and sponsors several events in keeping with the Judeo-Christian tradition”.

And before the Freedom From Religion Foundation filed suit against them, the Task Force’s application form

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Individual membership \$40 per year; Family membership \$65; Subscription only: \$30.

Articles published in PIQUE are archived in www.shsny.org. They may be reprinted, in full or in part, in other newsletters. SHSNY is a Charter Chapter of the American Humanist Association (AHA), an Affiliate Member of Atheist Alliance International (AAI), an Affiliated Local Group of the Council for Secular Humanism (CSH) program of the Center for Inquiry (CFI), and an Endorsing Group in the Secular Coalition for New York (SCNY).

for participation required any applying organization or individual to affirm the absolute inerrancy of the Bible, and required volunteers to "... commit that NDP activities I serve with will be conducted solely by Christians".

That "Judeo-Christian tradition" - whatever the hell that means? Several Jewish organizations report that they were rebuffed when they tried to participate in NDP events. In 2004, Ms. Dobson barred Mormons from conducting services—even in Utah!—and in 2005 she repulsed the Hindu American Foundation.

Has the NDP been challenged? Yes, the Freedom From Religion Foundation brought suit in 2008, and originally prevailed, when in 2010 U.S. District Judge Barbara Crabb ruled that the statute establishing the National Day of Prayer was unconstitutional, as it is "an inherently religious exercise that serves no secular function". However, in April, 2011, a three-judge panel of the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals unanimously overturned Crabb's decision, essentially saying that no one was being hurt by the Day of Prayer ... and besides, Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address referenced God seven times and prayer three times.

Really. They actually said that.

Okay, what can we do about it? We may not be able to get rid of the National Day of Prayer, but we can fight back - we can promote reason instead of prayer.

We can support the lobbying efforts of the American Humanist Association and of Rep. Mike Honda (CA-17) who introduced H. Res. 228 to recognize May 7, 2015 as a National Day of Reason. We can write our Congressional reps, as 48 SHSNY members and friends promised to do at our Seventh Annual Day of Reason Brunch at Pete's Tavern on May 3rd. (I know at least a dozen actually did, because they emailed me they had.)

Yes, May 7, 2015, has come and gone, but the Neanderthals and bigots of the religious right aren't going away, and the fight goes on. *Your* Congressional rep needs to know that *you* support a National Day of Reason, not just for 2015, but for next year and every year after that. The AHA has made it ridiculously easy for you to do so.

Just type http://action.americanhumanist.org/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=17764 into your browser, fill in your 5-digit Zip code, which will bring up a ready-made letter to *your* Representative, and all you have to do is add your name and address and hit the Submit button.

Do it.

REASON CONFRONTS FAITH: DEBATE OR BRAWL?

Walter Balcerak

Beliefs based on religious faith are notoriously difficult to alter using reason. Why is this so? According to recent studies, reason and religious belief are entirely different modes of thinking.

In an opinion article in *The New York Times*, T. M. Luhrmann, a professor of anthropology at Stanford, wrote: "People process evidence differently when they think with

a factual mind-set rather than with a religious mind-set." She listed several conclusions recently drawn by scholars about this dichotomy, including these:

- For religious people, "what the belief does for their lives matters more than, well, the facts". For example, a study showed that over 70 percent of people who left a religious cult complained about things other than the leader's views.

- "Religious beliefs explain why, rather than how." How earthquakes happen is explained by science. Why they happen (because God disapproves of gay marriage, say) is explained by religion.

- "People's reliance on supernatural explanations increases as they age." Professor Luhrmann doesn't say why, but this doubtless is caused by the growing attractiveness, as time passes, of an afterlife.

If reasoned arguments play little role in changing religious beliefs, this has an important implication for secular humanists. It means we should be aware that reasoning with the faithful has possible pitfalls. If such discussions have little or no impact, or if they distress or anger believers, they serve little purpose.

I don't at all contend that religion and believers should be shielded from analysis and criticism. Thoughtful, courteous discussion might actually influence believers. Ridicule and attacks will surely alienate them.

Such destructive criticism violates a central goal of humanism, which is to foster the flourishing of humanity. Clearly, attacking or ridiculing sacred beliefs does not cause religious people to flourish. On the contrary, such challenges threaten the rewards they get from their faith, such as community, a loving deity that watches over them and listens to their prayers, rituals to mark life's important passages and, best of all, eternal life. It's quite an attractive package, is it not? So when we attack or ridicule a religious person's beliefs, in effect we may be attacking or ridiculing that person's very being.

In his book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, Steven Pinker explains why people may react with violence when their deepest beliefs are questioned.

"Challenge a person's beliefs," he writes, "and you challenge his dignity, standing, and power. And when those beliefs are based on nothing but faith, they are chronically fragile ... Since one cannot defend a belief based on faith by persuading skeptics it is true, the faithful are apt to react to unbelief with rage, and may try to eliminate that affront to everything that makes their life meaningful."

That is why criticizing religion or debating with believers calls for courtesy, whether in person or in the media. I'm afraid this notion will raise the hackles of many secular humanists, who believe it is our duty to expose the myths of religion without pulling punches. But I think our humanist outlook requires us to follow a different ethic, something I advocated in earlier PIQUE essays.

In my first article, about four years ago, I regretted that I had shattered my young daughter's belief in Santa Claus. The yearly drama of leaving cookies for Santa and treats for his reindeers, and receiving lots of presents from him, surely

excited Laura. Years later, she told me that learning the truth about Santa had left her “confused and disappointed”.

I wanted my daughter to share my skepticism toward irrational beliefs. “But I failed to understand,” I wrote, “that skepticism does not fulfill psychological needs the way supernatural beliefs do. Skepticism is a method for understanding the universe, and thus is an orientation toward reality. Belief in Santa, fairies, angels, or God, on the other hand, is a form of wish fulfillment that disregards evidence.” As a humanist, I aspire to make the world a better place. But I failed to do that when I deprived a child of a harmless belief that made her happy.

