

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

July, 2016

Before we slip into the *dolce far niente* of summer (no PIQUE in August), we give a great big Thank You herein to Louis J. Appignani, re-evaluate Dwight Eisenhower in the '50s and freedom of the press now, remember Reason Rally 2016, launch a Design-a-Cap Contest, consider creeping fascism, celebrate our newest Board member and New York's 31 gender flavors, and invite one and all to hear Jennifer Hecht at Ethical in July. See you in September. – JR

NO, I DON'T REALLY HAVE MUCH TO SAY ABOUT ORLANDO

John Rafferty

Because so many others have beat me to it. NRA-owned legislators across the country mouthed pieties and bowed their heads in solemn prayer ... a Christian pastor in Arizona grabbed his fifteen minutes by calling the murders "good news" because "homosexuals are a bunch of disgusting perverts" (his landlord has since kicked him out) ... the blogosphere lit up with ("coming for your guns!") government-conspiracy lunacies ... the Lieutenant Governor of Texas greeted the news of 49 LGBT deaths with a Biblical tweet, "God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" ... a former Israel ambassador to the U.S. advised Donald Trump to emphasize the murderer's Muslim name ... and Trump himself implied ("There's something going on") that the President of the United States was somehow complicit.

So what is there to say that hasn't been said?

We know the problem, but we'll ignore it. Until the next atrocity, after which we'll ignore it again. Until we live in some bio-engineered, free will-free "brave new world" or "Pleasantville" we will always have terrorists and murderous psychopaths among us.

Just calculate: the U.S. adult population is just about 250 million; if one-tenth of one percent of that population is crazy – and you *know* it's so much more – we have a quarter of a million Omar Mateens among us. And we allow every one of them to buy an assault rifle – hell, twelve assault rifles and "cop-killer" bullets – legally, no questions asked.

We know what needs to be done. We also know we won't do it.

I have never said this before, and I almost tremble to say it now, but I look at my country, my beloved America, and I am disgusted.

OF COURSE, THE NRA HAD SOMETHING TO SAY THE MORNING AFTER THE ORLANDO MURDERS



NRA @NRABlog

Need a gift for #FathersDay? How about a gift from the #NRAstore?! <http://ow.ly/PfPM3018LzG>

11:30 AM - 12 Jun 2016

AND THIS, I THINK, SAYS IT ALL



NO PIQUE IN AUGUST

The entire editorial, production and distribution staff of PIQUE, in all our worldwide offices and bureaus, will be on vacation. Back in September.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS: John Rafferty, *Pres./Editor*; Robert A. Murtha, Jr., *V.P.*; Donna Marxer, *Treas.*; Brian Lemaire, *Secty*; Maria Astifidis; Kiwi Callahan; Dorothy Kahn; Carl Marxer; Claire Miller; Carlos Mora; David Orenstein; John Wagner
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Individual membership \$40 per year; Family membership \$65; Subscription only: \$30.

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

AND NOW FOR SOME GOOD NEWS

Laurie Goodstein

(Excerpted from "University of Miami Establishes Chair for Study of Atheism", The New York Times, 5/20/2016)

With an increasing number of Americans leaving religion behind, the University of Miami has received a donation from a wealthy atheist to endow what it says is the nation's first academic chair "for the study of atheism, humanism and secular ethics".

The chair has been established after years of discussion with a \$2.2 million donation from Louis J. Appignani, a retired businessman and former president and chairman of the modeling school Barbizon International, who has given grants to many humanist and secular causes — though this is his largest so far. The university ... will appoint a committee of faculty members to conduct a search for a scholar to fill the position.

"I'm trying to eliminate discrimination against atheists," said Mr. Appignani, who is 83 and lives in Florida. "So this is a step in that direction, to make atheism legitimate."

Religion departments and professors of religious studies are a standard feature at most colleges and universities, many originally founded by ministers and churches. The study of atheism and secularism is only now starting to emerge as an accepted academic field, scholars say, with its own journal, conferences, course offerings and, now, an endowed chair.

"I think it's a very bold step of the University of Miami, and I hope there will be others," said Richard Dawkins, an evolutionary biologist and atheist luminary who is the author of *The God Delusion*. "It's enormously important to shake off the shackles of religion from the study of morality." ...

The percentage of Americans who claim no religious affiliation has risen rapidly in a short time, to 23 percent of the population in 2014, up from 16 percent in 2007, according to a report by the Pew Research Center. Younger people are even less religious, with 35 percent of millennials saying they identify as atheist, agnostic or with no religion in particular. ...

