

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

October, 2015

Bullshit! (*Did that get your attention?*) Herein, a comedian warns us about it, a teenager exposes it, a Baptist mourns its ubiquity in public life – and below we equate it with “religious freedom” right here in (Hudson) River City. Also, we kill off a major myth about god and ten about atheism, celebrate godless science and the uses of philosophy (it scratches where we itch), and set one of our best to explaining why he is a “None”. – JR

WHO NEEDS KIM DAVIS? WE HAVE de BLASIO

John Rafferty

Hey, liberal, sophisticated, New Yorkers, citizens of “the capital of the Western World” – while we Twitter and titter about the goings-on of a fundamentalist ignoramus in a county clerk’s office in Bible-Belt Kentucky, and tut-tut about the pandering politicians who endorse her bigotry, let’s take a look at the Biblical beam in our own eye.

Mayor Bill de Blasio, the “progressive” we elected less than two years ago (I voted for Quinn in the primary), has once again smooched the black-suited behinds of the city’s bloc-voting Hasidim.

Much has been written in these pages about the ultra-Orthodox ritual of *metzitzah b’peh*, whereby circumcisers – *mohels* – orally suck clean the bloody head of a boy baby’s penis. Why have we been interested? Because this Iron Age religious practice has resulted in herpes virus-carrying *mohels* infecting no-one-knows-how-many infants, causing at least two deaths and several cases of brain damage – *that’s* why.

Michael Bloomberg, Mr. de Blasio’s predecessor in City Hall, tried to get the rabbis and their *mohels* to adhere to at least 19th century standards of sanitation – use mouthwash, *wash your hands!* – and was brushed off like a flea. He did have the Health Department produce a consent form for parents that acknowledged the risks. Fat lot of good it did – the *mohels* refused to use it, citing “religious freedom”.

Sound familiar? Just a little like Kentucky?

But Bill de Blasio has eliminated even that toothless “informed-consent” prescription. On September 9, he fulfilled a campaign promise to Brooklyn’s best black-hatted misogynists and bigots who make Kim Davis look like Rachel Maddow. His Health Department voted to “abandon consent forms”, as a *New York Times* editorial noted on September 12, “in favor of education and friendly

persuasion” with – *ta da!* – a new brochure. Said *The Times*:

“The rabbis are exulting over a deal that doesn’t oblige them to do anything. No paperwork, no informed consent, no consequences. The administration is hoping that if a baby gets sick, the mohel will agree to be tested and, if there is a DNA match, stop doing circumcisions.”

Here’s “hoping” they “agree”? These denizens of the 12th century? One of whose leaders dismissed Bloomberg with the contemptuous, “We do not change. We will not change”? Another fat chance.

Here’s my prediction – one that takes no special foresight because it is a certainty – more infants will be infected by slobbering, bearded old men and will sicken.

And sooner or later another will die.

And Bill de Blasio will use the word “tragedy”.

WHO NEEDS KIM DAVIS? WE HAVE CUOMO

Dennis Middlebrooks

The July 18 *New York Post* reported the “shocking news” that Governor Andrew Cuomo had vetoed a bill that would have limited additional development in the predominantly Hasidic community of Kiryas Joel in upstate New York.

The bill would have required local government (dominated by Hasids) to obtain approval before annexing more land, and was in direct response to the Hasidic effort to annex 507 additional acres. Non-Hasidic residents of the area have been effectively disenfranchised by this bloc-voting community which, among other outrages, has defunded local public schools in non-Hasidic areas while diverting funds to yeshivas masquerading as “public schools” in Hasidic enclaves.

The *Post* article further noted that less than a week after the veto, Cuomo accepted \$250,000 in campaign cash from limited liability corporations linked to a Hasidic

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developer with direct interests in the land grab. That was more money than Cuomo received from any other source. The donations angered non-Hasidic activists who supported the bill, with one calling it “the blatant purchase of an elected leader”. That is an understatement. Cuomo’s father, the late Mario Cuomo, also shamefully pandered to this Kiryas Joel enclave when he was governor. Andrew is a real chip off the old block.

This is just the latest example of the blatant corruption that is corroding the Empire State. Where is the Justice Department and the New York State Attorney General?

Andrew Cuomo should be impeached.

BILL MOYERS ON DELUDING OURSELVES

(Editor: Here is one of the most thoughtful commentators on the American scene, no atheist but an active Baptist, writing in the aftermath of the disastrous 2004 election. Eleven years later? It's only worse. – JR)

One of biggest changes in politics in my lifetime is that the delusional is no longer marginal, it has come in from the fringe, to sit in the seat of power in the Oval Office and in Congress. For the first time in our history, ideology and theology hold a monopoly of power in Washington. Theology asserts propositions that cannot be proved true: ideologues hold stoutly to a world view despite being contradicted by what is generally accepted as reality. When ideology and theology couple, their offspring are not always bad but they are always blind. And there is the danger: voters and politicians alike, oblivious of the facts. – *Bill Moyers, 2004*

IF YOU SMELL SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING

Jon Stewart

(Transcribed from the final episode of “The Daily Show with Jon Stewart”, 8/5/2015)

Bullshit is everywhere. There is very little you will encounter in life that has not been, in some ways, infused with bullshit – not all of it bad. General day-to-day free-range bullshit is often necessary, or at least innocuous.

“Oh, what a beautiful baby. I’m sure he’ll grow into that head.”

That kind of bullshit in many ways provides important social contract fertilizer and keeps people from making each other cry all day. But then there’s the more pernicious bullshit – premeditated institutional bullshit designed to obscure and distract. Designed by whom? The bullshitocracy. And it comes in three basic flavors.

One, making bad things sound like good things.

“Organic all-natural cupcakes”, because “factory-made sugar oatmeal balls” doesn’t sell. “Patriot Act”, because “Are You Scared Enough To Let Me Look At All Your Phone Records? Act” doesn’t sell.

Whenever someone’s trying to sell you “Freedom”, “Fairness”, “Family”, “Health”, and “America”, take a good long sniff. Chances are it’s been manufactured in a facility

that may contain traces of bullshit.

Number two – the second way – hiding the bad things under mountains of bullshit, complexity. “You know, I would love to download Drizzy’s latest Meek mill diss, (*Aside: Everyone promised me that that made sense*) but I’m not really interested right now in reading Tolstoy’s iTunes agreement, so I’ll just click ‘Agree’ even if it grants Apple *prima nocta* with my spouse.”

