

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

May, 2015

Finally, Spring, and the humanist heart lightly turns to thoughts of ... brunch (see page 7). We turn, too, to evolving culture, Sherlockian thinking, godless dying, and the weirdnesses of both the quantum universe and the one run by Galactic Overlord Xenu. We consider Good Guys and receive mis-sives from members and from America's very own gulag. We slice-and-dice time, compare cow pies and apple pies, analyze atheism and the religious right and, below, a bogus holiday for bigots. — JR

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER? Americans United for Separation of Church and State

(Excerpted from the Americans United press release.)

By act of Congress, the first Thursday in May is set aside for the National Day of Prayer (NDP), and this year's event takes place on May 1. Government officials issue proclamations urging people to gather for prayer, and religious events often take place at the seats of local, state and federal governments.

Events are going on across the country this year. But this does not mean the National Day of Prayer is a good idea. Many believe a government-backed call for prayer and religious worship violates the separation of church and state. Americans United for Separation of Church and State raises the following objections:

Americans don't need the government to tell them when or how to pray. Americans have the right to pray for whomever they want and in what manner they like. But we don't need an officially designated government proclamation to do that. Our people are free to engage in worship whenever they want. Allowing government to set aside certain days for prayer and worship implies that the state has some say over our religious lives when it does not. It is simply not the business of government to advise when, if and how people pray.

The National Day of Prayer has been hijacked by the Religious Right, which uses it to promote religious bigotry.* In recent years, most NDP activities have been coordinated by the "National Day of Prayer Task Force", an organization based in Colorado Springs and run by Shirley Dobson, wife of Religious Right radio broadcaster James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family.

*(*In fact, until a couple of years ago, organizers of local NDP events were instructed on the official website to allow anyone to attend, but to allow only fundamentalist and evangelical Christians to speak or sit on platforms. — JR)*

The National Day of Prayer has become a vehicle for spreading misinformation about American history and society. In years past, the Task Force has used the NDP to promote bogus "Christian nation" history and advocate for erroneous claims that fundamentalist Christians are being persecuted in the United States or denied their right to spread their faith.

The National Day of Prayer is not historical. The NDP is of recent vintage. It was created by Congress in 1952. The scheduling of the event used to change, but it was codified by Congress in 1988 (after pressure from the Religious Right) as the first Thursday in May.

The National Day of Prayer is unnecessary. America does not need an official, government-mandated "National Day of Prayer". Religious individuals who feel strongly about the country are free to pray for it at any time. They do not need to be directed or encouraged by government.

THE ANSWER TO THE BIGOTS, HISTORY FABRICATORS AND SCIENCE DENIERS? COME CELEBRATE

THE NATIONAL DAY OF REASON!

SUNDAY, MAY 3, AT NOON AT PETE'S TAVERN.

Join half a hundred of your fellow and sororal freethinkers for SHSNY'S 7th Annual Day of Reason Brunch at "the tavern O. Henry made famous".

And learn, from SCNY Chair John Wagner, how we can fight back politically against the bigots and liars.

See the details on page 7, and save 10 percent on a great brunch (drink included) by booking early ... *now!*

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ATHEISM, ACTUALLY

Giddian Beer

(Reprinted from the *Paleolibrarian* blog, 12/3/2014)

Look at what people are saying and writing about atheism: that it exists only to oppose religion, hates God, has no morals, is a religion, is a negative philosophy, etcetera. But such ideas are initiated by people who seriously dislike atheism and are figments of their dislike-inspired imaginations. So, here is the lowdown, starting with some clarifications:

First: Generally, atheists do oppose religion, but that is not why atheism exists; it exists because atheists know that there is no creator-supervisor of the universe. Also, just as atheists do not hate unicorns and mermaids, they do not hate God.

Second: Religions are dedicated to worship and propitiation of deities; they impose dogma and rules. Atheists, knowing that deities are imaginary creatures, recommend critical thinking based on real evidence, and impose no dogma or rules. That is the essential difference – atheists' opinions are neither rules nor dogma. Instead, atheists are guided by empathy and common decency. Paraphrasing Kenneth Bronstein (President of New York City Atheists), "Atheism is not a religion, it's a conclusion."

Third: Atheism opposes replacement of science and rationality with myths and superstitions. However, the myths and superstitions *per se* are not major reasons for opposing religion; the main reasons are the suffering and damages that religions so often inflict. The popularity of religion is no reason to exonerate its bad behavior and harmful effects.

Religion is ubiquitous in human societies. Religious strife and oppression are natural concomitants. The behavior and effects of religion are related to its intensity. Where intensity is strong and pervasive – as in the Mideast, Africa, central and south Asia – sectarian conflict, hatred, persecution and massacre are endemic. Where it is prevalent there are efforts to impose religious versions of history, biology and acceptable conduct on people who have different beliefs and lifestyles. These efforts are resented and resisted. In the United States, additionally, marriage of religious fundamentalism with ideologically constipated economics has paralyzed government, prolonged recession and stymied efforts to protect the environment.

Where religious intensity is minimal, as in Scandinavia, stress is lower and inter-religious conflict is absent.

Religions espouse magical thinking and mythical explanations for existence and for the conditions and vicissitudes of life. These explanations are inculcated in poorly informed people through stories and parables. When people want to believe, nothing is too absurd. And people who have unthinking trust of authoritarian sources are more easily exploitable by political manipulators as well as by religious leaders.

For the indoctrinated, religion provides rituals, hopes of miracles, prescriptions for living and visions of an

afterlife that can be emotionally and psychologically helpful. Monotheistic religions also provide the comfort of worshiping, belonging and submitting to the ultimate power, a kind of benevolent, demanding, protective super-daddy who dispenses rewards and punishments and whom they can love and/or fear. Atheists need none of these.

Religions also engender stressful feelings: resentment, mistrust, dread, even hatred, of people who believe differently. Atheists deplore and repudiate these.

Some denominations, especially in the lower ranks, work hard and effectively to relieve suffering and poverty, but usually in association with proselytizing efforts.

These days there are denominations that are tolerant and avoid inter-religious conflict. They believe in God but do not reject science. They adjust their dogma and rules in light of reality, basic human needs and common decency. There is no reason to oppose them.