With atheists still often stigmatized and disparaged in this country, it took some persuading for the University of Miami to agree to create a chair with the word "atheism" in the title, according to Harvey Siegel, a professor of philosophy who has helped to broker the arrangement. He said that more than 15 years ago, when he was chairman of the philosophy department, he and Mr. Appignani first began discussing the idea for a chair to study atheism and secularism

"There was great reluctance on the part of the university to have an endowed chair with the word 'atheism' in the name, and that was a deal-breaker for Lou," Mr. Siegel said. "He wasn't going to do it unless it had the word atheism in it." The university had reason to be cautious, Thomas J. LeBlanc, executive vice president and provost, said.

"We didn't want anyone to misunderstand and think

that this was to be an advocacy position for someone who is an atheist," he said. "Our religion department isn't taking an advocacy position when it teaches about Catholicism or Islam. Similarly, we're not taking an advocacy position when we teach about atheism or secular ethics." ...

Mr. Appignani said he rejected a proposal from a dean to call it a chair in "philosophical naturalism." Instead, he and the university leaders worked out the title, broadening the scope by including humanism and secular ethics.

Mr. Appignani was raised a Roman Catholic in the Bronx by Italian immigrant parents. His father was a clothing presser in the garment district. He attended Catholic schools and said he became a nonbeliever at the City College of New York when he discovered the work of Bertrand Russell, the British philosopher and Nobel Prize winner. With the money he made from the Barbizon school, he said, he created the foundation that has given grants to groups like the American Humanist Association and the Secular Coalition for America, and the Appignani Humanist Legal Center.

Over the years, Mr. Appignani has sponsored two public lectures by Mr. Dawkins at the University of Miami. The discussions about a chair gained momentum last year with the arrival of a new university president, Julio Frenk.

Pitzer College, a liberal arts school in Southern California with about 1,000 students, became the first to begin a program and major in secular studies five years ago. Phil Zuckerman, a sociologist of religion who founded the program, said it now offered four courses on secularism of its own and many others by the six professors associated with the department. ... Scholars have formed a "Nonreligion and Secularity Research Network," which is holding its fourth conference this summer in Zurich. A peer-reviewed journal, *Secularism and Nonreligion*, is now up and running.

"There is a real need for secular studies," Mr. Zuckerman said. "As rates of irreligion continue to rise, not only here in the U.S.A. but all over the world, we need to understand secular people, secular culture, and secularism as a political and ideological force."

JANUARY 20, 1953: WHEN SECULAR GOVERNMENT IN AMERICA DIED

Kevin M. Kruse

(Excerpted from *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America*, posted on *Delanceyplace.com*, 5/16/2016)

The inauguration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower was much more than a political ceremony. It was, in many ways, a religious consecration. ... Indeed, the Republican nominee talked so much about spirituality on the stump that legendary *New York Times* reporter Scotty Reston likened his campaign to "William Jennings Bryan's old invasion of the Bible Belt during the Chautauqua circuit days". On election day, Americans answered his call. Eisenhower won 55 percent of the popular vote and

a staggering 442-to-89 margin in the Electoral College. Reflecting on the returns, Eisenhower saw nothing less than a mandate for a national religious revival. ...

In the past, incoming presidents had attended religious services on the morning of their inauguration, but usually discreetly. ... Eisenhower, in contrast, turned spirituality into spectacle. At a transition meeting with his cabinet nominees, he announced that they and their families were invited to a special religious service at National Presbyterian Church the morning of the inauguration. "He added hastily as an afterthought that, of course, no Cabinet member should feel under pressure to go to the Presbyterian services," remembered Sherman Adams, his chief of staff; "anybody could go instead to a church of his own choice." But given a choice between worshiping with the president or worshiping without him, almost all chose the former. More than 150 supporters joined the extended Eisenhower clan for the services. ...

Immediately after [Eisenhower took] his oath [of office], in his first official words as president, Eisenhower asked the 125,000 Americans in attendance—and the estimated seventy million more watching live on television—to bow their heads so that he might lead them in "a little private prayer of my own" he had composed that morning. ... The president's prayer caused a minor sensation — not because of anything said in it but simply because it had been said. ...

The inauguration and its immediate aftermath established the tenor for Eisenhower's entire presidency. On the first Sunday in February, he became the first president ever to be baptized while in office, taking the rite before the congregation of National Presbyterian Church. That same night, Eisenhower broadcast an Oval Office address for the American Legion's "Back to God" ceremonies, urging the millions watching at home to recognize and rejoice in what the president said were the spiritual foundations of the nation. Four days later, he was the guest of honor at the first-ever National Prayer Breakfast, which soon became an annual tradition. ... The convening pastor led a "prayer of consecration" for Eisenhower, who then offered brief remarks of his own.

"The very basis of our government is: 'We hold that all men are endowed by their Creator' with certain rights", the president asserted. "In one sentence, we established that every free government is embedded soundly in a deeply-felt religious faith or it makes no sense."