Here’s another one. Simply put, banks shouldn’t be able to bet your pension money on red. Bullshitly put, it’s this ... (*piles huge stack of paper on his desk*) ... *Dodd-Frank!*

Hey, a handful of billionaires can’t buy our elections, right? Of course not.

“They can only pour unlimited anonymous cash into a 501(c)(4) if 50 percent is devoted to issue education. Otherwise they’d have to 501(c)(6) it or file it openly through a non-campaign-coordinating SuperPAC with a quarter ... (*whispering behind his hand*) ... I think they’re asleep now, we can sneak out.”

And finally – finally, it’s the bullshit of infinite possibility. These bullshitters cover their unwillingness to act under the guise of unending inquiry.

“We can’t do anything because we don’t yet know everything. We cannot take action on climate change until everyone in the world agrees gay marriage vaccines won’t cause our children to marry goats who are going to come for our guns. Until then, I say teach the controversy.”

Now, the good news is this – bullshitters have gotten pretty lazy, and their work is easily detected. And looking for it is a pleasant way to pass the time, like an “I Spy” of bullshit.

I say to you tonight, friends, the best defense against bullshit is vigilance.

So if you smell something, say something.

KEEP QUESTIONING AUTHORITY

TheWurxFollow

(Excerpted from “How a 14 Year Old Girl Decimated a Conservative Academic Orthodoxy”, on The Daily Beast and on DailyKos 8/6/2015.)

A substantial portion of conservative ideology concerns a denial of victimhood and structural disadvantages of classes of people. “You aren’t victimized! You’re just lazy!”

Fitting into this attitude is a scholarly article written by Professor Richard Jensen in 2002 that refutes the long-held notion that the Irish people were denied opportunity for equal access to employment in 19th and early 20th century America, the famous “No Irish Need Apply” signs.

Jensen essentially claims they never happened, the Irish were never denied access to the job markets, they just spread that lie to justify their claim to victimhood.

In the 13 years since this paper was written, spread around with lots of support from a sector of academia that leans conservative, this view has been essentially absorbed into academic orthodoxy, and those arguing against it have

found themselves dismissed and discredited.

It’s impossible to prove a negative, but a claim like this may be given some currency if no proof to the contrary is provided. As long as no one could show contemporaneous accounts or proof of the NINA phenomenon, Jensen’s argument could be taken seriously.

And then a 14-year-old girl did a Google search. Rebecca Fried, a rising high school freshman—who one of the preeminent scholars on the Irish diaspora in the United States now calls a “hero” and “quite extraordinary”—simply couldn’t believe it, either.

Rebecca never set out to prove the thesis wrong. She was just interested in an article her dad brought home from work one day. Rebecca wasn’t even trying to disprove her dad—let alone an academic at the University of Illinois-Chicago. She just figured she’d Google the words and see what came up over 100 years ago.

What she found from actual newspaper archives were tons of 19th century and early 20th century want ads for labor slathered with the phrase “No Irish need apply”, pages of citations of the sign appearing in shop windows. Then she thought, somebody had to have done this before, right?

Nope. Nobody had.

Why are people so ready to accept groundless assertions? The entire academic community had essentially written off Irish persecution in this country as a myth just because some professor with no real evidence said it didn’t happen. And it was so easily refuted – by a 14-year-old.

Keep questioning authority and orthodoxy. Know bullshit when you see it. There is no reason things always have to be the way they are.

GRETA CHRISTINA’S BEST ARGUMENT FOR NOT BELIEVING IN GOD

Greta Christina

(Editor: On her blog – it’s in the process of moving, so just Google “Greta Christina’s blog” – Ms. Christina posted a two-part essay, “The Top Ten Reasons I don’t believe in God. I think she saved the best for last, and here it is. – JR)

10: The complete and utter lack of solid evidence for God’s existence.

This is probably the best argument I have against God’s existence: There’s just no evidence for it. No good evidence, anyway. No evidence that doesn’t just amount to opinion and tradition and confirmation bias and all the other stuff I’ve been talking about for the last two days.

And in a perfect world, that should have been the only argument I needed. In a perfect world, I shouldn’t have had to spend the last month and a half collating and summarizing the reasons I don’t believe in God, any more than I would have for Zeus or Quetzalcoatl or the Flying Spaghetti Monster. As thousands of atheists before me have pointed out: It is not up to us to prove that God does not exist. It is up to theists to prove that he does.

In a comment on this blog, “arensb” made a point on

this topic so ridiculously insightful I’m still smacking myself on the head for not having thought of it. I was writing about how theists get upset at atheists for rejecting religion after hearing 876,362 arguments for it, saying, “But you haven’t considered Argument #876,363! How can you be so close-minded?” And here’s what arensb said:

“If, in fact, it turns out that argument #876,364 is the one that will convince you, WTF didn’t the apologists put it in the top 10?” Why, indeed?

If there’s an argument for religion that’s convincing – convincing by means of something other than authority/tradition, personal intuition, confirmation bias, fear and intimidation, wishful thinking, or some combination of the above – wouldn’t we all know about it?

Wouldn’t it have spread like wildfire? Wouldn’t it be the Meme of All Memes? I mean, we all saw that video of the cat trying to wake its owner up within about two weeks of it hitting the Internet. Don’t you think that the Truly Excellent Argument/Evidence for God’s Existence would have spread faster and wider than some silly cartoon video?

If the arguments for religion are so wonderful, why are they so unconvincing to anyone who doesn’t already believe? And why does God need arguments, anyway? Why does God need people to make his arguments for him? Why can’t he just reveal his true self, clearly and unequivocally, and settle the question once and for all? If God existed, why wouldn’t it just be obvious?

It is not up to us to prove that God does not exist. It is up to theists to prove that he does. And in the absence of any genuinely good, solid evidence or arguments in favor of God’s existence – and in the presence of a whole lot of very solid arguments against it – I am going to continue to hold the null hypothesis of atheism: that God almost certainly does not exist, and that it is completely reasonable to act as if he does not exist.

10 MYTHS ABOUT ATHEISTS, DEBUNKED

Amanda Marcotte

(Reprinted from “10 Myths Many Religious People Hold About Atheists, Debunked” on AlterNet, 4/14/2015. This article was originally published in 2011.)