Others strive to foist their precepts and protocols on everyone. It is an element of their morality, a sacred duty. They meddle in government, corrupt history, replace science with fantasy and try to dumb down the populace. Some are mercilessly virulent. Ignorance and maniacal sex obsessions are cruelly enforced. Fanaticism, foolishness and inhumanity prevail; common sense, compassion and understanding are forsaken.

Once it was worse. Monotheistic religions emphasized belief over reason. Devotees were exhorted to purge doubt, purify thought and intensify faith, a recipe for often lethal zeal. For centuries they imposed ideological purity with oppression, massacres, witch-hunts, executions and fiendish tortures, and they ground against each other with inter-religious warfare.

Though that intensity has since abated or been constrained in most places, impulses to purify humanity by force—even by exterminating some of it—persist. The Holocaust was an offspring of the many centuries of hostility towards, and persecution of, a people (Jews) who would not believe required precepts and dogmas. So, in any list of pursuits that drive "man's inhumanity to man", religion would certainly be near the top.

Finally, imagine that there were no religions. Then a major cause of conflict, repression and abuse would be absent: no religious persecutions; no pogroms; no murders of homosexuals; no denial of needed health care for women; no Shia Muslims, Sunni Muslims, Jews, Roman Catholics, Orthodox Catholics, Protestants, Hindus, Buddhists, etc., who need to defend and/or inflict their faiths with sometimes murderous passion; no Armenian genocide; no religious cleansing in the former Yugoslavia; no religion-motivated killings and bombings in Northern Ireland, Lebanon, Iraq, Mumbai, Syria; no inter-religious massacres in the Mideast, the Caucasus, Africa, India, Bangladesh; no Holocaust; no 9/11 event. Then atheists would not be troubled by magical thinking any more than they are by astrology or crop circles; they would be content urging critical thinking and replacement of fantasy with science.

That would be a better world indeed.

SOME SNOWFLAKES ARE MORE SPECIAL THAN OTHERS

Rachel191

(Reprinted from "The 'Special Snowflake' Syndrome of American Conservatives", originally posted at Rachel's Hobbit Hole on Daily Kos, 4/6/2015)

The "religious freedom" debacles in Indiana and Arkansas have illustrated a lot of important points lately. The big one, of course, is that we as a society are moving past the point where it is socially acceptable to harbor animus toward another human being because of their sexual orientation, and try to find refuge in the law for discriminatory impulses that arise from that animus.

But there's another important one that should not be overlooked. It's the religious far-right's "special snowflake" syndrome. That's really what the entire conversation is about: conservative Christians thinking that because they believe God sanctions their particular brand of bigotry, they're special snowflakes who shouldn't be retrained by human decency, much less the pesky laws that the rest of us are obliged to follow. If you hate hard enough, the rules don't apply to you.

Because you are a special snowflake, who really, really believes in what you're doing, your feelings about something make you so special that the law just ceases to apply to special little you.

And it's not like conservatives are going too far out on a limb in believing this. In some measure we've come to accept that belief should excuse you from following the law, even as it impacts others. With, for instance, Hobby Lobby, we see a shift toward the idea that your beliefs, even if factually wrong, simply exempt you from the law — even when, in practice, that has an impact on other people.

We've moved away from the sensible idea that a person shouldn't be held to laws that conflict with his beliefs where exemption won't have an impact on others, to a world where religion is a valid excuse to get out of such obviously necessary things as driver's licensing rules. So we've gone from "Your career won't be ruined for using a prohibited substance in your religious ceremony" to "You don't have to provide health care coverage for medicine you don't like." Religion and religious belief has become the trump card: having a belief about something, in a sense, did make you a special snowflake, and you could get away with all sorts of things, regardless of the impact on other people, by virtue of how special you were.

All animals are equal, but animals who profess a strongly held belief are more equal. Or so conservatives, and their overly broad interpretations of religious freedom, seem to have convinced themselves.

And then along comes the Indiana skirmish, and all of a sudden this isn't a given any more. Along the lines of "Your right to swing your fist ends where the other fellow's nose begins", it seems that people are not willing to make the same allowance for belief when it impacts people beyond the believer as they are when it concerns just the

believer. In other words, people still haven't lost sight of the only sensible view of religious liberty there is: we should all be free to live according to our consciences, up until the moment that those consciences drive us to impose our beliefs on another person. In a world full of competing, often contradictory ideas, this is the only view of religious liberty that is feasible, or could possibly be evenly applied.

And it's a far cry from the special snowflake syndrome conservatives seem to be suffering from ... because at the end of the day none of us are or should be special snowflakes in the eyes of the law, and none of us should have a trump card to use at the expense of our neighbors.

CULTURE EVOLVES – IN OUR DIRECTION

Jim Haught

(Reprinted from the Charleston (WV) Gazette, 3/24/2015, of which Mr. Haught is Editor – and forwarded by Edd Doerr)

America's culture evolves constantly in many ways. Most changes are glacial and little-noticed — but they slowly add up to profound sociological effect. Here's a major transformation: Churchgoing keeps dwindling in America, as it did previously in Europe, Canada, Japan, Australia and other modern democracies. This trend has far-reaching implications.

A new Gallup survey says West Virginia's largest religious group isn't Catholics, Baptists or Methodists — instead, it's people who don't go to church. Pollsters found that 34 percent of West Virginians say they attend worship weekly, and 18 percent say they go at least monthly, but the largest group is 49 percent who answer "seldom or never" or "don't know".

Actually, West Virginia is more religious than most states. In Vermont, only 17 percent say they attend weekly. Churchgoing is stronger in the Deep South. Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana and Arkansas all report attendance in the 40 percent range.

Many studies find that the most rapid shift in America is an increase in people who say their religion is "none", a segment that has surged since 1990. This group has climbed to around 50 million. It includes one-third of adults under 30. This secular trend is rising.

Mainline Protestant "tall steeple" faiths have suffered the worst loss, dropping millions of members. In 1965, half of America's population belonged to the top seven mainline bodies, but today it's 10 percent. Scholar Joseph Bottum lamented: "The Great Church of America has come to an end." Meanwhile, around 20 million have drifted from Catholicism — so one-tenth of U.S. adults are ex-Catholics. And evangelicals likewise are shrinking.

The Barna religious polling service says secularism has increased so much that "about 156 million U.S. adults and children are churchless". That's half of the population. Only 18 percent of Americans actually attend church on a typical Sunday, researcher David Olson says — and he expects the ratio to slip below 15 percent by 2020.