Eisenhower made clear that he would personally turn those words into deeds. The next day, he instituted the first-ever opening prayers at a cabinet meeting. It took some time before this innovation became a natural habit. His secretary recalled Eisenhower emerging from a cabinet session only to exclaim: "Jesus Christ, we forgot the prayer!"

Comment: Jesus Christ, how could I have forgotten all this? Over the decades my memories of Eisenhower have mellowed (and, yes, in hindsight he probably was the better choice for President than Stevenson, for whom I stuffed envelopes), but the above reminds me of how disgusted I was then by the public piety and posturing of the "Fabulous Fifties". - JR

IS OKLAHOMA OK?

Jonathon Engel

My older brother lives in Norman, Oklahoma (because he's a professor at the University of Oklahoma, that's why), and so I take a bit more interest in the Sooner state than the average person, especially when it comes to their weather. And lately the weather hasn't been too good. Yes, it is indeed tornado season in the Midwest, and Oklahoma is pretty much ground zero. Oklahoma sits at the heart of "Tornado Alley", which stretches from the Rocky Mountains to the Appalachians, and while Texas technically experiences more total tornadoes, Kansas and Oklahoma rank at the top for tornadoes per square mile. But tornadoes are not the only natural disaster plaguing Oklahoma these days. It now has earthquakes to deal with as well, although it never used to. Last year the state experienced almost 900 3+ magnitude earthquakes; in 2007 it recorded just 1. In fact, according to the Federal government, parts of Oklahoma are now as seismic as parts of California and Alaska, long the nation's leaders in earthquakes. It's debatable whether all these earthquakes fit under the "natural disaster" category, as many scientists (including my brother, who is a geologist) blame the increased seismic activity on the process of hydraulic fracking, but no one is absolutely sure, and, at any rate, earthquakes are historically thought of as fitting into the "natural disaster" category.

In early human times (from the "Dark Ages" on back) societies frequently associated natural disasters like tornadoes and earthquakes with the wrath of God(s). Somebody was doing something wrong, and so to demonstrate his displeasure God unleashed a tornado or two. But advances in science allowed us to understand the real reasons behind such phenomena, and so mankind left these superstitions behind. If only that were completely true. Because certain segments of our population (i.e., religious fundamentalists) still believe such nonsense despite what science has taught us over the past millennium or so. Just a few examples: After Hurricane Katrina, Pastor John Hagee said he believed that God caused the largest natural disaster in U.S. history to stop a scheduled gay pride parade in New Orleans. After the 2010 earthquake in Haiti Pat Robertson said that Haiti had been targeted by the almighty because it had "made a pact with the devil". Preacher Cindy Jacobs of the Generals International Ministry linked the 2011 Japanese tsunami to the United States' "Don't Ask Don't Tell" gays-in-the-military policy, although why God would punish Japan for American military policy is unclear.

Now, curiously enough, it is the state of Oklahoma, which is one of the most pious states in the Union, that is being hit with these disasters. The Pew Research Center rates Oklahoma as the eighth most religious state in the country. If, as obviously many fundamentalist religious types believe, natural disasters are an expression of God's wrath against the wayward, why are the pious people of Oklahoma being hit by so many of them? And more

interestingly still, where are the fundamentalist voices asking if perhaps Oklahoma is doing something wrong?

Personally, I don't believe this fundamentalist claptrap, but I question whether fundamentalists really do either, or whether the whole God's wrath dogma is just ultra-religious types using the almighty as a kind of Boogie Man to scare people into following their hard-right political beliefs. Otherwise, they really would be questioning what Oklahomans are doing wrong that has subjected them to God's righteous anger. If there is a God, he must be awfully tired of being used this way. Maybe that's the real reason why he keeps throwing lightning bolts (and tornadoes and hurricanes) at the Sooner state (just kidding).

So is Oklahoma OK? Doesn't look that way to me, but the reasons have nothing to do with gods or the supernatural and everything to do with phenomena for which there are scientific explanations, if only people's minds are open enough to hear them.

It is the natural tendency of the ignorant to believe what is not true. In order to overcome that tendency it is not sufficient to exhibit the true; it is also necessary to expose and denounce the false.

To admit that the false has any standing in court, that it ought to be handled gently because millions of morons cherish it and thousands of quacks make their livings propagating it—to admit this, as the more fatuous of the reconcilers of science and religion inevitably do, is to abandon a just cause to its enemies, cravenly and without excuse. — *H.L. Mencken, the American Mercury*

**WHY WE LIVE IN NEW YORK #99
STATE OF IOWA
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
IN THE NAME AND
BY THE AUTHORITY OF
THE STATE OF IOWA
PROCLAMATION**

WHEREAS all Scripture is essential to prepare us to be the people God wants us to be and to accomplish the purpose for which he created us; and

[Seven more Whereases follow, invoking Washington, Jackson, Lincoln, Wilson and Reagan, and the Bible as "the one true revelation from God", leading to ...]