In a regular poll conducted by political scientists Robert Putnam and David Campbell on American political attitudes, atheists recently lost their spot as the most disliked group in America to the Tea Party. Still, number two is simply way too high in the unpopularity rankings for a group of people who just happen to spend Sunday mornings in bed instead of in church. Polling data shows that nearly half of Americans would disapprove if their child married an atheist and nearly 40 percent of Americans don’t see atheists as sharing their vision of American society, numbers that outstripped similar prejudices toward Muslims and African Americans.

Of course, the real reason atheists are so hated has little to do with jealousy for all their free time, but largely

because most Americans are better acquainted with myths than with the realities of atheists' lives. Unfortunately, atheists often have these myths tossed in their faces, usually by believers who would rather talk about what they heard atheists are like rather than uncomfortable subjects such as the lack of proof for any gods.

These myths do more than hurt atheists. They also harm the basic religious freedoms of all Americans, regardless of their beliefs. Religious freedom and tolerance don't mean much if they can't be expanded to include those without religion. With that in mind, here's 10 of the ugliest myths about atheists, debunked:

1) There are no atheists in foxholes. The basic idea behind this myth is that atheism is a luxury of the problem-free, and as soon as they feel fear or weakness, atheists will run straight into the arms of religion. This myth irritates atheists, because it tries to make a virtue out of preying on people's weaknesses in order to sell them a lie. If you heard a marketer brag that he targets people who've been diagnosed with terminal illnesses because they're easier targets, or a guy say he likes to cruise funerals because grieving women are easier to pick up, you'd think that person had no morals at all. But targeting people in moments of weakness to sell them religion is regarded as a normal and even virtuous strategy for proselytizing.

Beyond concerns about manipulation are the concerns about accuracy. Believers argue religion offers unique comforts to people in fear or pain, but what many atheists realize is that religion often provokes more anxiety and fear than it soothes. If we accept that God is all-powerful, as many religions claim, then it's like being in an abusive relationship that can't be escaped for eternity; a relationship with a God who will throw us into hell for not fearing him and who allows horrors like the Holocaust to happen. Many religious teachings aren't actually that soothing at all if you take a step back and look at them clearly. Believing that evil is more an accident of nature than something imposed on us by an inscrutable supernatural being is the far greater comfort than any prayer could be.

2) Atheists are just angry with God. Atheists often point out the logical inconsistencies of many religious beliefs – such as the belief both that God is all-good and all-powerful, but he somehow also allows evil to exist – and believers use that to conclude that atheists are angry with God. We aren't. You can't be angry with a being that you don't believe exists. I'm no angrier with God than I am angry with Zeus or the aliens that keep kidnapping drunks sleeping in their cars. Anger with religions for promoting false beliefs isn't the same thing as being angry at the being that believers invented.

But I also have to quarrel with the very notion that a person's arguments can be dismissed because of anger. Smugly accusing someone of anger doesn't do anything to discount the content of the argument. I'd argue that people who see vile behavior in the name of religion and don't get angry are the ones who have something wrong with them.

3) Atheists are aggressive and rude. This myth has been around in various forms for a long time, but it really took off after the rise of "New Atheism", which focuses its energy on

disproving religious claims instead of merely pleading for tolerance of atheists. This myth only persists because belief is unconsciously privileged over atheism, causing people to believe it's somehow ruder for an atheist to say, "I don't believe in God and here's why" than for a believer to intrude in your personal space with pamphlets, attack people when they're feeling low with religious claims, knock on your door to proselytize, or force your children to recite religious language in school. Objectively speaking, believers commit transgressions against good manners far more than atheists. But atheist arguments tend to disturb believers more than arguments for God disturb atheists, so atheists get an unfair reputation for being rude, even when they are merely outspoken or unapologetic.

4) Atheism is a white dude thing. It's easy if atheism makes you uncomfortable to write off atheism as the hobbyhorse of a tiny minority of men with overly high opinions of their own intelligence. That men such as Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins get most of the media attention devoted to atheism only reinforces this myth. If you scratch the surface, however, you'll see that the ranks of outspoken atheists have far more women than the media would let on. Atheist blogger Jen McCreight grew so tired of this myth that she compiled an extensive list of prominent female atheists such as Susan Jacoby, Rebecca Watson and Lori Lipman Brown. Greta Christina followed up with a list of prominent atheists of color, such as Debbie Goddard, Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Hemant Mehta. Women are specially targeted for religious oppression around the world, so of course, many of us will be open to arguments against the legitimacy of religion.

5) Atheism is just a faith like any other. You occasionally see agnostics trot this one out, as well. The idea is that arguments for and against the existence of any gods have equal value, but it's simply not true. The logical position toward an extraordinary, supernatural claim is skepticism until proof is offered, and so far none of the thousands of gods that have been claimed to exist throughout history have lifted a finger to prove themselves. In fact, most believers grasp this for themselves; they automatically disbelieve all religious claims except their own, barring actual proof that never produces itself. Atheists just do religious people one better, and make no exceptions for a religion because it happens to be the one we were raised in or convinced by friends to convert to.

I always flinch in embarrassment for the believer who trots out, "Atheism is just another kind of faith", because it's a tacit admission that taking claims on faith is a silly thing to do. When you've succumbed to arguing that the opposition is just as misguided as you are, it's time to take a step back and rethink your attitudes.

6) Atheists don't have a moral code. Atheists are routinely asked how people will know not to rape and murder without religion telling them not to do it, especially a religion that backs up the orders with threats of hell. Believers, listen to me carefully when I say this: When you use this argument, you terrify atheists. We hear you saying

that the only thing standing between you and Ted Bundy is a flimsy belief in a supernatural being made up by pre-literate people trying to figure out where the rain came from. This is not very reassuring if you're trying to argue from a position of moral superiority.

If anything, atheism correlates to better behavior on average. Atheists are under-represented in prison, for instance, and more religious nations have higher rates of violent crime, teen pregnancy, early adult mortality and even abortion. But setting the numbers aside, we can see that even religious people generally believe that morality exists outside of religion. After all, most religious people condemn people who commit acts of evil in the name of religion. If religiosity were the measure of morality, terrorists who murder in the name of God would be more moral than atheists who pay their taxes and give to charity.

7) Atheist lives are bleak and lack meaning. Those in the atheist activist community find this one particularly insipid, because we so often deal with people who suffered religious abuse and were only able to find peace by abandoning religion. There's really no reason to believe that happiness and fulfillment come from a supernatural place, or else believers would have no need for fulfilling work, loving families, friends, and hobbies, since their spiritual beliefs would suffice. Most atheists actually find our lack of belief in a supernatural being makes it easier to fill our lives with meaning and joy. Since we don't believe in an afterlife, many of us find ourselves more motivated to make the most out of the time we do have instead of looking to the next life to make us happy.