The cultural shift can be seen in disappearance of church-backed laws. A half-century ago, it was a crime for

stores to open on the Sabbath — or for an unwed couple to share a bedroom — or for anyone to buy a cocktail or lottery ticket, or look at the equivalent of a Playboy magazine — or for couples to practice birth control in some states. Gay sex was a felony. And it was a felony for a desperate girl to end a pregnancy. Now all those moral laws are gone.

The rise of “nones” has political implications. Those who don’t attend church generally are more tolerant of gays, more welcoming of blacks and Hispanics, more supportive of women’s right to choose, more approving of the public safety net. In other words, they tend to back compassionate progressive values — and they have become the largest single group in the Democratic Party base.

Sociologist Ruy Teixeira predicts they will boost Democratic politics in coming decades and turn America more liberal. But they’re somewhat less inclined to vote. A couple of years ago, Dr. Teixeira wrote about America:

“In 1944, 80 percent of adults were white Christians. But things have changed a lot since then. Today, only about 52 percent of adults are white Christians. By 2024, that figure will be down to 45 percent. That means that by the election of 2016, the United States will have ceased to be a white Christian nation. Looking even farther down the road, by 2040 white Christians will be only around 35 percent of the population and conservative white Christians, who have been such a critical part of the GOP base, only about a third of that — a minority within a minority.”

Part of this shift is caused by the steady rise of Hispanics, Asians, blacks and other minorities, which gradually will reduce traditional European whites to less than half of the U.S. population. London’s *Guardian* reported last fall:

“So-called millennials (Americans born between 1982 and 2000) are far more diverse, educated and tolerant than their predecessors. They’re also the least-religious generation in American history — they’re even getting less religious as they age, which is unprecedented — and the majority of them identify Christianity as synonymous with harsh political conservatism.”

As the huge millennial generation slowly replaces old conservatives, the power of the Republican “religious right” will dwindle, it said. It’s fascinating to watch the culture shift -- and to guess where America is heading.

THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT ARE POLITICALLY STRONGER THAN EVER

Edd Doerr

(Reprinted from Mr. Doerr’s letter in the Charleston (WV) Gazette, 4/5/2015)

James Haught’s March 22 article, “Cultural change is slow but deep”, accurately reported demographic shifts in religion in America, but that’s not the whole story. The “nones” or religiously unaffiliated may be 20 percent of our population now, but in the 2014 elections — in which only 36 percent of eligibles bothered to vote — exit surveys showed that only 12 percent of voters were “nones.”

Further, while very conservative churchgoers, usually labeled the “Religious Right”, are diminishing somewhat in numbers, they are politically stronger than ever. They and their political allies nationwide have:

1. Advanced their agenda of diverting public funds to faith-based private schools through vouchers and tax credits, even though American voters between 1966 and 2014 have rejected such measures by an average 2-to-1 margin in 28 state referendum elections from coast to coast; and this is damaging the public schools serving 90 percent of our kids.

2. Increased restrictions on women exercising their rights of conscience and religious freedom to terminate problem pregnancies for medical or other serious reasons.

3. Denied climate change—involving carbon dioxide buildup in the atmosphere, resource depletion, toxic waste accumulation, deforestation, desertification, soil erosion and nutrient loss, rising sea levels (40 percent of world population lives in coastal areas), shrinking biodiversity, and increasing sociopolitical instability and violence, all of which is fueled by human overpopulation — thus endangering the planet.

4. Increased federal and state court rulings that undermine the constitutional church-state separation that protects the religious freedom of each and every one of us.

There is indeed a culture shift, but our country is not out of the woods by a long shot. Americans of all persuasions — Protestants, Catholics, Jews, the “nones” and others — need to work together to stop the erosion of our basic values before it is too late.

(Note: Edd Doerr is President of Americans for Religious Liberty, Jim Haught is editor of the Charleston (WV) Gazette, and both are columnists in Free Inquiry. — JR)

THE FIRST (AND LAST) WORDS ON CHARLIE HEBDO

George Packer

(Reprinted from “The Blame for the Charlie Hebdo Murders” at newyorker.com/news/news-desk/blame-for-charlie-hebdo-murders, 1/7/2015)

(Editor: I got such a rush of correspondence on the Charlie Hebdo murders in January, and there was so much subsequent media to sort through, that this, from NewYorker.com on the very day of the atrocity, fell through the cracks until Gretchen Robinson forwarded it to me in April. Nearly half the pages of the last three issues of this newsletter have since been taken up with arguments regarding terrorism, Islam, Islamic terrorism, and Islamophobia. While in no way trying to stifle or end those arguments herein, I offer the following as a sort of envoi on the subject. Enough, for a while, anyway. — JR)

The murders today in Paris are not a result of France’s failure to assimilate two generations of Muslim immigrants from its former colonies. They’re not about French military action against the Islamic State in the Middle East, or the American invasion of Iraq before that. They’re not part of some general wave of nihilistic violence in the economically depressed, socially atomized, morally hollow West—the Paris version of Newtown or Oslo. Least

of all should they be “understood” as reactions to disrespect for religion on the part of irresponsible cartoonists.

They are only the latest blows delivered by an ideology that has sought to achieve power through terror for decades. It’s the same ideology that sent Salman Rushdie into hiding for a decade under a death sentence for writing a novel, then killed his Japanese translator and tried to kill his Italian translator and Norwegian publisher. The ideology that murdered three thousand people in the U.S. on September 11, 2001. The one that butchered Theo van Gogh in the streets of Amsterdam, in 2004, for making a film. The one that has brought mass rape and slaughter to the cities and deserts of Syria and Iraq. That massacred a hundred and thirty-two children and thirteen adults in a school in Peshawar last month. That regularly kills so many Nigerians, especially young ones, that hardly anyone pays attention.

Because the ideology is the product of a major world religion, a lot of painstaking pretzel logic goes into trying to explain what the violence does, or doesn’t, have to do with Islam. Some well-meaning people tiptoe around the Islamic connection, claiming that the carnage has nothing to do with faith, or that Islam is a religion of peace, or that, at most, the violence represents a “distortion” of a great religion. (After suicide bombings in Baghdad, I grew used to hearing Iraqis say, “No Muslim would do this.”) Others want to lay the blame entirely on the theological content of Islam, as if other religions are more inherently peaceful—a notion belied by history as well as scripture.