In my last PIQUE article, in March, I responded in a similar way to the Charlie Hebdo massacre. Because many secular humanists are atheists, and all are skeptical about religion, I noted, we feel free to criticize theism and all its trappings. “But such criticism can go too far,” I wrote. “After all, it is acceptable to question religion, but it is quite another thing to attack or insult sacred beliefs.”*

Free speech is an essential human right, but unbridled free speech is not. Reasonable people agree that we should not shout “Fire!” in a crowded theater. Uncaring people will, of course, engage in speech that is hateful or harmful. But to my mind, that right is overruled for humanists by an essential tenet of our ethics. You won’t find that rule in the Ten Commandments, the first three of which order us to humble ourselves before an imaginary sky god. The most basic ethic of humanism, I submit, can be stated with just two words: *Be kind*.

**Comment: Didn’t agree with you in March – still don’t. – JR*

THE RIGHT TO BLASPHEME

David Frum

(Excerpted from *TheAtlantic.com*, 5/15)

The right to blaspheme is not a right most of us make much use of these days, and for excellent reason. In modern Western free societies, we take it absolutely for granted that nobody can enforce religious dogma on anybody else. And since we take it for granted, few of us feel much need to make a big deal about denying and defying other people’s dogmas. It feels stupid and rude precisely because it is pointless. Nobody’s compelling you to respect the Host, so you are merely a jerk, not a martyr, if you gratuitously insist on disrespecting something so holy to so many of your neighbors.

The same holds true for every one of the other religious doctrines that flourish in a free society. It may seem strange to others that some of us avoid pork, or wear turbans, or begin the day with close study of books written in Greek 2000 years ago—but whether strange or not, we show respect to others as we’d wish respect shown to us.

The basis of this exchange of respect, however, is the shared understanding that it’s fully voluntary. It’s not policed by the state; it’s not enforced by violent vigilantes. When religious authority begins to be backed by compulsion, resistance to religious authority acquires a different character, too. When she defies the threat of violence, the

former jerk can become a genuine martyr.

Yet even as Western societies have jettisoned their laws against blasphemy, many democratic societies have experimented with a different kind of speech restriction, intended to protect human beings rather than God. Maybe the classic text is the French law of 1972 that forbids incitement to hatred, discrimination, or violence on the basis of race or religion (subsequently amended to include gender, sexual orientation, or disability).

Hate-speech laws remain highly controversial. But whether they are wise or dangerous, their purpose is secular: to protect people by restricting speech intended to abrogate their human rights. God, it is thought, can look after Himself. Thus, under French law, it would be hate speech to shout, “Kill the Jews!” It would not be hate speech to denounce Jewish kosher slaughter as inhumane. It would be hate speech to say, “No Muslim can be a patriotic French citizen”, [but not] to write, “The Koran is not true.”

Americans who’d like to inscribe some concept of hate speech into U.S. law don’t always understand the distinction that the Europeans draw between affront to people and dissent from doctrine. ... *The New York Times* ... had this to say about the attempted terror attack in Garland, Texas:

“The Muhammad Art Exhibit and Contest in Garland, Tex., was not really about free speech. It was an exercise in bigotry and hatred posing as a blow for freedom. ... Pamela Geller, the anti-Islam campaigner behind the Texas event, has a long history of declarations and actions motivated purely by hatred for Muslims.

“... She achieved her provocative goal in Garland – the event was attacked by two Muslims who were shot to death by a traffic officer before they killed anyone.

“Those two men were would-be murderers. But their thwarted attack, or the murderous rampage of the Charlie Hebdo killers ... cannot justify blatantly Islamophobic provocations like the Garland event.”

Anti-Muslim bigotry is a real and ugly phenomenon. But there’s a necessary distinction to be drawn between vilifying people and repudiating their beliefs. Blasphemy isn’t bigotry. Applying the single term “Islamophobia” blurs that difference: conflating the denial of a belief with discrimination against the believer.

Five years ago, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution condemning the “defamation of religion” and specifically citing Islam as the religion most defamed. The resolution specifically condemned the “stereotyping” of religions’ “sacred persons” and urged all states to use the full power of their law to suppress religious defamation. The U.S. representative on the council, Eileen Donahoe, explained why the U.S. and 16 other democratic states voted “no”: “We continue to see the ‘defamation of religions’ concept used to justify censorship, criminalization, and in some cases violent assaults and deaths of political, racial, and religious minorities around the world. ... Contrary to the intentions of most member states, governments are likely to abuse the rights of individuals in the name of this resolution, and in the name of the Human Rights Council.”

It's not just governments that are liable to use resolutions against prejudice as the bases for attacks on conscience. We've seen the same principles applied to similar effect in the internal political debates of Western countries. No question, there are provocateurs who quote and misquote Islamic texts, wrenched out of context and history, to incite hostility to broad communities of people. But these provocateurs mostly succeed only when events like those in Paris, Copenhagen, and Garland appear to confirm their lurid warnings. ...

In a free society, the rights of believers in any faith do not extend to imposing the tenets of that faith on non-believers. Some of those who resist doctrinal imposition will be free thinkers who resist all dogma. But sometimes the resister will be just a different kind of narrow-minded fanatic. Samuel F.B. Morse, the future inventor of the telegraph, told a story about coming upon a papal procession when he visited Rome as a young man. A fervent Protestant, he refused to raise his hat to the pope and was, he claimed, knocked down by one of the pope's Swiss guards. Maybe it happened, and maybe it didn't. (Morse was always vague about the exact where and when of the incident.) Morse wrote a Geller-like pamphlet denouncing the Catholic Church as a "foreign conspiracy against the liberties of the United States" and ran for mayor of New York in 1836 on a nativist, anti-Catholic platform. Mercifully, he was decisively beaten. Yet if modern Americans can choose for themselves whether and how to greet a minister of religion, they owe some of that liberty to loudmouthed cranks like Morse.

When vigilantes try to enforce the tenets of a faith by violence, then it becomes a civic obligation to stand up to them. And if the people doing the standing up are not in every way nice people—if they express other views that are ugly and prejudiced by any standard—then the more shame on all the rest of us for leaving the job to them.

WILL MUSLIM-AMERICANS "COMPROMISE" AMERICAN IDEALS?

Arthur Harris

I love the United States of America! I love it with the passion of a teenager's first crush, with the pride and fierceness of a man holding his first newborn child – and I love it knowing its strengths and its weaknesses. I love it for its accomplishments and in spite of its failures. And that it tries to remove its warts.