8) Atheists are hedonists who don't understand the true meaning of love. As an open reproductive rights supporter, I've certainly faced my share of believers accusing me of being an atheist so I can simply indulge my sexual appetites and avoid some abstract true meaning of love. It is true that one of the benefits of being an atheist is that you're no longer crippled by religious phobias that assume that sexual fulfillment and real love are mutually exclusive, but that certainly doesn't mean atheists don't feel genuine love. I suspect some Christians enjoy making high-minded claims about feeling deeper love because they know there's no way to measure their claims. But the higher divorce rates in more religious states don't bode well for claims that sexual purity and Christianity make love deeper and truer.

9) Atheists have no way to cope after losing loved ones without the belief in an afterlife. The belief that religion has sole ownership over death is so ingrained that it often causes believers to behave in inappropriate ways toward grieving atheists, using the occasion of a loved one's death to try to coax us into taking up religion. Some believers who do this are openly predatory, but some mean well, and simply can't imagine how atheists cope without telling ourselves pretty stories about an afterlife. Atheists have every right to be skeptical of the argument that belief in the afterlife quiets the pain of grief. After all, many religions teach that the dead person could be burning forever in hell, which can cause far more anxiety than relief.

I imagine the nothingness of death is much like the nothingness that existed before birth. Believing in the afterlife seems to have more to do with the egos of the living than concerns about the dead, and by letting go of the need to make the end of someone else's life about your own fears of death, many atheists can focus on working through the grief in a healthy way. So please, believers, don't use the death of loved ones as an opportunity to proselytize.

10) Atheists are out to destroy Christmas. For Fox News, ratcheting fears about a "war on Christmas" has replaced caroling as the annual holiday ritual. It's all very silly. Atheists don't oppose ritual or holidays. Most atheists in America tend to see Christmas as a mostly secular holiday celebrating family that can be turned into a completely secular holiday with a few minor tweaks. Even the few atheists who don't celebrate Christmas at all certainly have no plan to make war on the holiday, beyond simply requesting that the government obey the First Amendment by not promoting Christianity above other beliefs, no matter what time of year.

Non-believers have some of the best Christmas celebrations around. My family tends to prefer all-night poker games for Christmas instead of going to Christmas mass – all the family togetherness, but with less boredom. Or you can choose to have "Christmas" in July and save yourself the expense and headaches of holiday travel.

Debunking these myths about atheists in print can only do so much to quell believer fears about the supposed atheist menace. Even better would be for believers to find themselves an atheist and get to know them better. They might find we're basically like everyone else, except more rested on Sundays and less afraid that invisible beings are judging us for masturbating.

OF PEOPLE AND TIME AND CLOUDS Freeman Dyson

(Editor: I dug out this long-ago-saved quote when I read about plugged-in people "living in the virtual cloud". – JR)

I believe that life can go on forever. It takes a million years to evolve a new species, ten million for a new genus, one hundred million for a class, a billion for a phylum – and that's usually as far as your imagination goes. In a billion years, it seems, intelligent life might be as different from humans as humans are from insects. But what would happen in another ten billion years? It's utterly impossible to conceive of ourselves changing as drastically as that, over and over again. All you can say is, on that kind of time scale the material form that life would take is completely open. To change from a human being to a cloud may seem a big order, but it's the kind of change you'd expect over billions of years.

THOUGHTS AFTER THE LATEST TV "DEBATE"

Every normal man must be tempted at times to spit on his hands, hoist the black flag, and begin to slit throats. – H.L. Mencken

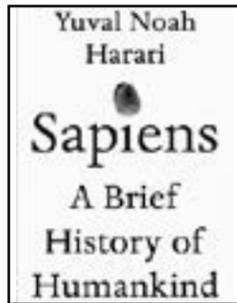
SHSNY CALENDAR: OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2015

SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURS, OCT 1, 7-8:30 pm
THE COMMUNITY CHURCH OF NEW YORK
40 East 35 St. (basement)

We'll discuss
SAPIENS:

A Brief History of Humankind
Yuval Noah Harari

How did Homo sapiens evolve from an unexceptional savannah-dwelling primate to become the dominant force on the planet, emerging as the lone survivor out of six distinct, competing hominid species? How did our talent for gossip help? And who cultivated whom, humans or wheat? Tackling evolutionary concepts from a historian's perspective, Harari describes human development through a framework of three not-necessarily-orthodox "Revolutions": the Cognitive, the Agricultural, and the Scientific. – All formats. *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, NOV 5, 7-8:30 pm
Community Church of New York
BIGGER THAN PHIL
Adam Gopnik

When did faith start to fade? Adam Gopnik asks in this *The New Yorker* essay from 2014. When did the burden of proof pass from atheists to believers? For some answers, Gopnik takes us on a tour of modern atheism.

Why that title? Find the witty answer when you read *Bigger Than Phil* at www.meetup.com/shsny-org/files/ ... as a Word file at www.shsny.org ... or at <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/02/17/bigger-phil>

SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURS, DEC 3, 7-8:30 pm
Community Church of New York
THE SHAPE OF THE NEW:
Four Big Ideas and How They Made the Modern World
Scott L. Montgomery and Daniel Chirot

This panoramic book tells the story of how revolutionary ideas from the Enlightenment about freedom, equality, evolution, and democracy have reverberated through modern history and shaped the world as we know it today. A testament to the enduring power of ideas. "A wonderful book. Montgomery and Chirot combine double-barreled scholarship, lucid prose, and considerable wisdom to offer us a fascinating excursion into the history of ideas."

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MON, OCT 5, 6:30 pm
SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)
WIT

Mike Nichols directed this 2001 TV-film adapted from a Pulitzer Prize-winning play. Emma Thomson plays Vivian Bearing, a professor of English literature, especially the metaphysical poetry of John Donne, who, upon learning she has metastatic ovarian cancer ("I'm at Stage IV – there is no Stage V"), agrees to be a research guinea pig. A tough film to watch, but brilliant!



After-Film Discussion:
"How should humanists die?"
SHSNY Movie Night is FREE.
(But put something on the bar beside your elbow.)

BRUNCH & CONVERSATION
SUN, OCT 18, 11:30 am
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)

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.