NOW, therefore I, Terry E. Branstad, Governor of the State of Iowa, do hereby encourage all Iowans to join in this historic Iowa 99 County Bible Reading Marathon to take place between June 30th and July 3rd in front of all 99 courthouses and furthermore, encourage individuals and families in Iowa to read through the Bible on a daily basis each year until the Lord comes.

[Signed and sealed "at Des Moines this 26th day of April, in the Year of Our Lord Two Thousand Sixteen."]

Comment:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

— December 15, 1791

Dispatch from Reason Rally 2016:

FAITH AS A CLOSED SYSTEM OF KNOWLEDGE

David Orenstein

(Reprinted from David's Paleolibrarian blog, 6/6/2016)

On the way down to the 2016 Reason Rally, my touring companions, which included my dear friend and French atheist, Michel Bourgois, and my better-two-thirds Francesca (and my better one-third Chloe), it was clear we were simpatico as we talked about global religious trends and especially what's going on in America as the "Nones" grow in number and as the atheist/humanist movement gains greater political prowess.

Essentially, I made the brief statement that based on current trends (and past history) religion and religious faith are essentially closed systems. That is, no matter how complex the theology and numbers of believers, that religion has to eventually diminish because fundamental beliefs make each faith its own island and thus limits their growth. Indeed, based on trends only Islam is growing, and this has less to do with the correctness of a faith tradition and more to do with birth rates and poverty in nations where there are few options for women other than to make babies.

Concurrently, if the final argument to every thought and idea is that one's personal god is the reason for everything, one cannot hope to have honest interest in the world where real knowledge can be accessed. This Dark Ages way of thinking, combined with the full acceptance of Bronze Age philosophy and deities, leaves little room for exploration and explanation of the natural world or universe and immediately sets one group against the many.

There is precedent for my stating this in print. Even the religious institutions that maintain demographic statistics on the number of clergy and active parishioners are alarmed at the falling numbers of both groups. Houses of worship are closing, attendance is falling in every but the most extreme faith traditions, and the scandals at the base of organized religious life have essentially turned off potential believers and pushed them towards modernity.

In my own lifetime I have seen so many churches shut, their doors closed, their buildings knocked down and replaced by new housing or commercial developments. Of course, because religion is really a business, most organized faiths keep title to the land, lease it and make more money than what would traditionally come from donations or pledges. Capitalism is ironic!

Now let's look at an open system. The best example I can use is the growing secular atheist/humanist movement in the United States and across the globe.

Certainly, we can thank technology for ushering in a new Age of Reason, but our social dynamics are also a direct result of religious political hegemony and violence, the now many atheist authors, the sad events of 9/11 and, as noted above, the disgusting sex and financial abuses by unchecked and out of control faith traditions that have run amok without audit or social checks.

SEEN AT THE REASON RALLY

This humanist/atheist system is open essentially because there is no absolute dogma. Other than acceptance of the material world based on scientific knowledge, acceptance of equal rights and constitutional secular democracy, a humanist worldview and the idea that we can be good without god and are freer to live our lives and help others without the baggage of faith.

This system is also inclusive. At the 2012 Reason Rally and now again at the 2016 event, those gathered shared a mix of ideas and ideals, and certainly there was a sense of community and of a coming of age for our movement. There was good diversity socially and economically, where straight and LGBT, many men, women and children, black, white, Latino and other ethnic groups, older and younger folks, those with disabilities and varying levels of formal education, all came together to feel the love.

In fact, the rally and our movement is openly secular and inviting to those of faith who support church-and-state separation. However, few if any faith traditions stop at the door of Constitutional democracy without trying to convert others, or support missionary work, or attempt to save souls by the book, by the smile or by the sword.

So what does this mean for faith traditions and our movement?

Telling was the fact that there were more evangelicals out protesting the 2016 Reason Rally than in 2012. The louder they scream and try to convert the un-convertible the more frantic they become as their values and vision for a “Christian America” slip away and remain part of their religious fantasy.

Since a growing part of the new secular/atheist movement and our mission is political, I personally accept and will work to support non-believers who run for local, state and national office. I (and millions of others) will work to ensure evolution rather than “Intelligent Design” is taught in our schools, that symbols of religious faith are kept off of public property, that women’s rights and reproductive freedoms—and the rights of numerous ethnic and minority groups—are protected, and that all people are free from faith if they choose to be, so they can speak or write and gather.

Lastly, the movement’s many organizations will work to hold the closed system of organized religion accountable, and to hold those who lead or preach and who make others suffer accountable for their actions as well. Religious faith is *not* necessarily a virtue, especially when those in charge of tending a flock fleece it, do not pay taxes and harm those who cannot speak for themselves because they may be threatened by reprisal.