Not being opposed to immigration, I welcome those who come here as my ancestors did, eager to become Americans. As a non-believer, I resist attempts to require the general population to adhere to any religious belief. However, I fear for America's future in that a recent study states that by the year 2070, the Muslim population will be equal to the Christian population*.

But the probability is that these immigrants will compromise the hard won beliefs and ideals of our Founding Fathers and replace them with sharia law.

This fear is borne out by the so called Arab Spring,

which in skipping summer and fall went directly to winter, with Algeria the one exception. Where elections appeared reasonably honest, voters elected religious leaders. Turkey and Egypt, where some secularism had been achieved, reversed many gains. In practice, Islam offers little or no freedom for secular beliefs, with any imam able to issue a fatwa, encouraging followers eager to murder those who do not adhere to their beliefs.

This nation of ours resulted from the assembling of a constellation of stars—our Founders—that occurred only once in the history of mankind. There may have been horse thieves among them [*and slave-owners, Art - JR*] but in those early Congresses the best and brightest shone at a time when they were sorely needed, hammering out words and deeds that resonate today, and still inspire millions, are still a beacon of hope for the world. What we are stemmed from the experiment conducted by those few.

Long live their ideals and the good old USA.

**Comment: The poll you refer to, Art, suggests that Muslims will equal Christians in number world-wide by 2070, not in the U.S. Equally important, every poll indicates that the vast majority of American Muslims do not want sharia law in the U.S. - JR*

DILBERT ON FREE SPEECH

Scott Adams

*(Transcribed from Dilbert Classic on NonSequitur, 3/22/15)
(Dilbert's housemates, a rat and a dog, discuss freedom.)*

Ratbert: The great thing about this country is that we have freedom of speech. ... Is it okay to say that?

Dogbert: Hmm ... let's see if it's on the free speech checklist. Okay, you didn't advocate overthrowing the government ... You were not obscene ... You did not generalize about a disadvantaged group ... You did not teach children anything useful or practical ... You didn't refer to anybody who can afford to hire a lawyer to sue us ... and there's nobody within hearing distance who can harm us financially ... You're clear.

Ratbert: God bless this country.

Dogbert: *Whoa. WHOA!*

DENNIS MIDDLEBROOKS "VOICES" OUT AGAINST ANTI-ATHEIST HATE SPEECH

(Editor: Using one of his several Letters-to-the-Editor pseudonyms, Dennis got this powerful statement published in the Daily News "Voice of the People" column May 3.)

Brooklyn: To Voicer Shahina Bashir, who is upset by the anti-Muslim bus ads and questions whether free speech means the right to be hateful: Yes, it does. That is why atheists have to put up with church billboards across the country quoting Biblical passages denouncing them as fools who never do good and who should be shunned. And it's why Bill Donohue of the Catholic League is free to repeatedly state that atheists "believe in nothing".

I suspect these forms of so-called hate speech have never bothered Bashir. – *Martin Brahms*

WHY STANDING UP TO ISLAMIC EXTREMISM IS LIBERALISM AT ITS BEST

Bill Maher and Ayaan Hirsi Ali

(Transcribed from "Real Time with Bill Maher", 5/15/2015)

(Editor: Bill Maher, for as far back as my memory of him goes, has mocked Islam just as he mocks Christianity and Judaism. Since 9/11/2001, in our decade-and-a-half Age of Terror, he has been a blistering critic of Islamic extremism, which has made him the focus of attacks by some cultural-relativist liberals, most famously the actor Ben Affleck, who some months ago on the program called Maher's attacks on Islam "racism", an accusation that went world-wide viral in minutes. (Since when is a religion a "race"?) Anyway, here is Maher interviewing apostate Muslim Ayaan Hirsi Ali, whose newest book is Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now. - JR)

Maher: How do we get liberals, and some of them are people I used to respect - how do we get them to understand that we're the liberals in this debate - the people who are shining a light on oppression and demanding that it will end, how can that not be the liberal cause? What do you say to liberals?

Ali: I say to them that the cancer of Islamic extremism is an assault on liberalism and liberal ideals. On the idea of the human being as - you know, protect the life of the human being, the freedom of the human, the quality of human beings - that is what it is an assault on.

Islamic extremists divide the world into Us and Them. And the ones they deem to be Them, even if they're pious Muslims, they kill them, they subjugate them, they sell them into slavery, they rape the women. They destroy art and civilization, and we see it every day. If you are a liberal, and if you really and truly believe in the principles of liberalism, you've got to stand up to the challenge of the day, and that is Islamic extremism.

JESUS AND MO CHAMPION BUT SPEECH

(Transcribed from jesusandmo.net/2015/04/29/but/)

Jesus: I believe in freedom of speech, but it should be used responsibly.

Mohammed: Me, too - I believe in freedom of speech, but not when it offends deeply held religious sentiments.

Jesus: And not when it feeds into a narrative of oppression.

Mo: Yes, freedom of speech is great, but only within strictly defined parameters. I also believe in equality, but not for everyone.

HOW TO DEFEND THE BANGLADESH ATHEISTS Sidney Finehirsh

A third Bangladeshi atheist has now been hacked to death. The response by the Bangladeshi government has been somewhere between lackadaisical and non-existent. That is not a surprise. What is more shocking is the pathetic response of the atheist movement both in the United States and worldwide.

Oh yes, the atheist press has published article after article decrying these barbaric attacks and calling for the right of free expression. Indeed, these articles call for action

now! Write letters; sign petitions; tweet your outrage; post on Facebook. All of which is guaranteed to make as much headway as a fly in a hurricane.

Two years ago, Center For Inquiry did join up with American Atheists to organize a demonstration at the UN calling for protection of atheists in Bangladesh. Trouble was, they couldn't agree on a date. Even so, about 20 people showed up, but due to the lack of any real effort to broaden the appeal of the message beyond a couple of atheist organizations, the demonstration was effectively a non-event. Nice try, but as about as useful as staying home to watch the news of the murders on TV.

How can we really help atheists in Bangladesh and elsewhere in the Muslim world? The answer is a broad-based coalition that reaches across secular, religious, and political lines of demarcation to support the rights of bloggers to write and speak without fear of intimidation: a "*Je suis un Bangladeshi blogger*" movement.