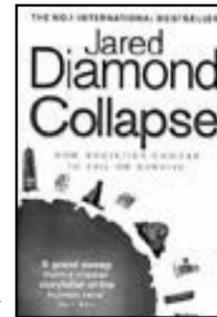
Come join 20 or more other free-thinkers for food, fun and well-fed conversation.

Discussion:
What does "Religious Freedom" mean?

SHSNY CALENDAR: OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2015

GREAT LECTURES ON DVD
WED, OCT 28, 7 pm
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)
COLLAPSE: How Societies Choose to Succeed or Fail
Jared Diamond

Over the 20th and 21st centuries, the rise of our civilization has seemed unstoppable. But could our modern, industrialized civilization fall apart like great ancient ones before us? Two hundred years from now, will scientists find evidence that we followed a recipe for disaster similar to that of the Maya or the Romans?



To understand a collapse, imagine it has already happened. *National Geographic* reveals a vivid look into the future to our descendants in the year 2210 as they set out on a scientific expedition to figure out what brought us down. A water crisis? Lack of energy sources? Dust storms? Global warming?

Diamond's talk – an eye-opening conjecture about our societal future based on our current downward spiral – is based on his book of the same name, a follow-up to his prize-winning *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, which chronicled the rise of human civilizations since the Ice Age. Here Diamond turns his attention to how some once-productive societies such as the Easter Islanders and Greenland Norse died, and applies the lessons learned to our own time and place. Fascinating stuff.

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

STUDYING HUMANISM
MON, OCT 26, 6:30 – 8:30 pm
Community Church of New York
40 East 35 St. (basement)
2015-16 Meeting/Discussion #2
"Stoicism & Humanism"

Taking our cue from our Freethought Day speaker in our second meeting of the "semester", we'll consider the relationship between the philosophy of Stoicism, ancient and modern, and humanism.

Professor Pigliucci recommends our book. The online article is short and comprehensible to us laypeople. We'll post a video of Massimo's talk ASAP after 10/11. Our reading for 10/26 is:
Book: Irvine, William B.: *A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy.*

Online: *Stoicism* at <http://www.iep.utm.edu/stoicism>

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

SAT-SUN, OCT 10-11
9:30 am – 5:00 pm
99 Madison Ave. (15th floor)
"THOUGHTWORKS"

Adynamic two-day workshop for therapists, counsellors, healthcare professionals and – especially – survivors of childhood abuse. Led by Sue Cox of SMART-UK, advocate; Dr. Kim Wager, neuroscientist; Louise Rooney, therapist. For complete info: www.battleoftheabusedbrain.website. And for more, see Paleolibrarian David Orenstein's post at <http://www.paleolibrarian.info/2015/09/upcoming-program-winning-battle-of.html>

FREETHOUGHT DAY BRUNCH, LECTURE AND CONVERSATION
Sunday, October 11
at 12 Noon, at
PETE'S TAVERN,
129 East 18 St. (Irving Place)
With guest speaker
MASSIMO PIGLIUCCI
on
"STOICISM TODAY"

Massimo Pigliucci is a Professor of Philosophy at CUNY-City College, editor in chief of the online magazine *Scientia Salon*, prolific author, and Honorary Member of SHSNY who has lately turned his attention to the ancient Greco-Roman philosophy of ethics and resilience that is Stoicism. He says:

"Stoicism is experiencing a surprising comeback these days, positioning itself as the Western answer to Buddhism, with which it shares a number of similarities. In this talk I will explain the basics of Stoicism and argue that it is a philosophy highly suitable to the complexities of life in the 21st century, perhaps even a good complement to secular humanism."

Join us! Brunch is \$25

... for your choice of 11 excellent entrees, one drink (Bloody Mary, Mimosa, etc.) and coffee or tea, and including all taxes and tips.

Pre-pay now at shsny.org
... to reserve your place, because the room at Pete's only seats 50. Questions? email editor@shsny.org ... or call 646-922-7389, and leave a call-back number.



ALL SCIENTISTS SHOULD BE MILITANT ATHEISTS

Lawrence M. Krauss

(Reprinted from *thenewyorker.com*, 9/8/2015)

As a physicist, I do a lot of writing and public speaking about the remarkable nature of our cosmos, primarily because I think science is a key part of our cultural heritage and needs to be shared more broadly. Sometimes, I refer to the fact that religion and science are often in conflict; from time to time, I ridicule religious dogma. When I do, I sometimes get accused in public of being a “militant atheist”. Even a surprising number of my colleagues politely ask if it wouldn’t be better to avoid alienating religious people. Shouldn’t we respect religious sensibilities, masking potential conflicts and building common ground with religious groups so as to create a better, more equitable world?

I found myself thinking about those questions this week as I followed the story of Kim Davis, the county clerk in Kentucky who directly disobeyed a federal judge’s order to issue marriage licenses to gay couples, and, as a result, was jailed for contempt of court. (She was released earlier today.) Davis’s supporters, including the Kentucky senator and Presidential candidate Rand Paul, are protesting what they believe to be an affront to her religious freedom. It is “absurd to put someone in jail for exercising their religious liberties”, Paul said, on CNN.

The Kim Davis story raises a basic question: To what extent should we allow people to break the law if their religious views are in conflict with it? It’s possible to take that question to an extreme that even Senator Paul might find absurd: imagine, for example, a jihadist whose interpretation of the Koran suggested that he should be allowed to behead infidels and apostates. Should he be allowed to break the law? Or—to consider a less extreme case—imagine an Islamic-fundamentalist county clerk who would not let unmarried men and women enter the courthouse together, or grant marriage licenses to unveiled women. For Rand Paul, what separates these cases from Kim Davis’s? The biggest difference, I suspect, is that Senator Paul agrees with Kim Davis’s religious views but disagrees with those of the hypothetical Islamic fundamentalist.

The problem, obviously, is that what is sacred to one person can be meaningless (or repugnant) to another. That’s one of the reasons why a modern secular society generally legislates against actions, not ideas. No idea or belief should be illegal; conversely, no idea should be so sacred that it legally justifies actions that would otherwise be illegal. Davis is free to believe whatever she wants, just as the jihadist is free to believe whatever he wants; in both cases, the law constrains not what they believe but what they do.