A religion is not just a set of texts but the living beliefs and practices of its adherents. Islam today includes a substantial minority of believers who countenance, if they don’t actually carry out, a degree of violence in the application of their convictions that is currently unique. Charlie Hebdo had been nondenominational in its satire, sticking its finger into the sensitivities of Jews and Christians, too—but only Muslims responded with threats and acts of terrorism. For some believers, the violence serves a will to absolute power in the name of God, which is a form of totalitarianism called Islamism—politics as religion, religion as politics. “Allahu Akbar!” the killers shouted in the street outside Charlie Hebdo. They, at any rate, know what they’re about.

These thoughts don’t offer a guide to mitigating the astonishing surge in Islamist killing around the world. Rage and condemnation don’t do the job, nor is it helpful to alienate the millions of Muslims who dislike what’s being done in the name of their religion. Many of them immediately condemned the attack on Charlie Hebdo, in tones of anguish particular to those whose deepest beliefs have been tainted. The answer always has to be careful, thoughtful, and tailored to particular circumstances. In France, it will need to include a renewed debate about how the republic can prevent more of its young Muslim citizens from giving up their minds to a murderous ideology—how more of them might come to consider Mustapha Ourrad, a Charlie Hebdo copy editor of Algerian descent who was among the victims, a hero. In other places, the responses have to be

different, with higher levels of counter-violence.

But the murders in Paris were so specific and so brazen as to make their meaning quite clear. The cartoonists died for an idea. The killers are soldiers in a war against freedom of thought and speech, against tolerance, pluralism, and the right to offend—against everything decent in a democratic society. So we must all try to be Charlie, not just today but every day.

TERRORISM AS SELF-HELP JUSTICE

Michael Shermer

(Excerpted from his “Skeptic” column in *Scientific American*, May, 2015)

After the Middle Ages ... morally motivated self-help justice was replaced for the most part by rationally motivated criminal justice. [But when] people do not trust a state’s justice system or believe it to be biased against them — or when people live in weak states or governments are ineffectively stateless societies — they take the law into their own hands. Terrorism is one such activity, the expression of which ... is a form of self-help justice whose motives depend on the secular terrorist group. These have ranged from the revolutionary Marxism in the 1970s to apocalyptic Islam today as practiced by the Islamic state of Iraq and Syria (known as ISIS or ISIL), which is not a state at all but a loose confederation of jihadists.

Many American liberals and media pundits have downplayed their religious motives, but as [sociologist Daniel] Black told me in an email, “Muslim terrorists should be taken at their word that their movement is Islamic, anti-Christian, anti-Jewish, etc. We have their word as evidence, and in my view that is the proper basis on which to classify their movement. Would we have said that the violence used by Protestants and Catholics during the Protestant Reformation had nothing to do with religion? That would be absurd.”

No less absurd is the belief that jihadists are secular political agitators in religious cloak. As Graeme Wood writes in “What ISIS Really Wants”, his investigative piece in the March issue of the *Atlantic*, “much of what the group does looks nonsensical except in light of a sincere, carefully considered commitment to returning civilization to a seventh-century legal environment, and ultimately to bringing about the apocalypse”.

Yes, ISIS has attracted the disaffected from around the world, but “the religion preached by its most ardent followers derives from coherent and even learned interpretations of Islam,” Wood concludes, adding that its theology “must be understood to be combated.”

Nothing is more dangerous than an idea when it's the only one you have. — *Emile Chartier*

Fear prophets and those prepared to die for the truth, for as a rule they make many others die with them, often before them, at times instead of them. — *Umberto Eco*

SHSNY CALENDAR: MAY – JULY 2015

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

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

40 East 35 St. (Park-Madison)
(Church basement - elevator)

We'll discuss

**IMAGINE THERE'S
NO HEAVEN:**

**How Atheism Helped Create
the Modern World**

Mitchell Stephens

Traveling from classical Greece to twenty-first century America we explore the role of disbelief in shaping Western civilization. Stephens tells the often-



courageous tales of history's most important atheists—like Denis Diderot and Salman Rushdie—and makes a strong and original case for unbelief's importance not only to today's New Atheist movement but to the way many of us—believers and nonbelievers—now think and live. — Hardcover, Kindle, and half-price download from Amazon.com

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, JUN 4, 7-8:30 pm
Community Church of New York
**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, incl Amazon Bargain Book.

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.

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@NY_Sec_Humanist

BRUNCH & CONVERSATION

SUN, MAY 17, 12 NOON
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)

Success! Our first brunch at Stone Creek, in the private back room, was a definite crowd favorite. The new and expanded pub-grub menu was enhanced with an



\$11 breakfast special, the Bloody Marys were hot, the beer was cold, and conversation sparkled, even long after the plates were cleared.

Come join 20 or more other free-thinkers and humanists for food, fun and well-fed conversation.

*Discussion: "Free-Range Kids"
— A freethought issue?*

MON, MAY 11, 7:00 pm

SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT

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

RASHOMON

Akira Kurosawa's masterpiece, this Oscar-winning crime drama unfolds as four witnesses to a rape and murder report their versions of the attack. A riveting psychological thriller that investigates the nature of truth and the meaning of justice, "Rashomon" is widely considered one of the greatest films ever made.

After-Film Discussion:

The "Rashomon Effect":

*How do we know what is true?
(See "Quantum Weirdness", pg 8)*

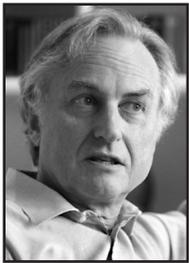
SHSNY Movie Night is FREE.

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

SHSNY CALENDAR: MAY – JULY 2015

GREAT LECTURES ON DVD
WED, MAY 22, 7:00 pm
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)

THE GOD DELUSION
Richard Dawkins



Dawkin fires a direct no-holds-barred salvo against organized religion. He argues that belief in “the God hypothesis” is both intellectually wrong and a divisive and oppressive force that contributes to social backwardness and bigotry. He says, “I am hostile to fundamentalist religion because it actively debauches the scientific enterprise. It teaches us not to change our minds, and not to want to know exciting things that are available to be known. It subverts science and saps the intellect.”

This carefully-reasoned, yet entertaining and insightful analysis by one of the great minds of our time will give both atheists and believers something to think about.