The first step in establishing such a coalition is an independent defense committee that is more than the step-child of any existing atheist organizations, but can represent everyone who is in favor of free expression. Such a committee, consisting of representatives of atheist, religious, professional, political, and civil liberties groups, would have a much greater impact on the general public and clearly identify the Bangladesh murders as more than just an atheist issue. Certainly there are many organizations which could be receptive to join such a coalition.

Besides the dozen of atheist groups in this country, there are such groups as the Interfaith Council, Ethical Culture, reform synagogues, mainstream Protestants, Maryknoll Sisters, ACLU, Americans for Separation of Church and State, civil rights groups, libertarians, Democratic clubs, Gay Rights, clothing workers unions, and professional organizations like Physicians for Social Responsibility. A little brainstorming would add dozens, if not hundreds of organizations to this list. And yes, let's not forget Muslim organizations like Muslims for Progressive Values and Park51 Islamic community center, which hosted an atheist event in 2011. (Getting support from American Muslims on the basis of free speech would of course be a big plus for any effort to defend Bangladeshi atheists, but here is where Islamophobia hurts our own movement.)

Besides an independent defense committee that could drive support to this campaign, there are likely hundreds, perhaps thousands of prominent individuals in all walks of life; in the secular, religious, and political world who could be enlisted as endorsers of a statement of conscience for free speech in Bangladesh.

Such broad based defense coalitions have a history of success. Similar campaigns have been successfully carried out by civil rights, political and labor organizations for decades. Such a committee must be independent, but that doesn't mean it can't be kickstarted by atheist organizations. If we really want to make a difference in the lives of Bangladeshi atheists, we need to cast a wider net that goes beyond signing petitions while crying in our beer.

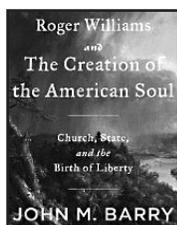
SHSNY CALENDAR: JUNE – AUGUST 2015

Note: New (old) location for the summer months!

SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURS, JUNE 4, 7-8:30 pm
THE COMMUNITY CHURCH
OF NEW YORK
28 East 35 St. (Park-Madison)
Front Lounge
We'll discuss

ROGER WILLIAMS AND THE CREATION OF THE AMERICAN SOUL: Church, State and the Birth of Liberty
John M. Barry

For 400 years, Americans have wrestled with two concepts that define the nature of the nation: the proper relation between church and state and between a free individual and the state.



Here's a revelatory look, by a distinguished historian, at how religious dissenter Roger Williams shaped the nature of religion, political power, and individual rights in America. — *All formats, including Amazon Bargain Book.*

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

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 Stone Creek Lounge

Great Lectures: 4th Wednesday
 at Stone Creek Lounge.

Studying Humanism: Last Monday
 at the Community Church of NY

More info: www.shsny.org,
 and/or 646-922-7389

SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURS, JUL 2, 7-8:30 pm
Community Church of New York
IN GODS WE TRUST:
The Evolutionary Landscape
of Religion
Scott Atran

Using our knowledge of the evolution of cognition, cognitive anthropologist and psychologist Scott Atran argues that religion is a by-product of human evolution just as the cognitive intervention, cultural selection, and historical survival of religion is an accommodation of certain existential and moral elements that have evolved in the human condition. — *Hardcover, paper, Kindle.*

SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURS, AUG 6, 7-8:30 pm
Community Church of New York
RELIGION EXPLAINED:
The Evolutionary Origins
of Religious Thought
Pascal Boyer

Why do people have religion? Cognitive anthropologist Boyer does not shrink from the task of explaining "the full history of all religion (ever)".

Using findings from anthropology, cognitive science, linguistics, and evolutionary biology, *Religion Explained* shows how this aspect of human consciousness is increasingly admissible to coherent, naturalistic explanation. — *Hardcover, paper, Kindle.*

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MEET US ON MEETUP

www.meetup.com/shsny-org/

TEXT US ON TWITTER

@NY_Sec_Humanist

Note: New (earlier) start time!

MON, JUNE 8, 6:30 pm
SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)
DOGMA

"Blasphemy!" said the Catholic League – what more do you need to know about this hilarious 1999 comedy about fallen angels trying to get back into heaven?

With Ben Affleck, Matt Damon, Linda Fiorentino, Alan Rickman, Salma Hayek, Chris Rock, Janeane Garofalo, Alanis Morissette ...



and George Carlin in full red-cloak drag as Cardinal Ignatius Glick!

Come – it'll be fun!

After-Film Discussion:

Let's tell George Carlin stories.

SHSNY Movie Night is FREE.

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

BRUNCH & CONVERSATION
SUN, JUNE 21, 11:30 am

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

Stone Creek works! We gather in the saloon's back room, where we have enough privacy to have different conversations around the several large tables, as well as the big one led by Dorothy Kahn.



The expanded pub-grub menu has been enhanced with an \$11 breakfast special, the Bloody Marys are hot, the beer is cold, and conversation sparkles.

Come for food, fun and well-fed conversation.

Discussion:

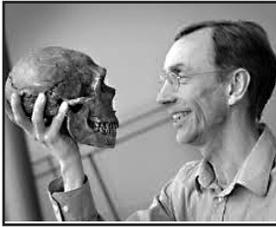
Is Muslim Anger Justified?

SHSNY CALENDAR: JUNE – AUGUST 2015

GREAT LECTURES ON DVD WED, JUNE 24, 7:00 pm Stone Creek Bar & Lounge 140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves) **NEANDERTHAL MAN: IN SEARCH OF LOST GENOMES**

Dr. Svante Paabo

Dr. Paabo, of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, tells the story of his mission to answer the question of what we can learn from the genes of our closest evolutionary relative, culminating with his sequencing of the Neanderthal genome in 2009.



Neanderthal genes may hold the key to unlocking the mystery of why humans survived while Neanderthals disappeared as a distinct race of people.

Drawing on genetic and fossil clues, Paabo explores what is known about the origin of modern human beings and their relationship to the Neanderthals and describes the fiery debate surrounding the nature of the two species interactions.

Great Lectures on DVD is FREE.
(But put something on the bar beside your elbow.)



Note: New (old) location for the summer months!