In recent years, this territory has grown murkier. Under the banner of religious freedom, individuals, states, and even—in the case of Hobby Lobby—corporations have been arguing that they should be exempt from the law on

religious grounds. (The laws from which they wish to claim exemption do not focus on religion; instead, they have to do with social issues, such as abortion and gay marriage.) The government has a compelling interest in insuring that all citizens are treated equally. But “religious freedom” advocates argue that religious ideals should be elevated above all others as a rationale for action. In a secular society, this is inappropriate.

The Kim Davis controversy exists because, as a culture, we have elevated respect for religious sensibilities to an inappropriate level that makes society less free, not more. Religious liberty should mean that no set of religious ideals are treated differently from other ideals. Laws should not be enacted whose sole purpose is to denigrate them, but, by the same token, the law shouldn’t elevate them, either.

In science, of course, the very word “sacred” is profane. No ideas, religious or otherwise, get a free pass. The notion that some idea or concept is beyond question or attack is anathema to the entire scientific undertaking. This commitment to open questioning is deeply tied to the fact that science is an atheistic enterprise. “My practice as a scientist is atheistic,” the biologist J.B.S. Haldane wrote, in 1934. “That is to say, when I set up an experiment I assume that no god, angel, or devil is going to interfere with its course and this assumption has been justified by such success as I have achieved in my professional career.” It’s ironic, really, that so many people are fixated on the relationship between science and religion: basically, there isn’t one. In my more than thirty years as a practicing physicist, I have never heard the word “God” mentioned in a scientific meeting. Belief or nonbelief in God is irrelevant to our understanding of the workings of nature—just as it’s irrelevant to the question of whether or not citizens are obligated to follow the law.

Because science holds that no idea is sacred, it’s inevitable that it draws people away from religion. The more we learn about the workings of the universe, the more purposeless it seems. Scientists have an obligation not to lie about the natural world. Even so, to avoid offense, they sometimes misleadingly imply that today’s discoveries exist in easy harmony with preexisting religious doctrines, or remain silent rather than pointing out contradictions between science and religious doctrine. It’s a strange inconsistency, since scientists often happily disagree with other kinds of beliefs. Astronomers have no problem ridiculing the claims of astrologists, even though a significant fraction of the public believes these claims. Doctors have no problem condemning the actions of anti-vaccine activists who endanger children. And yet, for reasons of decorum, many scientists worry that ridiculing certain religious claims alienates the public from science. When they do so, they are being condescending at best and hypocritical at worst.

This reticence can have significant consequences. Consider the example of Planned Parenthood. Lawmakers are calling for a government shutdown unless federal funds for Planned Parenthood are stripped from spending bills for

the fiscal year starting October 1st. Why? Because Planned Parenthood provides fetal tissue samples from abortions to scientific researchers hoping to cure diseases, from Alzheimer’s to cancer. (Storing and safeguarding that tissue requires resources, and Planned Parenthood charges researchers for the costs.) It’s clear that many of the people protesting Planned Parenthood are opposed to abortion on religious grounds and are, to varying degrees, anti-science. Should this cause scientists to clam up at the risk of further offending or alienating them? Or should we speak out loudly to point out that, independent of one’s beliefs about what is sacred, this tissue would otherwise be thrown away, even though it could help improve and save lives?

Ultimately, when we hesitate to openly question beliefs because we don’t want to risk offense, questioning itself becomes taboo. It is here that the imperative for scientists to speak out seems to me to be most urgent. As a result of speaking out on issues of science and religion, I have heard from many young people about the shame and ostracism they experience after merely questioning their family’s faith. Sometimes, they find themselves denied rights and privileges because their actions confront the faith of others. Scientists need to be prepared to demonstrate by example that questioning perceived truth, especially “sacred truth,” is an essential part of living in a free country.

I see a direct link, in short, between the ethics that guide science and those that guide civic life. Cosmology, my specialty, may appear to be far removed from Kim Davis’s refusal to grant marriage licenses to gay couples, but in fact the same values apply in both realms. Whenever scientific claims are presented as unquestionable, they undermine science. Similarly, when religious actions or claims about sanctity can be made with impunity in our society, we undermine the very basis of modern secular democracy. We owe it to ourselves and to our children not to give a free pass to governments—totalitarian, theocratic, or democratic—that endorse, encourage, enforce, or otherwise legitimize the suppression of open questioning in order to protect ideas that are considered “sacred.” Five hundred years of science have liberated humanity from the shackles of enforced ignorance. We should celebrate this openly and enthusiastically, regardless of whom it may offend.

If that is what causes someone to be called a militant atheist, then no scientist should be ashamed of the label.

IS SCIENCE A RELIGION?

Richard Dawkins

(Excerpted from “*Is Science a Religion?*”, his speech upon accepting the 1996 AHA Humanist of the Year award.)

Given the dangers of faith — and considering the accomplishments of reason and observation in the activity called science — I find it ironic that, whenever I lecture publicly, there always seems to be someone who comes forward and says, “Of course, your science is just a religion like ours. Fundamentally, science just comes down to faith, doesn’t it?”

Well, science is not religion and it doesn’t just come

down to faith. Although it has many of religion’s virtues, it has none of its vices. Science is based upon verifiable evidence. Religious faith not only lacks evidence, its independence from evidence is its pride and joy, shouted from the rooftops. Why else would Christians wax critical of doubting Thomas? The other apostles are held up to us as exemplars of virtue because faith was enough for them. Doubting Thomas, on the other hand, required evidence. Perhaps he should be the patron saint of scientists.

One reason I receive the comment about science being a religion is because I believe in the fact of evolution. I even believe in it with passionate conviction. To some, this may superficially look like faith. But the evidence that makes me believe in evolution is not only overwhelmingly strong; it is freely available to anyone who takes the trouble to read up on it. Anyone can study the same evidence that I have and presumably come to the same conclusion. But if you have a belief that is based solely on faith, I can’t examine your reasons. You can retreat behind the private wall of faith where I can’t reach you.

There’s all the difference in the world between a belief that one is prepared to defend by quoting evidence and logic and a belief that is supported by nothing more than tradition, authority, or revelation.

Our belief is not a belief. Our principles are not a faith. We do not rely solely upon science and reason, because these are necessary rather than sufficient factors, but we distrust anything that contradicts science or outrages reason.” — *Christopher Hitchens*

THE MEANING OF LIFE? IT HAS NONE, MOSTLY

Walter Balcerak

There is no God, and we have no free will. There are no transcendent moral truths, we are not the center of the universe, and we are not here for any purpose. In fact, life has no ultimate meaning.