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

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.
- June 1, 7pm, **Rebecca Kelly** and **Craig Brashear’s** Rebecca Kelly Ballet company will present a Summer Preview Performance “of classical and contemporary dance in an intimate setting” at City Center Studio #4, 130 West 56 St.. \$40, RSVP 212-431-8489. Info at www.rebeccakellyballet.org

STUDYING HUMANISM

MON, JUN 1, 6:30 - 8:30 pm
 (June 1 because last Monday in May is Memorial Day holiday weekend)

Community Church of New York
40 East 35 St (church basement)
2014-15 Meeting/Discussion #6
**“Islam & Humanism:
 Is Coexistence Possible?”**

Online:

All the following short essays are available to read or download in pdf format at www.shsny.org/Calendar

- Kenan Malik – *When Does Criticism of Islam Become Islamophobia?*
- Kenan Malik – *The Making of Wannabe Jihadis In The West*
- Kwame Appiah – *How Muslims Made Europe*
- Hugh Eakins – *Norway: The Two Faces of Extremism*

• See also the *Historical List of Terrorist Organizations and Attacks*
 The meeting will be led by Islam scholar Sid Finehirsh, assisted by John Rafferty and Mike Weiss.

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!*

**OTHER REASONABLE
 NEW YORK EVENTS**

New York Philosophy: Fri, May 1, 6-11pm at 49 Grove, *Cocktails & Conversation: (Subject TBA)*. Free admission, 100 expected. www.nyphilosophy.com

NY Society for Ethical Culture:

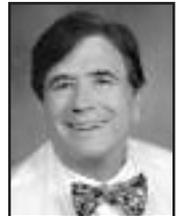
- Fri, May 1, 7 pm, Ethics in Film: *The Truman Show* (1988). Snacks/bevs, \$5 suggested.

- Fri, May 8, 7pm, Ethics and the Theater: Reading of *Broken Fences* by Steven Simoncic. 6:30 reception, snacks/bevs, \$10 suggested.

See the full RNY calendar at www.reasonable.nyc

BOOK EARLY - SAVE \$5!
SUNDAY, MAY 3, NOON
DAY OF REASON BRUNCH,
at PETE'S TAVERN,
129 East 18 Street

JOHN A. WAGNER
**“Promoting Secular Politics
 in the Empire State”**



Yes, New York may be a lot better than Mississippi, but the push to incorporate the religious agenda into our laws and our tax code is alive and well in the Empire State.

SHSNY Board member John Wagner is Chair of the Secular Coalition for New York. He and his team have been studying New York politics with an eye toward promoting secular values, eliminating religious privilege, and promoting laws based on scientific, rather than superstitious values.

Join us to find what he has learned, to discover how you can maximize your impact in the political arena, to share your concerns, and to discuss tactics with like-minded secular humanists.

Don't miss this lively, informative talk (plus Q&A) at the oldest continuously operating tavern/bar in NYC ... and join 40 or more of your fellow freethinkers for one of SHSNY's best annual get-togethers.

Brunch is just \$25 at the door, for your choice of 11 entrees, tax, tips and a drink included.

**But save 20% (\$5)
 by reserving now
 at www.shsny.org**

DYING WITHOUT DEITY A Report by Elaine Lynn

SHSNY members joined participants from the US and other nations at a symposium on “Dying without Deity,” held at Columbia University April 10th and 11th. The symposium was presented by the Institute for Science and Human Values, an organization founded by the late Paul Kurtz, and headed by Toni Van Pelt, its President and Public Policy Director.

Two SHSNY members were presenters and discussants. Jennifer Michael Hecht, whose *Doubt: A History*, has recently been the subject of three SHSNY Book Club meetings is the author of, most recently, *Stay: The History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It*.

Massimo Pigliucci, Professor of Philosophy at City College and at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, discussed his current research on the views of death in ancient Greek and Roman philosophy and their relevance today.

During the hospital consolidation of the last few decades, one of the groups with a relatively high rate of mergers is that of Catholic hospitals. As an expert explained, there are specific Catholic prohibitions applying to all staff of those merged institutions, prohibitions of which patients may be unaware. This affects not only gynecology and obstetrics, but end of life decisions as well. Patient autonomy at these and other medical facilities are a concern at both the public and individual levels. Among the speakers were two attorneys who work on these issues directly and who brought useful hand-outs to share. One is “Estate Planning to Eliminate Religious Ritual”; the other is “Protecting Your Rights in Death”. The latter has sample documents that can help people to do this on their own.

Asserting a person’s right to death with dignity may include their own decision to choose the time and circumstances. During the discussion, Ms. Hecht agreed that her support of what she called “the secular argument against suicide” does not contradict a terminal patient’s right to control over the timing and manner of death.

The Institute for Science and Human Values is a 501(c)(3) organization. Its website, <http://instituteforscienceand-humanvalues.com>, includes their mission statement, an ISHV Cyber Think Tank with articles and videos from the web, and other material of interest. It also publishes a journal, *The Human Prospect: A Neohumanist Perspective*.

SHERLOCK AT NECSS

**“Mastermind: Mastering the Rational Thinking of Sherlock Holmes”, by Maria Konnikova
A Report by Brian Lemaire**

Maria Konnikova, author of *Mastermind: How to Think Like Sherlock Holmes*, gave a fascinating Day 3 presentation at the NorthEast Conference on Science and Skepticism (NECSS), and made a few points about habits of thinking that can help us in our day-to-day lives. Try these on ...

Organize new things in the attic of your mind. Konnikova urged us to clean up that jumbled clutter of hundreds of things strewn around our mental attics. If we think a new piece of information will be worth remembering, we can consciously store new things in our memory, filing it next to related information in our existing framework. Like a filing cabinet.

Multi-tasking brings us more headaches than it is worth. A slide showed a man commuting to work on his bicycle while talking on his cell phone – dangerous and dumb. Konnikova recommends setting aside a minute or two each day to clear our minds. Close your eyes. Just listen to your breathing, and shoo away for the time being any stray thoughts that creep into your consciousness. Improves your ability to focus later on.

And sometimes, try Sherlock’s “Three-pipe solution”. Example: “The Adventure of the Red-Headed League”, in which a man with “flame-red hair” comes to Holmes to find out why he was hired – because of his red hair and at a large salary – to do meaningless busywork, then was abruptly dropped by his employer, who has disappeared.