So as our open system continues to grow let’s invite more people to dialog. Let’s make sure that people can come out of the closet as secular or humanist or atheist. Let’s keep our doors and our hearts and minds open to others—regardless of their beliefs—as it is truly the only way our non-faith traditions and customs can grow and take center stage in the USA and around the world.



SHSNY CALENDAR: JULY - SEPTEMBER 2016

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

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

28 East 35 St. (front lounge)
We'll discuss

**POLITICAL ORDER AND
POLITICAL DECAY: From the
Industrial Revolution to the
Globalization of Democracy**

Francis Fukuyama

(Conclusion of our reading)

Taking up the essential question of how societies develop strong, impersonal, and accountable political institutions, Fukuyama follows the story begun in *The Origins of Political Order* [our April/May book] from the French Revolution to the so-called Arab Spring and the deep dysfunctions of contemporary American politics. He examines the effects of corruption on governance, and why some societies have been successful at rooting it out.



Fukuyama, author also of the best-selling and prize-winning *The End of History and the Last Man*, explores the different legacies of colonialism in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, and offers a clear-eyed account of why some regions have thrived and developed more quickly than others. And he boldly reckons with the future of democracy in the face of a rising global middle class and entrenched political paralysis in the West.

– Paperback & Kindle available

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

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURS, AUG 4, 7-8:30 pm
Community Church of New York
**ISLAM AND THE FUTURE OF
TOLERANCE: A DIALOGUE**
Sam Harris & Maajid Nawaz

In this short book, Sam Harris and Maajid Nawaz invite us to join an urgently needed conversation: Is Islam a religion of peace or war? Is it amenable to reform? What do words like *Islamism*, *jihadism*, and *fundamentalism* mean in today's world?

This dialogue between a famous atheist and a former radical Islamist is startling for the actual progress they make.

– Hardcover & Kindle available

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURS, SEP 1, 7-8:30 pm
Community Church of New York
**CONSCIOUSNESS
AND THE BRAIN:
Deciphering How the Brain
Codes Our Thoughts**
Stanislas Dehaene

How does our brain generate a conscious thought? And why does so much of our knowledge remain unconscious? Thanks to clever psychological and brain-imaging experiments, we are closer than ever to cracking this mystery.

Consciousness and the Brain will excite anyone interested in cutting-edge science and technology and the vast philosophical, personal, and ethical implications of finally quantifying consciousness.

– Paperback & Kindle available

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@SHS_NewYork

SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT

MON, JULY 11, 6:30 pm
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)
**WHERE TO INVADE NEXT:
Prepare to be Liberated**

With an eye toward finding solutions to the social problems plaguing



America, provocative documentary Michael Moore embarks on a European expedition to interview ordinary citizens about their nations' effective policies and practices. "His funniest film by far."

After-Film Discussion:

Let's talk about Michael Moore.

SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT MON, AUG 8, 6:30 pm

Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
**WITH GOD ON OUR SIDE:
George W. Bush and the Rise
of the Religious Right**

This 2004 documentary "is the most powerful, humane and compassionate documentary exposé of the Christian Zionist movement, and the impact of their ideology on the lives they have touched (and ruined), ever made. It is well crafted, subtle and fair. And



– notable in the 'when hell freezes over' department – it was directed and produced by an American Evangelical." (*Huffpost*)

After-Film Discussion:

How dangerous to civil liberty is the Religious Right?

SHSNY Movie Night is FREE.

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

SHSNY CALENDAR: JULY - SEPTEMBER 2016

GREAT LECTURES ON DVD
TUES, AUG 2, 7 pm
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)
CAN ATHEISM SAVE
EUROPE?

**Christopher Hitchens and
 John Lennox: A Debate.**

A New Europe is emerging from the old order and with it a modern version of an old philosophy. Advocates of the "New Atheism" call for the abandonment of religion altogether and the adoption of Secular Humanism. Religion, they argue, is detrimental to society. According to Hitchens, "it poisons everything".

Professor Lennox (of Oxford) disagrees. He argues that far from undermining society, religion, especially Christianity, is vital to the survival of Western Civilization. This leads to inevitable questions: Should Atheism replace Christianity in Europe? Does Atheism have a better record than Christianity? Where would the New Atheism lead Europe?

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

GREAT LECTURES ON DVD
WED, AUG 24, 7 pm
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)
THE ISLAND OF
KNOWLEDGE:

**The Limit of Science and
 the Search for Meaning**
Dr. Marcelo Gleiser

Do all questions have answers? Is there such a thing as an ultimate truth? To be human is to want to know. Dr. Gleiser, an astronomer and physicist at Dartmouth College, traces our search for answers to the most fundamental questions of existence, and reaches a provocative conclusion: science, the main tool we use to find answers, is fundamentally limited.