If Darwin’s theory of natural selection and the scientific account of the origin of the universe are true, which they almost surely are, these nihilistic assertions are also true, according to Steve Stewart-Williams, author of *Darwin, God and the Meaning of Life*. A senior lecturer at Swansea University in Wales, he has doctorates in psychology and philosophy.

He refutes three main arguments for God’s existence often used by apologists for religion.

First, apologists claim that everything has a cause, and the cause of the universe is God. Stewart-Williams responds: “If we have to posit a God to explain the universe, wouldn’t we then have to posit a Super-God to explain God, a Mega-Super-God to explain Super-God, and so on ad infinitum? The theist will resist this suggestion, and insist that God doesn’t require a cause. However, if we can accept that God exists without a cause, why can we not just accept that the universe exists without a cause and leave it at that?”

Second, apologists employ the argument from design, asserting that the earth is fine-tuned for life, against all

reasonable odds. Stewart-Williams' retorts: "[T]he earth is not fine-tuned for life; life is fine-tuned for the earth, and evolutionary theory explains how the fine-tuning took place."

Third, apologists contend that gaps in our knowledge refute the theory of evolution. "Where there are gaps in our knowledge," Stewart-Williams says, "we should admit our ignorance, not resort to the unsupported answers of ancient peoples who were even more ignorant than we are."

As for free will: "[O]ur decisions and actions are presumably either caused or they're random. To paraphrase David Hume, if they're caused we don't have free will, whereas if they're random—well again, we don't have free will."

Since there is no God, we cannot look to Mount Sinai for moral truths. Their source is natural selection, which favors moral precepts that enable us to live harmoniously in society. Thus, human moral beliefs are "a set of principles fitting one particular species to its evolved lifestyle".

Human culture also plays a critical role in shaping morality: "Shared morality does not have a direct evolutionary origin. It is a cultural construct built from raw materials furnished by natural selection, and it is the product of multiple forces."

By disputing the existence of God, free will, and moral truths, Stewart-Williams paints a bleak picture of human existence and our place in the universe. Yet he believes this need not be grounds for despair.

"For it is certainly possible to frame an ethic consistent with the Darwinian view of the world. Such an ethic might emphasize the virtue of being honest enough and courageous enough to acknowledge unflinchingly that there is probably no God, no afterlife, no soul; that there is no objective basis to morality or higher purpose behind our suffering; that we are insignificant in a vast and impersonal cosmos; that existence is ultimately without purpose or meaning; and that the effects of our actions will ultimately fade away without trace. It is admirable to acknowledge these uncongenial truths, yet to struggle on as if life were meaningful and strive to make the world a better place anyway, without promise of eternal reward or hope of ultimate victory."

In my opinion, the nihilistic conclusions reached by Stewart-Williams accurately sum up the implications of evolutionary theory and scientific cosmology. But he fails to touch on some evolutionary developments that make human existence extremely meaningful. I'm talking about our capacity for friendship, love and joy, as well as our ability to experience beauty and to be inspired, if only for a brief while, by our exquisite planet and the universe beyond.

ON PERSPECTIVE

If you break your neck, if you have nothing to eat, if your house is on fire, then you've got a problem. Everything else is an inconvenience. Life is inconvenient. Life is lumpy. A lump in the oatmeal, a lump in the throat, and a lump in the breast are not the same kind of lump. One needs to learn the difference. – Robert Fulghum

PHILOSOPHY SCRATCHES THE ITCH

Simon Critchley

(Excerpted from "There Is No Theory of Everything", on *The Stone*, the New York Times' online philosophy series at nytimes.com/opinionator)

People often wonder why there appears to be no progress in philosophy, unlike in natural science, and why it is that after some three millenniums of philosophical activity no dramatic changes seem to have been made to the questions philosophers ask. The reason is that people keep asking the same questions and are perplexed by the same difficulties. Wittgenstein puts the point rather directly: "Philosophy hasn't made any progress? If somebody scratches the spot where he has an itch, do we have to see some progress?"

Philosophy scratches at the various itches we have, not in order that we might find some cure for what ails us, but in order to scratch in the right place and begin to understand why we engage in such apparently irritating activity. Philosophy is not Neosporin. It is not some healing balm. It is an irritant, which is why Socrates described himself as a gadfly.

This is one way of approaching the question of life's meaning. Human beings have been asking the same kinds of questions for millenniums and this is not an error. It testifies to the fact that human beings are rightly perplexed by their lives. The mistake is to believe that there is an answer to the question of life's meaning. As Douglas Adams established quite some time ago, the answer to the question of life, the universe and everything will always be "42" or some variation of 42. Namely, it will be something really rather disappointing.

The point, then, is not to seek an answer to the meaning of life, but to continue to ask the question.

STOICISM: A GUIDE TO THE GOOD LIFE

William B. Irvine

(Excerpted from his book, *A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy*)

(Editor: In anticipation of his presentation at our Freethought Day brunch October 11 – see page 7 for the details – I asked Massimo Pigliucci for a good introductory book on Stoicism. Prof. Irvine's 2009 book was his suggestion. I love it, and the following is from the Introduction. – JR)

Rather than being passive individuals who were grimly resigned to being on the receiving end of the world's abuse and injustice, the Stoics were fully engaged in life and worked hard to make the world a better place. Consider, for example, Cato the Younger. His Stoicism did not prevent Cato from fighting bravely to restore the Roman republic. Likewise, Seneca seems to have been remarkably energetic: besides being a philosopher, he was a successful playwright, an advisor to an emperor, and the first-century equivalent of an investment banker. And Marcus Aurelius, besides being a philosopher, was a Roman emperor – indeed, arguably one of the greatest Roman

emperors. As I read about the Stoics, I found myself filled with admiration for them. They were courageous, temperate, reasonable, and self-disciplined – traits I would like to possess. They also thought it important for us to fulfill our obligations and to help our fellow humans – values I happen to share.

In my research on desire, I discovered nearly unanimous agreement among thoughtful people that we are unlikely to have a good and meaningful life unless we can overcome our insatiability. There was also agreement that one wonderful way to tame our tendency to always want more is to persuade ourselves to want the things we already have. This seemed to be an important insight, but it left open the question of how, exactly, we could accomplish this. The Stoics, I was delighted to discover, had an answer to this question. They developed a fairly simple technique that, if practiced, can make us glad, if only for a time, to be the person we are, living the life we happen to be living, almost regardless of what that life might be.