Watson was all eager to go out and hunt up the employer, but Holmes said, No, he wanted to smoke his pipe on the puzzle for a while. Taking a step back, looking at the larger picture, the meta-picture, Holmes deduces that the meaningless job was just that, meaningless, and that the “employer’s” motivation was to get the redheaded man out of and away from his own office. Sure enough, on examination, Holmes, Watson and the police find that thieves were digging under the redhead’s own office to get at the bank vault next door.

Sometimes it’s best to step back ... and re-think.

AND THE BEST ONE-LINER FROM FOUR DAYS OF NECSS

David Gorski, of the Society for Science-Based Medicine, on the attempts to integrate “alternative medicine” with, you know, real medicine:

“When you mix a cow pie with an apple pie, it doesn’t make the cow pie taste better, but it does make the apple pie taste worse.” – JR

HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT WE THINK WE KNOW?

Julian Barnes

If I called myself an atheist at 20, and an agnostic at 50 and 60, it isn’t because I have acquired more knowledge in the meantime: just more awareness of ignorance. How can we be sure that we know enough to know? As twenty-first-century neo-Darwinian materialists, convinced that the meaning and mechanism of life have only been fully clear since the year 1859, we hold ourselves categorically wiser than those credulous knee-benders who, a speck of time away, believed in divine purpose, an ordered world, resurrection and a Last Judgment. But although we are more informed, we are no more evolved, and certainly no more intelligent than them. What convinces us that our knowledge is so final?

THE REALITY OF QUANTUM WEIRDNESS

Edward Frenkel

(Reprinted from The New York Times, 2/20/2015)

In Akira Kurosawa's film "Rashomon," a samurai has been murdered, but it's not clear why or by whom. Various characters involved tell their versions of the events, but their accounts contradict one another. You can't help wondering: Which story is true?

But the film also makes you consider a deeper question: Is there a true story, or is our belief in a definite, objective, observer-independent reality an illusion? This very question, brought into sharper, scientific focus, has long been the subject of debate in quantum physics. Is there a fixed reality apart from our various observations of it? Or is reality nothing more than a kaleidoscope of infinite possibilities?

This month, a paper published online in the journal *Nature Physics* presents experimental research that supports the latter scenario — that there is a "Rashomon effect" not just in our *descriptions* of nature, but in nature itself.

Over the past hundred years, numerous experiments on elementary particles have upended the classical paradigm of a causal, deterministic universe. Consider, for example, the so-called double-slit experiment. We shoot a bunch of elementary particles — say, electrons — at a screen that can register their impact. But in front of the screen, we place a partial obstruction: a wall with two thin parallel vertical slits. We look at the resulting pattern of electrons on the screen. What do we see?

If the electrons were like little pellets (which is what classical physics would lead us to believe), then each of them would go through one slit or the other, and we would see a pattern of two distinct lumps on the screen, one lump behind each slit. But in fact we observe something entirely different: an interference pattern, as if two waves are colliding, creating ripples.

Astonishingly, this happens even if we shoot the electrons one by one, meaning that each electron somehow acts like a wave interfering with itself, as if it is simultaneously passing through both slits at once.

So an electron is a wave, not a particle? Not so fast. For if we place devices at the slits that "tag" the electrons according to which slit they go through (thus allowing us to know their whereabouts), there is no interference pattern. Instead, we see two lumps on the screen, as if the electrons, suddenly aware of being observed, decided to act like little pellets.

To test their commitment to being particles, we can tag them as they pass through the slits — but then, using another device, erase the tags before they hit the screen. If we do that, the electrons go back to their wavelike behavior, and the interference pattern miraculously reappears.

There is no end to the practical jokes we can pull on the poor electron! But with a weary smile, it always shows that the joke is on us. The electron appears to be a strange hybrid of a wave and a particle that's neither here *and* there nor here *or* there. Like a well-trained actor, it plays the role

it's been called to perform. It's as though it has resolved to prove the famous Bishop Berkeley maxim "to be is to be perceived."

Is nature really this weird? Or is this apparent weirdness just a reflection of our imperfect knowledge of nature?

The answer depends on how you interpret the equations of quantum mechanics, the mathematical theory that has been developed to describe the interactions of elementary particles. The success of this theory is unparalleled: Its predictions, no matter how "spooky," have been observed and verified with stunning precision. It has also been the basis of remarkable technological advances. So it is a powerful tool. But is it also a picture of reality?

Here, one of the biggest issues is the interpretation of the so-called wave function, which describes the state of a quantum system. For an individual particle like an electron, for example, the wave function provides information about the probabilities that the particle can be observed at particular locations, as well as the probabilities of the results of other measurements of the particle that you can make, such as measuring its momentum.

Does the wave function directly correspond to an objective, observer-independent physical reality, or does it simply represent an observer's partial knowledge of it?

If the wave function is merely knowledge-based, then you can explain away odd quantum phenomena by saying that things appear to us this way only because our knowledge of the real state of affairs is insufficient. But the new paper in *Nature Physics* gives strong indications (as a result of experiments using beams of specially prepared photons to test certain statistical properties of quantum measurements) that this is not the case. If there is an objective reality at all, the paper demonstrates, then the wave function is in fact reality-based.

What this research implies is that we are not just hearing different "stories" about the electron, one of which may be true. Rather, there is one true story, but it has many facets, seemingly in contradiction, just like in "Rashomon". There is really no escape from the mysterious — some might say, mystical — nature of the quantum world.

But what, if anything, does all this mean for us in our own lives? We should be careful to recognize that the weirdness of the quantum world does not directly imply the same kind of weirdness in the world of everyday experience. That's because the nebulous quantum essence of individual elementary particles is known to quickly dissipate in large ensembles of particles (a phenomenon often referred to as "decoherence"). This is why, in fact, we are able to describe the objects around us in the language of classical physics.

Rather, I suggest that we regard the paradoxes of quantum physics as a metaphor for the unknown infinite possibilities of our own existence. This is poignantly and elegantly expressed in the Vedas:

"As is the atom, so is the universe; as is the microcosm, so is the macrocosm; as is the human body, so is the cosmic body; as is the human mind, so is the cosmic mind."

JUST A ZEPTOSECOND – I’LL BE RIGHT WITH YOU

Natalie Angier

(Excerpted from *The Canon: A Whirligig Tour of the Beautiful Basics of Science*)

What happens ... in subsections of seconds? In a tenth of a second, we find the proverbial “blink of an eye” for that’s how long the act takes. In a hundredth of a second, a hummingbird can beat its wings once. ... A millisecond, 10^{-3} seconds is the time it takes a typical camera strobe to flash. Five-thousandths of a second is also the time it takes ... a Mexican salamander ... to snag its prey.