Recognizing limits, he argues, is not a deterrent to progress or a surrendering to religion. Rather, it frees us to question the meaning and nature of the universe while affirming the central role of life and ourselves in it. Science must go on, but recognizing its limits reveals its true mission: to know the universe is to know ourselves.

BRUNCH & CONVERSATION
SUN, JULY 17, 11:30 am
and
SUN, AUG 21, 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 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 freethinkers for food, fun and great conversation.

July 17 Discussion:

A humanist (i.e.: non-Trump) take on immigration: Who, How many?

August 21 Discussion:

What does a humanist eat?

STUDYING HUMANISM

No Studying Humanism in July or August. See you in September.

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

(leave a call-back number)

THE EMOJI BIBLE IS REAL ... GOOGLE IT AND SEE



WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?

John Rafferty

Bill Maher: It's so hard to feel sorry for the media when they're so sleazy."

(Transcribed from HBO's "Real Time with Bill Maher", 6/3/2016)

Here, in (very) brief, is what Bill Maher is talking about. Gawker.com is a website in the gossip business ("Today's gossip is tomorrow's news"). Some time ago, it outed as gay Peter Thiel, who made his billions as one of the founders of PayPal. An enraged Thiel has since been on a one-man crusade to destroy Gawker and its founder, Nick Denton. In pursuit of that end, Thiel financed a \$100 million lawsuit that the wrestler Hulk Hogan (real name Terry Gene Bollea) had brought against Gawker for publishing a sex tape of an adulterous liaison of Hogan's, citing invasion of privacy, emotional distress, blah, blah.

Under ordinary circumstances, as Jeet Heer has written on newrepublic.com, it was the kind of lawsuit that would have been settled for a much, much smaller amount (" \$100 million" is for headline purposes), and in fact Gawker did offer to settle – several times. But Peter Thiel wouldn't have it. He saw an opportunity, offered to fully fund Hogan's lawsuit against Gawker and Denton, guaranteed the wrestler at least as much as Gawker would have settled for, and sent his battalions of lawyers into this tawdry little case.

The result: a jury awarded Hogan not a hundred million, but \$140 million, a judge has upheld the verdict, Gawker has filed for bankruptcy protection and is in the process of being chopped up and sold.

Okay, go wash your hands after reading that, and let's get to why any of it matters – or should matter – to us.

"Free speech's many-sided appeal," Edmund Fawcett wrote in *The New York Times Book Review* of May 29, "is not hard to identify. It prods society to criticize itself and learn from mistakes. It fosters the independence of mind we need to be responsible grown-ups. Take away free speech, and liberal democracy ceases to be truly liberal or democratic. ... [But] "to defend free speech you have to allow bad speech. Free speech gave us Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream.' It also gave us Donald Trump."

And gawker.com.

The press in America – and that includes Gawker – has been protected from harassing or fishing-expedition lawsuits ever since, in *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan*, "the Supreme Court, in a unanimous decision, made it just about impossible for a 'public figure' to win a lawsuit against a news organization", wrote Nicholas Lemann on newyorker.com, adding,

"This standard ... made this the country with the most pro-free expression, and specifically pro-press, laws in the developed worldBut today the American press has a profoundly different structure than it did in the Sullivan era. ... The roguish part of the press is proliferating. People like Nick Denton love to mock the mainstream media for being preachy and self-regarding, while taking full advantage of the protections that arrived during its brief period of general public esteem.

Now the public likes the press less and less, and that invites a sustained reconsideration of the protections.

"The Republican candidate for President, for whom Thiel plans to serve as a California delegate, has said, 'I'm going to open up our libel laws so when they write purposely negative and horrible and false articles, we can sue them and win lots of money' – meaning, he'll do what he can to overturn the Sullivan standard."

On the show quoted at the top of this piece, Bill Maher also said, "I don't think it's a good thing that billionaires can drive media outlets out of business ... " and I agree.

But, he also said, "... except, on the other hand, Gawker are fucking whores." And I agree again.

Now the question is, What do *you* think, freethinkers and liberals and humanists? Does freedom of the press trump (pun intended) the right to privacy? How far should free speech protection extend to bad speech? Whose side are you on: the billionaire bullies or the gossip whores?

Send your opinions—long or short, considered or intemperate—to editor@shsn.org.

THIS IS HOW FASCISM COMES TO AMERICA

Robert Kagan

(Excerpted from a Washington Post OpEd of the same title, 5/18/2016)

That his tough-guy, get-mad-and-get-even approach has gained Donald Trump an increasingly large and enthusiastic following has probably surprised Trump as much as anyone else. Trump himself is simply and quite literally an egomaniac. But the phenomenon he has created and now leads has become something larger than him, and something far more dangerous.