STUDYING HUMANISM MON, JUNE 29, 6:30 - 8:30 pm Community Church of New York 28 East 35 St (Front Lounge) 2014-15 Meeting/Discussion #7 **"How Should We Die?"**

Humanism is a guide to all of life, including the end of it. Let's examine ancient wisdom and 21st-Century possibilities.

Book:

- Barnes, Julian: *Nothing to be Frightened Of* (Paper & Kindle)

Online:

All are available to read or downloaded at www.shsny.org/Calendar

- *Epicurus on Death*
- 2015-7 SHSNY MD-Assisted Suicide March 2005
- 2015-7 SHSNY MD-Assisted Suicide April 2005

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!

REASONABLE NEW YORK SUMMER SOLSTICE PARTY SUN, JUNE 21, 12-4 pm at Ellington in the Park 103 St. in Riverside Park

Join dozens (50-60?) of Reasonable New Yorkers for fun, food and drink (full bar) on the longest day of the year. **FREE!**

COME TO PRIDEFEST! SUN, JUNE 28, 11am - 6pm Hudson Street between Abingdon Sq to West 14 St.

SHSNY will table at PrideFest's 22nd annual LGBT street fair that combines vendors, entertainers and activities for a day of fun and celebration in the name of equality. **FREE!**

SHSNY MEMBERS ALSO ...

- From May 22, artists Irene Christensen and Donna Marxer will exhibit paintings in "Seven American Artists" at Avelan Arts gallery, Laveanet, France.
- **Mon, June 1, 7 pm** Choreographer **Rebecca Kelly** will present 3 ballets at the City Center Studios, 130 W 56th St, NYC, featuring Rebecca Kelly Ballet's newest ensemble work, *Cascade*, to a rippling piano score. Also on the program are two duets: the lighthearted *La Belle* and *Le Bad Boy* and the sombre "tango" *Tenderness of Wolves*. Guests are invited to join the artists in a champagne reception following. Tickets \$40. (Students \$10) RSVP in advance, 212-431-8489.
- **Sun, June 14, 4:00 pm** at Holy Apostles Episcopal Church (SE corner of 28th St and 9th Ave, **Bob Murtha** and the New York City Community Chorus will sing a celebration of the lyrics of Ira Gershwin in songs composed by his brother George and by Jerome Kern and Kurt Weill. Suggested contribution \$12.00.

- **Monday, June 15, 6:30 pm**, **Ellen Peckham** will read with other poets in the last session of the Writer's Hotel Master Class at Bowery Arts and Science, 308 Bowery at Bleecker St. - *Free*.

THE LISTINGS RULES:

- You must be a dues-paid SHSNY member *personally* involved in an event (performing, exhibiting, speaking, etc.) open to the public.
- Send your info (no pdfs I have to retype, please) to editor@shsny.org
- Send your info for *next* month (and/or the month after) by the 20th of *this* month, e.g., info for July is due by June 20.
- Info will be edited to fit PIQUE's format and available space.

SCIENTISTS: EARTH ENDANGERED BY NEW STRAIN OF FACT-RESISTANT HUMANS

Andy Borowitz

(Excerpted from *thenewyorker.com*, 5/12/2015)

Scientists have discovered a powerful new strain of fact-resistant humans who are threatening the ability of Earth to sustain life, a virulent strain who are virtually immune to any form of verifiable knowledge, leaving scientists at a loss as to how to combat them.

"These humans appear to have all the faculties necessary to receive and process information," Davis Logsdon, one of the scientists who contributed to the study, said. "And yet, somehow, they have developed defenses that, for all intents and purposes, have rendered those faculties totally inactive." More worryingly, Logsdon said, "As facts have multiplied, their defenses against those facts have only grown more powerful."

While reaffirming the gloomy assessments of the study, Logsdon held out hope that the threat of fact-resistant humans could be mitigated in the future. "Our research is very preliminary, but it's possible that they will become more receptive to facts once they are in an environment without food, water, or oxygen," he said.

YOU CAN'T ARGUE WITH THIS LOGIC

John Rafferty

Sylvia Driskell, of Auburn, Nebraska, filed suit in federal district court in Omaha against homosexuals. *Driskell v. Homosexuals* is a suit against all homosexuals, and the heart of her seven-page, handwritten lawsuit is this unimpeachable (and unedited) logic:

"Your Honor; I've hear the boasting of the Defendant: the Homosexuals on the world news; from the Young, to the Old; to the rich An famous; and to the not so rich An famous; How they were tired of hiding in the closet, and how glad they are coming out of the closet.

"I Sylvoia Ann Driskell; Contented that homosexuality is a sin, And that they the homosexuals know it is a sin to live a life of homosexuality. Why else would they have been hiding in a closet."

Wow - case closed.

"IT'S ALWAYS BEEN THAT WAY"

Jonathan Engel

On April 28 oral arguments were held in the Supreme Court case "*Obergefell v. Hodges*". The primary issue in the case is whether there exists a Constitutional right to marry a person of the same sex. (Another, somewhat secondary issue in the case is whether states that do not sanction same sex marriages are compelled to recognize such unions performed in states that do).

As I was reading news reports about the case's Supreme Court oral argument, I was struck by how many Justices fell back on what I consider to be a very insubstantial argument against gay marriage, which can be summed up in the words "It's always been that way". Justice Kennedy

said "This definition (i.e. marriage being only between one man and one woman) has been with us for millennia. And it's very difficult for the court to say 'Oh well, we know better'." Justice Roberts said, "Every definition (of marriage) that I looked up, prior to about a dozen years ago, defined marriage as unity between a man and woman as husband and wife." Even Justice Breyer stated "the opposite view (that marriage is between one man and one woman) has been the law everywhere for thousands of years".

Except that it hasn't. Polygamy is legal, *right now*, in about 25 percent of the world's countries. So when people, even Supreme Court Justices, say that throughout history marriage has always been defined, in every culture, as only being between one man and one woman, they are flat out wrong. Not that I'm urging the United States to legalize polygamy, but I am saying that if you rest your argument against marriage equality on the "fact" that marriage has always been defined everywhere as between one man and one woman, your argument rests on a fallacy.