CALVIN'S SYNERGISTIC PHILOSOPHY

Bill Watterson

(Six-year-old Calvin and his stuffed tiger, Hobbes, are the stars of the sorely-missed "Calvin and Hobbes" comic strip)

Calvin: Some people are pragmatists, taking things as they come, and making the best of the choices available. Some people are idealists, standing for principle and refusing to compromise. And some people just act on any whim that enters their heads.

Hobbes: I wonder which *you* are.

Calvin: I pragmatically turn my whims into principles.

HOW I BECAME A NONE

Dr. David I. Orenstein

(aka The Paleolibrarian)

I am an apostate. I became an atheist consciously at the age of eight. I think I chose not to believe because I never really thought the supernatural was special in any way. Don't get me wrong, I had and still have an active imagination and I loved reading comic books about the exploits of Superman and his ilk. But religion, religious ritual and god-belief never seemed to make sense to me from a practical point of view.

As I look back on my choice, I think that I've always been a person without religious faith. However, I do have faith in humanity and I remain optimistic even though there are plenty of reasons for great sadness in our world. I conclude that at its core and through its roots, this sadness is caused by some form of religious philosophy, sectarian violence or god-worship.

But let's get back to my atheist journey. When I was a pre-teen, I became ill with rheumatic fever. The infection left me with damaged mitral and aortic valves. I thought, if there was a God and if he was a kind and loving deity, then why would he hurt me so? After all, as a child, I never did anything to hurt him or anyone. Who plans this way? Why, if God controls all, did I have to suffer or, for that matter, why

does anyone have to suffer? If God is so powerful, why not just fix everything? Then I realized in my own words, what Woody Allen said years before, although I was unaware of his statement: "It's not that God isn't all powerful, it's just that he is an underachiever." As a fellow Jew from Brooklyn, I get the joke and the pathos of Allen's comment.

So in 1979, at the age of 17, I underwent open-heart surgery to replace my aortic valve. They put in a porcine valve (a fancy way of saying "pig"). I was no longer kosher (not that I ever was), but at least my short life was extended a little longer. That was, up until 1987, when the porcine valve calcified and was replaced by a non-organic valve. After each surgery I was told that my family and friends prayed for my survival. Each time I went under the knife I neither prayed nor pleaded with "God" to spare me. Frankly, I was more concerned with the job experience of the heart surgeon.

I guess you can say that my heart surgeries were a form of battle, and in that case I can assure you that there are atheists in foxholes, because I am and will always be a nonbeliever. I choose atheism because I have never seen evidence to contradict my conclusion that there isn't a God.

So if God does not exist, it follows that there is no need for a religious or religiously-based spiritual life. It also follows that one can and will act morally and with kindness toward others even without the threat or reliance on God or a theistic philosophy.

The scientist and skeptic Carl Sagan is quoted as saying, "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence." Without evidence, humans backslide into a Paleolithic set of beliefs that existed way before science could show us that the natural world and the mechanics of the universe are knowable. The physical world can be, and is, beautiful and testable. And the most wonderful part of it all is that it can be understood through human invention and inquiry. Although there is still so much more to know, science allows us to both explore and expand our knowledge of the natural world, and that it is both beautiful and amazing.

The daily discoveries in all scientific disciplines show us how the world and universe operate without the need for superstitious belief or theistic intervention. At the same time we have religion, which tells us nothing about human nature, other than that we can be ignorant, sometimes violent, and duped into believing the unbelievable through religious dogma and ritual, which is actually really good only for those who get paid to lead a flock.

What I knew as a little boy I know as an adult man. There is no need for God. We have science and literature and fine arts and so many human-made intellectual contrivances which heighten our sensibilities. We also have the scientific method to fill in the gaps of our understanding and, more important, to explore what we don't know. As long as we can test the mechanics of the universe we can ensure that what we do know is valid, while continuing to question and continue to make discoveries to enliven our world.

Comment: Tell us *your* story – next page.

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• **Philip Appleman:** *The Labyrinth: God, Darwin, and the Meaning of Life*

"In the face of greatness, one should not mince words. Philip Appleman's *The Labyrinth* is one of the most soaring, eloquent, and resoundingly humane essays I have ever been offered the privilege of publishing." (Tom Flynn, editor, *Free Inquiry*) "Philip Appleman distills into one short, delightful, beautifully written book vast libraries of wisdom, history, science, ethics, and philosophy." (Edd Doerr, President, Americans for Religious Liberty)

• **Giddian Beer:** *Kouken: Jewels, Jolts & Jeremaids*

"A wonderful, kaleidoscopic yin and yang popping out of Aladdin's lamp ... witty, exotic, funny, imaginative poetry, stories, essays ... take a vacation for the mind." (Amazon reader review) "Dive right in for the sheer intellectual fun of real poetry and acerbic, often hilarious commentary." (John Rafferty, President, SHSNY)

• **Jennifer Michael Hecht:** *Stay: A History of Suicide and the Philosophies Against It*

"A history not only of suicide, but how we think about

suicide. . . . Hecht proposes her own argument against suicide in the secular, modern world, presenting a humanist call for life. . . . Her final plea to the suicidal gives the book its title: she urges them to simply 'stay'." (Thomas Flynn, *The Daily Beast*) "Eloquent and affecting." (David Brooks, *The New York Times*)

• **Philip Kitcher:** *Life After Faith: The Case for Secular Humanism*

"Scrupulous in its argument, elegant in its style, humane in its spirit, it is animated by a stirring aspiration to wisdom." (Leon Wieseltier) "A brilliant and complete little book ... tremendously impressive and illuminating." (James Wood, Harvard University)

• **Massimo Pigliucci:** *Answers for Aristotle: How Science and Philosophy Can Lead Us to a More Meaningful Life*

"Pigliucci is a singular bridge-builder, one who connects science as the investigation of what is with philosophy as reflection on what should be." (Booklist) "... a veritable Cook's Tour of science, philosophy, and the curious meeting ground of the two." (*Philosophy Now*)

• **John Rafferty:** *A Fit of Pique: Dispatches from the Culture Wars*

"Shades of Mencken ... witty and casually cultured essays by a leading freethinker on hate crimes, evolution, gay pride, the poetry of John Donne, Catholic schools, Jerry Falwell, the Sopranos, and, above all, the failures of organized religion." (Norman Dorsen, past Pres., ACLU)

10/11 Free Thought Day Brunch
with Massimo - Reserve Now!
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