Republican politicians marvel at how he has "tapped into" a hitherto unknown swath of the voting public. But what he has tapped into is what the founders most feared when they established the democratic republic: the popular passions unleashed, the "mobocracy". Conservatives have been warning for decades about government suffocating liberty. But here is the other threat to liberty that Alexis de Tocqueville and the ancient philosophers warned about: that the people in a democracy, excited, angry and unconstrained, might run roughshod over even the institutions created to preserve their freedoms. As Alexander Hamilton watched the French Revolution unfold, he feared in America what he saw play out in France – that the unleashing of popular passions would lead not to greater democracy but to the arrival of a tyrant, riding to power on the shoulders of the people.

This phenomenon has arisen in other democratic and quasi-democratic countries over the past century, and it has generally been called "fascism". Fascist movements, too, had no coherent ideology, no clear set of prescriptions for what ailed society. "National socialism" was a bundle of contradictions, united chiefly by what, and who, it opposed; fascism in Italy was anti-liberal, anti-democratic, anti-Marxist, anti-capitalist and anti-clerical. Successful fascism was not about policies but about the strongman, the leader

(Il Duce, Der Führer), in whom could be entrusted the fate of the nation. Whatever the problem, he could fix it. Whatever the threat, internal or external, he could vanquish it, and it was unnecessary for him to explain how. Today, there is Putinism, which also has nothing to do with belief or policy but is about the tough man who single-handedly defends his people against all threats, foreign and domestic.

To understand how such movements take over a democracy, one only has to watch the Republican Party today. These movements play on all the fears, vanities, ambitions and insecurities that make up the human psyche. In democracies, at least for politicians, the only thing that matters is what the voters say they want – *vox populi vox Dei*. A mass political movement is thus a powerful and, to those who would oppose it, frightening weapon. When controlled and directed by a single leader, it can be aimed at whomever the leader chooses. If someone criticizes or opposes the leader, it doesn't matter how popular or admired that person has been. He might be a famous war hero, but if the leader ridicules his heroism, the followers laugh and jeer. He might be the highest-ranking elected guardian of the party's most cherished principles. But if he hesitates to support the leader, he faces political death.

In such an environment, every political figure confronts a stark choice: Get right with the leader and his mass following or get run over. The human race in such circumstances breaks down into predictable categories – and democratic politicians are the most predictable. There are those whose ambition leads them to jump on the bandwagon. They praise the leader's incoherent speeches as the beginning of wisdom, hoping he will reward them with a plum post in the new order. There are those who merely hope to survive. Their consciences won't let them curry favor so shamelessly, so they mumble their pledges of support, like the victims in Stalin's show trials, perhaps not realizing that the leader and his followers will get them in the end anyway.

A great number will simply kid themselves, refusing to admit that something very different from the usual politics is afoot. Let the storm pass, they insist, and then we can pick up the pieces, rebuild and get back to normal. Meanwhile, don't alienate the leader's mass following. After all, they are voters and will need to be brought back into the fold. As for Trump himself, let's shape him, advise him, steer him in the right direction and, not incidentally, save our political skins.

What these people do not or will not see is that, once in power, Trump will owe them and their party nothing. He will have ridden to power despite the party, catapulted into the White House by a mass following devoted only to him. By then that following will have grown dramatically. Today, less than 5 percent of eligible voters have voted for Trump. But if he wins the election, his legions will likely comprise a majority of the nation. Imagine the power he would wield then. In addition to all that comes from being the leader of a mass following, he would also have the immense powers of the American presidency at his command: the Justice Department, the FBI, the intelligence services, the military.

Who would dare to oppose him then? Certainly not a Republican Party that lay down before him even when he was comparatively weak. And is a man like Trump, with infinitely greater power in his hands, likely to become more humble, more judicious, more generous, less vengeful than he is today, than he has been his whole life? Does vast power un-corrupt?

This is how fascism comes to America, not with jackboots and salutes (although there have been salutes, and a whiff of violence) but with a television huckster, a phony billionaire, a textbook egomaniac "tapping into" popular resentments and insecurities, and with an entire national political party – out of ambition or blind party loyalty, or simply out of fear – falling into line behind him.

NEWS FLASH: SANITY IN TEXAS!

John Rafferty

Remember Mary Lou Bruner, our recent Dumbth nominee ("One More Reason Why Norwegians Use 'Texas' as a Synonym for 'Crazy'", *PIQUE*, April)? No? Surely you must – she's the candidate who won 48 percent of the vote in a three-way GOP primary for the Texas State Board of Education in February, the one who believes that school shootings are the result of kids being taught evolution, and that President "Obama has a soft spot for homosexuals because of the years he spent as a male prostitute in his twenties" to pay "for his drugs".

Okay, now you remember.

Well, since she hadn't won an outright majority, District 9 had a runoff election last month. And – *surprise!* – Ms. Bruner lost by an 18-point margin, 59 to 41 percent.