But there's a much better counter to the "historical" argument against marriage equality that can be summed up in two words: "So what?" Yes, it is true that the world has a long history of discrimination against, and persecution of, gay people. But is there any good reason for continuing that prejudice? Do opponents of marriage equality, including those who sit on the Supreme Court, really believe that a legitimate rationale for discriminating against homosexuals is "Well, we've always done that"? That argument is not only specious, it also throws up a bulwark against human progress. Slavery was accepted in virtually every human culture until it wasn't anymore. Humanity cannot move forward if it clings to outmoded and harmful ideas for no other reason than "It's always been that way".

I DO, I DO

John Rafferty

(Reprinted from PIQUE, January, 2004)

(Editor: Jon Engel's essay, above, made me think that it might be worthwhile reprinting part of my own 2004 PIQUE piece on the same subject. Here it is.)

Until the Massachusetts Supreme Court struck down prohibitions against same-sex marriage in *Goodridge v. Dept. of Public Health*, I considered "civil union" a neat solution to the problem of balancing equal rights for all with the U.S. public's majoritarian distaste for legalizing homosexual marriage. Over the last few years I'd had long conversations with an expert on the subject, a friend who lost his seat in the Vermont senate over his vote for that state's civil union law (and won it back two years later when his constituents realized the sky hadn't fallen). Mark—whose opinions on the subject had progressed from indifference to interest and on to informed conviction—had based his Yes-vote decision on a principle that, amazingly, often still matters in American politics: he believed it was the right thing to do.

Okay, civil unions. But marriage? Didn't I believe marriage was something different? And didn't that belief

mean I agreed with George W.? Good grief. Of course *Goodridge* had instantly provoked the usual predictions of apocalypse from the usual suspects on the radical right (and the equally predictable proposed constitutional amendment), so weren't gays hurting their own cause by provoking a conservative backlash that might threaten even civil union? And why did I find the liberal arguments so unsatisfying, even annoying?

As conservative David Brooks wrote in an Op-Ed piece in *The Times* November 22 [2003]: "When liberals argue for gay marriage, they make it sound like a really good employee benefits plan. Or they frame it as a civil rights issue, like extending the right to vote." Rather, Brooks argued, because marriage of any kind is in such disarray (the nearly-half divorce rate, the number of single parents) in America today, "The conservative course is not to banish gay people from making such commitments. It is to expect that they make such commitments. We shouldn't just allow gay marriage. We should insist on gay marriage. We should regard it as scandalous that two people would claim to love each other and not want to sanctify their love with marriage and fidelity."

I could understand that (even if "sanctify" stuck in my craw), but it still didn't seem to answer the question: Why not civil union, why marriage?

The answers lie in the Massachusetts court's carefully-reasoned decision itself:

"Simply put, the government creates civil marriage. In Massachusetts, civil marriage is, and since pre-Colonial days has been, precisely what its name implies: a wholly secular institution. ... No religious ceremony has ever been required to validate a Massachusetts marriage. ... In a real sense, there are three partners to every civil marriage: two willing spouses and an approving State.

"The history of constitutional law 'is the story of the extension of constitutional rights and protections to people once ignored or excluded'. ... This statement is as true in the area of civil marriage as in any other area of civil rights. ... As a public institution and a right of fundamental importance, civil marriage is an evolving paradigm. The common law was exceptionally harsh toward women who became wives: a woman's legal identity all but evaporated into that of her husband. ... Thus, one early Nineteenth Century jurist could observe matter of factly that, prior to the abolition of slavery in Massachusetts, 'the condition of a slave resembled the connection of a wife with her husband, and of infant children with their father. He is obliged to maintain them, and they cannot be separated from him'. ... Alarms about the imminent erosion of the 'natural' order of marriage were sounded over the demise of antimiscegenation laws, the expansion of the rights of married women, and the introduction of 'no-fault' divorce. Marriage has survived all of these transformations, and we have no doubt that marriage will continue to be a vibrant and revered institution."

Clang! That was the bell going off in my head. Marriage

is a civil contract between two people, sanctioned by the state; any religious aspect of that union is, in law and as a matter of civil rights, secondary. And the "natural order" of marriage has changed many, many times. In the Old Testament, polygamy is as common as bloodletting. Paul and many early Christians considered marriage simply a necessary evil, better than "burning" with lust while waiting for the imminent Second Coming. There are indications that marriage was a much more casual institution in, say, pre-Christian Angle-land than in Anglican England. The plot complications of several Elizabethan comedies hinge on the device of couples who are secretly but legally-for-their-time married because they "plight their troth" to each other, without benefit of clergy, a kiss, like a handshake, being a contract. For thousands of years of Western history, brides were bought and bartered, from Jacob's Leah and Rachel to the daughters of the Medici, the Rothschilds and the Windsors. Wives were once the property of husbands, could not own property of their own, could be lawfully beaten with sticks "no thicker than a thumb", and divorce was next to impossible.

Yet today few brides are "given in marriage" by their fathers, almost none vow to "obey", and clergymen of every stripe pronounce couples "husband and ..." rather than "man and wife". And the sky has not fallen.

"Marriage," said the Massachusetts court, "... is a vital social institution. The exclusive commitment of two individuals to each other nurtures love and mutual support; it brings stability to our society. ... The question before us is whether ... the Commonwealth may deny the protections, benefits, and obligations conferred by civil marriage to two individuals of the same sex who wish to marry. We conclude that it may not."

Me too.

Update 2015: Since 2004, I have become a Humanist Celebrant and have performed a few dozen weddings. Four of them were same-sex during the first year or so I was licensed, but none for a couple of years. Why not? - I think because same-sex couples no longer have to travel to New York to get married. Times change - sometimes for the better. - JR

SUE COX, SURVIVORS VOICE EUROPE, AND US David Orenstein

On May 12th, SHSNY held a program highlighting the work of activists helping to prevent clergy emotional and sexual abuse of children. We were visited by the United Kingdom's Sue Cox, a therapist and internationally known advocate for her work to stop clergy abuse. Sue shared her personal story and also talked in detail about how we can help heal those who have been victimized by clergy. Her presentation was smart, powerful and left all who attended wanting to know more.