In one microsecond 10^{-6} seconds, nerves can send a message from that pain in your neck to your brain. On the same scale, we can illuminate the vast difference between the speed of light and that of sound: in one microsecond, a beam of light can barrel down the length of three of our metric-resistant football fields, while a sound wave can barely traverse the width of a human hair.

Yes, time is fleeting, so make every second and every partitioned second count, including nanoseconds, or billionths of a second or 10^{-9} seconds. Your ordinary computer certainly does. In a nanosecond, the time it takes you to complete one hundred-millionth of an eye blink, a standard microprocessor can perform a simple operation: adding together two numbers. ... The fastest computers perform their calculations in picoseconds, or trillionths of a second that is 10^{-12} seconds. ...

Ephemera, however, are all relative. When physicists, with the aid of giant particle accelerators, manage to generate traces of a subatomic splinter called a heavy quark, the particle persists for a picosecond before it decays adieu. Granted, a trillionth of a second may not immediately conjure Methuselah or Strom Thurmond to mind, but Dr. [Robert] Jaffe observed that the quark fully deserves its classification among physicists as a long-lived, “stable” particle. During its picosecond on deck, the quark completes a trillion, or 10^{12} , extremely tiny orbits. By contrast, our seemingly indomitable Earth has completed a mere 5 times 10^9 orbits around the sun in its 5 billion years of existence, and is expected to tally up only maybe another 10 billion laps before the solar system crumples and dies. ... In a very real sense then our solar system is far less “stable” than particles like the heavy quark. ...

Scaling down to an even less momentous moment we greet the attosecond, a billionth of a billionth of a second, or 10^{-18} seconds. The briefest events that scientists can clock, as opposed to calculate, are measured in attoseconds. It takes an electron twenty-four attoseconds to complete a single orbit around a hydrogen atom -- a voyage that the electron makes about 40,000 trillion times per second. There are more attoseconds in a single minute than there have been minutes since the birth of the universe.

Still, physicists keep coming back to the nicking of time. In the 1990s, they inducted two new temporal units

into the official lexicon, which are worth knowing for their appellations alone: the zeptosecond or 10^{-21} seconds, and the yoctosecond, or 10^{-24} seconds. The briskest time span recognized to date is the chronon, or Planck time, and it lasts about 5×10^{-44} power seconds. This is the time it takes light to travel what could be the shortest possible slice of space, the Planck length, the size of one of the hypothetical “strings” that some physicists say lie at the base of all matter and force in the universe.

NEIL deGRASSE TYSON DEFENDS BATSH*T-CRAZY SCIENTOLOGY FOR THE BEST POSSIBLE REASON

Joanna Rothkopf

(Excerpted from “Neil deGrasse Tyson defends Scientology”, on *salon.com*, 4/1/2015)

In an interview published on The Daily Beast super nerd Neil deGrasse Tyson defended the right of Scientologists to believe in Xenu the galactic overlord, while laying into the concept of religion as a whole.

“So, you have people who are certain that a man in a robe transforms a cracker into the literal body of Jesus saying that what goes on in Scientology is crazy?” he said, responding to a question about HBO’s “Going Clear” documentary. “Let’s realize this: What matters is not who says who’s crazy, what matters is we live in a free country. I don’t care what the tenets are of Scientology. They don’t distract me. I don’t judge them, and I don’t criticize them.”

He also objected to the idea that Scientology isn’t a religion. “But why aren’t they a religion? If you attend a Seder, there’s an empty chair sitting there and the door is unlocked because Elijah might walk in. OK. Educated people do this. Some will say it’s ritual, some will say it could happen. ... It looks like the older those thoughts have been around, the likelier it is to be declared a religion. If you’ve been around 1,000 years you’re a religion, and if you’ve been around 100 years, you’re a cult.”

“The line I’m drawing is that there are religions and belief systems, and objective truths. And if we’re going to govern a country, we need to base that governance on objective truths — not your personal belief system.”

DUMBTH ALSO-RAN UPDATE

John Rafferty

Kentucky State Senator Brandon Smith, who narrowly lost out in the 2014 Dumbth Awards (with his climate-change-denial claim that the temperatures on Mars and Earth are identical) was back in the news when he was pulled over for speeding and then flunked a breathalyzer test.

But that happened on January 6, when the state legislature was in session. So, he says, because an 1890s law protects KY lawmakers from prosecution while the legislature is in session ... he can legally drive drunk.

QED, as the logicians say.

Maybe so, but to quote Dean Wormer of “Animal House”, “drunk and stupid is no way to go through life”.

GREETINGS FROM THE GULAG

“C. Ryan”

(Editor: PIQUE is now received by two prisoners, self-identified humanists, at the Marianna federal facility in Florida, paid for by interested and compassionate SHSNY members. – JR)

My name is [Ed: not really “C. Ryan”] and through the kindness of a relative I have been granted access to your wonderful newsletter. I have to admit your publication has really changed my life. It has given me the confidence and knowledge of which I use every day to remind myself why I am proud to be a secular humanist, a free thinker.

In this prison we are only recognized as atheists, at best, by the federal Bureau of Prisons, even less so by the “no religion” preference, which is technically correct. Trying to explain humanism is almost an impossible task here. In short, I try to avoid the explanation entirely. However, there are times it is appropriate to present my thoughts – when, say, a memorial is held for a fellow atheist who, sadly, took his own life.

Last week the prison’s chaplain called upon some “leading” Christian inmates to pick a few “nondenominational” quotes from the Bible. Wait, what? This is where I felt personally offended and compelled to speak up. In my understanding the definition of a denomination is “a recognized branch of a church or religion” (Oxford) – therefore “nondenominational” is still within the confines of religion. I think this was a very poor way of executing guerrilla evangelicalism. “Nonreligious” quotes would have been more respectful for an atheist’s memorial.

Hidden within this “nondenominational” sendoff is the stink of entitlement, elitism and good old righteousness that comes with certain religious followers. While trying to get my point across to a few inmates I was told that basically everyone can see that a good Bible-source quote should be accepted by all.

Sure, the Bible has messages that can be used outside of religion, but we are talking about remembering and respecting a human who did not follow the restrictive paths of religion. Why should people think it is okay to undermine the very purpose of a memorial?