Loss and Recovery are two sides of the same coin if one is able to move from personal tragedy to self-fulfillment. If a person can regain their balance, self-respect and see themselves as valuable rather than as victims they in turn can help heal the world. For Sue Cox, the co-director of Survivors Voice Europe (SVE), finding her personal value

was a journey through emotional pain and suffering caused by a parish priest who lived with her family and who started to sexually abuse her at the age of ten and who raped her at the age of 13. A mother of six and a grandmother, Sue's mission in life today is to help those who have also suffered the indignity of abuse at the hands of clergy.

In 2014 the United Nations Commission of the Rights of the Child found the Vatican in violation of the international treaty to protect children – a treaty the Vatican signed and then promptly ignored by pretending priest abuse has never occurred, obfuscating the truth and outright protecting predator priests.

But the Catholic Church, while rife with too many sick men posing as ethical leaders, doesn't own the market on child molestation. Every organized religion has pedophile clergy within its ranks, ready to strike the most vulnerable – those whom they can manipulate and abuse through their power and authority as clergy. And those victims, of course, are the children left in their pastoral care.

Sue's personal story is fraught with suffering. An alcoholic and drug addict by 15, a cutter and self-abuser, she was lost to civil society because the priest's sexual abuse had robbed her of her identity and self-respect, her dignity as a woman and her humanity as a person.

Because she thought she was the only person who was ever abused she always felt dirty and as if it were her fault in some way that, at the age of ten she had lured the priest and caused her abuse. Certainly that was the message from her deeply religious family, and that was also the innuendo of the church as well. According to Sue, such feelings of isolation by victims keeps priests safe and also affords them the power to control their victims and keep on abusing.

If Sue's story ended at 28 it would have been a very sad story. But at 29, she began to self-heal for the sake of her small children. She divorced her abusive husband and began to rebuild her life around making her children's world better, safer and kinder.

Sue went back to school for degrees in counseling and therapy. Co-Founding Survivors Voice Europe with friend and colleague, Ton Leerschool, she and her team have provided programs and counseling services for clergy abuse victims and their families. Speaking out and speaking up is Sue's mission now.

Sue and her team of therapists will return to the U.S. in September to offer training in identifying abuse, as well as to offer insights and understanding in the abused brain, and to bring therapeutic solutions to help heal those abused.

We'll keep you posted.

READERS RESPOND TO MAY PIQUE

- *To the Editor:* Kudos. The article about the religious right's distortion of "religious liberty" ("Some Snowflakes Are More Special Than Others", May PIQUE) makes the interesting point that many humans seem to possess an endless talent for self-delusion. – *Brian Lemaire*
- *To the Editor:* Awesome read, as always. – *Deeya Pavelle*
- *To the Editor:* I note the two articles in the May issue on

awards ("A Smarth Award?" and "A Good Guy Award? Absolutely!", both May PIQUE). I made a similar, but different suggestion. My suggestion, if you recall, was not to balance the Dumbth award. It was more to honor, and acknowledge a person whose actions and beliefs celebrate "the basic ideas of secular humanism".

The sense of these suggestions are to show our group expressing positive values as well exposing sham ideas with our Dumbth Award. My suggested "Darwin Day Award" would be given to the individual, chosen by member votes as in the Dumbth, who best represents the ideals of Secular Humanism. He needn't be a member; any person worthy of the honor should be considered.

A great issue [May], as always. Although Julian Barnes ("How Do We Know What We Think We Know?") was not referring to Edward Frankel's "The Reality of Quantum Weirdness" article, his final words seemly oddly insightful: "What convinces us that our knowledge is so final?" Not the quantum theory, says Frankel. – *Remo Cosentino*

UNIVERSAL DARWINISM. REALLY, UNIVERSAL

Richard Dawkins

(Excerpted from "This Is My Vision of 'Life': A Conversation with Richard Dawkins", with an Introduction by Edge Editor John Brockman, 4/30/2015)

Nobody knows whether there's life elsewhere in the universe. I think there probably is. The number of stars in the universe is something like 10 to the 22, and most of them have probably got planets. It would be pretty astonishing if we were unique. It would go against the lessons of history, you know, we're not the center of the universe, et cetera. Science fiction writers try to speculate about what life elsewhere might be like. I have one contribution to make, which is that I think however weird, and alien, and strange, and different life elsewhere might be, we can say one thing about it, which is that it will be, if we discover it, it will turn out to be Darwinian life.

I think there's only one way for the lead of pure physics to be transmuted into the gold of complex life, and that is differential replicator survival, which is Darwinism in its most general sense. So I would stick my neck out and say that when and if we ever discover life elsewhere in the universe, it will be Darwinian, it will be based upon something like DNA, probably not DNA, but something like DNA in the sense of an ultra-high fidelity, self-replicating coding system with the capability of producing great variety, which is what DNA does. So what I call Universal Darwinism is the doctrine, almost, the one thing we know about life everywhere, is that it's Darwinian life.

I gave a talk called "Universal Darwinism" at one of the Darwin Centenary Conferences, the one in Cambridge, and I based it upon looking at all the alternatives that someone might have suggested like Lamarckism, inheritance of acquired characteristics, the principle of use and disuse. The point I tried to make is that contrary to what most biologists have said, the thing that's wrong with Lamarckism is not just

that it doesn't work in practice, that acquired characteristics are not as a matter of fact inherited.

There are biologists, including Ernst Mayr, who have said Lamarck's theory is a fine theory, but unfortunately acquired characteristics are not inherited. The point I made was that even if they were inherited, the Lamarckian theory is nothing like a big enough theory to do the job of producing complex adaptations. Lamarckian theory depends upon use and disuse. The more we use our muscles, the bigger they get. That's fine, that happens, and then inheritance of acquired characteristics, you pass on your bigger muscles to your children. Ernst Mayr said that's a perfectly good theory. The only trouble is it doesn't work because acquired characteristics are not inherited, which of course is true.

But the point I was making was that even if it was true, the principle wouldn't work to produce real interesting biological evolution. Muscles are fine, that's one thing that does grow bigger when you use them. But something like an eye, the delicate focusing mechanism of the eye, the transparency of the eye, the huge number of light-sensitive cells, three different color codings and so on, that doesn't come about by use and disuse. The more you use your eyes, they don't become more, the lens doesn't become more transparent as photons wash through it. The eyes become better because of every single tiny mutation that improves the eye. As Darwin said, nature is daily and hourly scrutinizing. So every little tiny change, no matter how deeply buried in internal cellular biochemistry it is, if it has any effect whatever on survival and reproduction, natural selection will pick it up. The Lamarckian principle will work only for very, very crude growth, things like muscles getting bigger when you use them.

As we look around the world in which we live, what we see is stupefyingly complicated manmade machines like this camera that you're filming with, this recording machine, this computer, cars, ships, planes. These are not produced directly by natural selection, these are produced by human ingenuity, by human brains working together. No one human can make a Boeing 747. I mean, this is a cooperative enterprise involving lots of humans, involving lots of computers. It's a fantastic extension of the Darwinian substrate. So the principles that give rise to the very strong design of a plane, or a car, or a computer, these all come from human brains. But that's not the ultimate explanation.

The human brains themselves have to come from Darwinian natural selection. So if we go to other planets and discover extremely complicated technology, that technology itself will be the direct product of Darwinian selection, but it will be the product, ultimately, of Darwinian selection of the brains ... whatever they call them on that planet. It's arguable that something ... this is a different kind of argument now ... it's arguable that something like Darwinism does go on in human technology: that when a human designer is designing on the drawing board, he designs something, doesn't like it, tosses it in the bin, gets a fresh bit of paper, designs a slight variation of it and so on. There might be a Darwinian element to that. That's not what I'm saying.

I'm saying that a wholly new, at least partly new, kind of design came into the world when human brains started to exercise ingenuity, especially social ingenuity, cultural ingenuity. But the ultimate source of that is evolved brains, and the evolved brains have to come about by some version of Darwinian selection, which on other planets might be very different, but it will still be, I conjecture, I bet my shirt on it being Darwinian.

Our current model for the universe is entropy, which at the daily level translates as: things fuck up. – Julian Barnes, in *The History of the World in 10-1/2 Chapters*

WE HAVE ANOTHER DUMBTH NOMINEE

John Rafferty

(Based on "Is 'God' Going Back in Air Force Oath?" in *The Humanist Monthly, newsletter of the Capitol District (Albany) Humanist Society, May, 2015.*)

Meet Rep. Sam Johnson (R-TX), who has yet to be introduced to the U.S. Constitution. He is outraged that cadets at the U.S. Air Force Academy are no longer required to say "so help me God" while reciting the Honor Oath – "because of one radical atheist group's demands!" (Thank you, Mikey Weinstein, *FFRF* and *MAAF*.)



The oath reads: "We will not lie, steal or cheat, nor tolerate among us anyone who does. Furthermore, I resolve to do my duty and to live honorably, so help me God."

But now, no more mandatory "so help me God".

So Rep. Johnson has introduced the "Preserve and Protect God in Military Oaths Act of 2015" bill in Congress that would prohibit any U.S. military organization from changing an oath without Congressional approval. "Let me be clear," he said with unintended irony, "Americans have the freedom of religion – but not freedom from religion."

Really? What's clear is the extent of his stupidity.

OH, TO BE IN ENGLAND National Secular Society (UK)

(Excerpted from the *NSS newsletter, 4/24/15*)

A survey carried out by Whitehouse Consultancy has found that 33 percent of parliamentary candidates contesting marginal seats [in the UK May Parliamentary election] describe themselves as atheists.

Just 37 percent said they believe in God, and 42 percent of the 225 parliamentary candidates who responded to the survey said they had no religious affiliation.

Chairman Chris Whitehouse commented ... "Given recent findings on Britain's religious beliefs, it's unsurprising that a majority of parliamentary candidates are either non-religious or atheist." ...

At Easter-time, YouGov polling found that 62 percent of people say they are not religious, and WIN/Gallup found that Britain is the world's sixth least religious country.

HOW DO WE FEEL ABOUT THIS, HUMANISTS?

(Excerpted from "Court Grants Chimps Human Rights. Will A.I. Get Them Next?" by Monica Joshi on bigthink.com)

A New York State court is seeking to protect two research chimps—Hercules and Leo—from unlawful imprisonment following arguments made by The Nonhuman Rights Project (NhRP), a group whose goal is to extend human rights into new, non-human areas.



Citing habeas corpus ... the court moved to liberate the two chimps from the Stony Brook University Labs. For the NhRP, this is simply the beginning in the struggle for animal welfare rights.

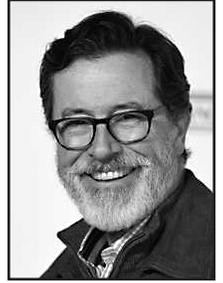
As chimps share 98.6 percent of our DNA, they have a close connection with humans and even closer ties to our ancestors. This ought not to be a surprise ruling as chimps are incredibly autonomous, complex creatures, with the ability to reason, identify and use symbols for communication, and have other cognitive functions significantly similar to humans. The surprise is that this is the first time that human rights have been granted to non-human creatures.

Not only does this come as a major victory for animal rights, but it also sets a precedent for cases of non-human creatures in captivity. We have to ask ourselves, "Will anything that displays human-like qualities be treated like a human with human rights under the court of law?"

Comment: Reader response is solicited - at editor@shsny.org

YES! WE HAVE ANOTHER GOOD-GUY NOMINEE: STEPHEN COLBERT

Public school teachers in South Carolina, like their colleagues across the U.S., find themselves starved for basic supplies like paper and pencils, while legislatures cut taxes on the rich and spend hugely on military-grade hardware for police and sheriff departments.



So SC teachers turned to the education crowdfunding website DonorsChoose.org with their individual requests, e.g.: "Please, I need a desktop globe to teach geography."

On April 30, at a surprise event at Alexander Elementary School in Greenville, comedian and SC native Stephen Colbert announced that he would fund every existing grant request South Carolina public school teachers have made - nearly 1,000 projects for more than 800 teachers at over 375 schools, totaling \$800,000. Of his own money.

What's more, news of his generosity went viral, spurring hundreds more donations nationwide.

Stephen joins our first 2015 Good Guy nominee in the Science-and-reason spotlight. Jimmy Kimmel, of ABC's late night "Live with Jimmy Kimmel", advised vaccination-averse parents who "are more afraid of gluten than smallpox" to "take medical advice from almost every doctor in the world - you know, the people who don't learn about the human body from their friends' Facebook page."

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