Because we live in a country that looks down on freethinkers, being in a prison that exists in the Bible Belt does not exactly make it any easier. I am going to try to raise some awareness in the chaplain. Gently though, to see if he knows about secular humanism, what we believe in and if we can bring more identity to such an important group that helps drive our society. Probably won’t help here in Marianna but being one of the few “nonbelievers” who live here I feel we need a voice.

So I guess I just wanted to share with you the basics of my first secular humanist adventure and how difficult it is to explain our views to the close minded uneducated. As they say, “God bless them”.

P.S.: My spelling is not too great. Apparently I fell asleep through the whole fourth grade.

Comment: Reader reactions and opinions are solicited. – JR

READERS RESPOND TO PIQUE

• *To the Editor:* Thank you for publishing my article on Avijit Roy (“Avijit Roy: Yet Another Victim of Islamic Extremists”, April PIQUE), but it is with a heavy heart that I want you to know that another atheist blogger has been killed in Bangladesh. Washiqur Rahman, whose Facebook banner declared “#IamAvijit”, in honor of that freethought martyr, was hacked to death by three machete-wielding assassins on the streets of Dhaka today, March 30.

My country is getting increasingly unlivable for those who have left Islam. – Asif Iqbal

• *To the Editor:* In the current *New Yorker*, we read about a Bangladeshi atheist noting with gentle irony and heartbreaking sadness that writing about things that really matter – like freedom of thought or civil rights – is “offensive” to many people. And dangerous; several freethinkers in Bangladesh have been killed. [See Asif Iqbal, “Avijit Roy: Another Victim of Islamic Extremists”, April PIQUE.] The writer muses that he should perhaps write instead about “plants ... movies ... love”.

Too true and very sad. It reminds me of Yves Montand singing, half a century ago, about the neighbor’s cat because, he says, it might be boring to sing about oppressed workers or starving children. *Plus ça change*. The Charlie Hebdo people might still be alive if they had published cartoons about a well-fed pampered pussycat. – Martine Reed

• *To the Editor:* On Page 1 of April PIQUE (“What the Hell Happened to the ‘Progressive’ We Elected Mayor?”) you write, “... de Blasio was raised secular and has no religious affiliation ...” but all I see is him going to mass at St. Patrick’s and paying homage to Cardinal Dolan. It appears to be happening too often to simply be an attempt to woo religious groups. – Wally Berliner

• *To the Editor:* March was one of your best issues since I became a faithful reader! It’s uncanny how PIQUE manages to outdo itself month after month. – Walter Balcerak

• *To the Editor:* I want to tell you PIQUE means a lot to me. So often it is educational. Take this March issue: I learned things about Muhammad I didn’t know from the Jack Herschlag article (“One Thing I Don’t Understand About Islam”) – important, interesting stuff. Then there is the article by Jonathan Engel (“Wanted and Needed: A Muslim Enlightenment”) about the need for a Muslim enlightenment – such a good analysis. It helps me better understand the current Arab behavior problem. Politics and religion are terrifically potent forces in today’s world, and PIQUE focuses on them with short, pithy articles, and thus is very readable. Congratulations – great job! – Giles Kelly

ERRATUM

In copying Dennis Middlebrook’s January, 2014, warnings about incoming Mayor de Blasio for our April issue (“What the Hell Happened to the ‘Progressive’ We Elected Mayor?”), I accidentally typed “secular” for Dennis’ original “sectarian”. Dennis was warning about de Blasio’s intention to “... provide ‘security officers’ in sectarian schools”, of course, not secular. My apologies. – JR

A SMARTH AWARD?

Flash Light

Re “Yes, We Should Have a ‘Good Guy’ Award, and Here’s the First Nomination” (April PIQUE), I suggest “Smarth”, because it’s an obvious antonym to Dumbth. I think anyone should be able to win; I wouldn’t disqualify teachers just because it’s their job to correct Dumbth.

However, just as a Dumbth winner has to exhibit exceptional wrongheadedness, I think a Smarth winner should have to exhibit exceptional cleverness in opposing Dumbth. My nomination for a diabolically clever Smarth winner: The Church of Satan for submitting a proposal for a Baphomet monument, featuring a bearded, goat-headed, winged hominid with horns seated on a throne beneath a pentagram with two smiling children to either side, as a response to a court decision that the Ten Commandments monument at the Oklahoma state-capitol building was permissible as long as other religions were also allowed monuments.

Unlike Dumbth winners, Smarth winners might actually *want* their award. I propose a LED light bulb – the light bulb being an icon for a good idea, and a LED light bulb being a smart version of the traditional bulb. I suggest it be screwed into a base which bears a commemorative SHSNY inscription, and has a cord, so it can actually be plugged in, and used as an energy efficient desk lamp.

Comment: Interesting, Flash, including the name, but as with the Dumbth, I’m leery of opening it up to organizations or groups. Everyone else: your opinions? – JR

A GOOD GUY AWARD? ABSOLUTELY!

Stan Friedland

Read the front pages of any daily newspaper in the entire country and each is filled with the worst news of the day. Our media still follows the credo that “Only bad news makes news”. Dead wrong.

Research on this subject shows that people respond much better to good news and positive remarks than they do to the avalanche of negative news or comments they experience daily.

To illustrate: in April, PIQUE gave us four dumbth remarks and their “dumb” authors, followed by a “Good Guy”. We’re humanists, remember, and we fully respect and appreciate the highest elements of human behavior. So why not showcase these and the people who do them? What a refreshing and uplifting change that would be for all of our publications!

My first nominee for a “Good Guy” award is Morris Dees, founder of the Southern Poverty Law Center. Google him to get the fullest sense of his accomplishments – simply awesome, a word I don’t use too often. He is a true hero, unsung and under-publicized.

April was another good issue, including perhaps the best “Jesus and Mo”.

Comment: While glad of the support for the “Good Guy” idea, Stan, and certainly a fan of Morris Dees, I think the awards should be – as the Dumbths are – restricted to individuals (see left column) and to specific and contemporary instances, i.e.: what did the nominee just or recently do? – JR

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Yes, we will have a

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Godless Dying and
Sherlockian Thinking

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Come Celebrate at
SHSNY’s 7th Annual
Day of Reason Brunch

Page 1
What’s So Wrong with the
“National Day of Prayer”

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