Which means that only two of every five Texas Republicans are willing to vote for a lunatic.

Not good news for November, Donald.

OH, WAIT. NEVER MIND WHAT I SAID ABOUT SANITY IN TEXAS

John Rafferty

(Based on "Louie Gohmert Panics: No Gay Space Colonies!", by Michael Stone, on *ProgressiveSecularHumanist.com*, 5/27/2016)

In support of his career-long ignorant arguments that the campaign for LGBT rights is wrong, and that the "gay agenda" is some Protocols-of-Zion-like plot to destroy "religious freedom" in America, Rep. Louie Gohmert (R-Texas), who believes that "terror babies" (his words) are being born here to establish citizenship; and that there is a "Muslim Brotherhood" cell operating in the White House, speculated on the floor of the House about what lawmakers should do in the event of an imminent asteroid collision:

"If you could decide what 40 people you put on the spacecraft that would save humanity, how many of those would be same-sex couples?"

Aha, gays, gotcha – no cosmic lifeboat for you!

The good people of Texas' First Congressional District have elected Gohmert not once, but six straight times.

IF THIS WERE NOT RELIGION IT WOULD BE CALLED CRIMINAL CHILD ABUSE

... OR INSANITY

Michael Stone

(Excerpted from "Christian Parenting Expert: Teach Children They Are 'Wicked Sinners'" on Progressive Secular Humanist, 5/24/2016)

Family Life Today is a popular Christian radio program that aims to "provide practical answers drawn from the Bible to issues faced by couples and families today". In a recent edition of the program titled "Introducing Your Child to God", co-host Bob Lepine discussed teaching "practical theology" to his young daughter, explaining:

"When my daughter, Amy, was still less than two years old, I started teaching practical theology to her. I used to put her on my lap – in fact ... I think she was still less than a year old. I used to have her on my lap, and she'd be all cute and cuddly, you know? She'd be coo-ing up at me. I'd look down at her and I'd say: 'You know what? You're a wicked sinner. Yes, you are. Yes, you are. You're a wicked sinner.' I was just trying to make sure she understood, from the beginning, her depraved nature.

"It sounds cruel, doesn't it? But the reality is – if she was going to understand who God is, she has to first understand her own desperate condition. I needed to say it for me because – you look at a new little baby, and all you think is how cute they are. We fall into this whole idea of thinking these babies are just adorable ... And the reality is: In her flesh dwells no good thing. Well, it does today because she's a follower of Christ. But in those days, she was a wicked sinner."

President of Family Life, Dennis Rainey, and co-host Bob Lepine, went on to laugh about the supposed necessity of teaching innocent children that they are actually "wicked sinners" before introducing their guest, Bruce Ware, a professional theologian and "Christian parenting expert" who teaches Systematic Theology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

After being introduced, Ware laughed with the co-hosts, while agreeing with the fact that toddlers are in reality "wicked sinners" in need of correction, noting:

"As you said, Bob – You look at these sweet little babies – but, boy, inside is, you can tell already, is this sin nature that is ready to be expressed in a variety of ways."

IN ISRAEL, LITTLE GIRLS ARE NOT JUST WICKED, THEY'RE PROVOCATIVE

According to ProgSecHumanist.com, an ultra-orthodox rabbi of the Jerusalem neighborhood of Nahloat has banned girls age five and above from riding bicycles, claiming the activity is "immodest" and "provocative".

Young girls riding bicycles, he said, could "cause serious damage to their modesty" and that bicycle seats caused young girls to sit in a way men find "provocative".

Comment: One wonders just what goes on in this creep's head when he looks at five-year-old girls. – JR

LIKE CARVEL, NYC OFFERS 31 FLAVORS

(But unlike Carvel, none are Vanilla)

John Rafferty

"In New York City, it's illegal to discriminate on the basis of gender identity and gender expression in the workplace, in public spaces, and in housing. The NYC Commission on Human Rights is committed to ensuring that transgender and gender non-conforming New Yorkers are treated with dignity and respect and without threat of discrimination or harassment."

– The New York City Commission on Human Rights

Good. And according to dailycaller.com of May 24, "Individuals living in New York City can choose from a minimum of 31 different gender identities, many of which allow them to fluctuate between some version or combination of male or female identities.

"Businesses that don't respect and accommodate an individual's chosen gender identity risk incurring six-figure fines under rules implemented by the commission."

Again, all good – and here are the 31:

Agender
Androgyne
Androgynous
Bi-Gendered
Butch
Cross-Dresser
Drag King
Drag Queen
Female-To-Male
Femme
Femme Queen
FTM
Gender Bender
Gender Blender
Gender Fluid
Gender Gifted
GenderQueer
Hijra
Male-To-Female
Man
MTF
Non-Binary Transgender
Non-Op
Pangender
Person of Transgender Experience
Third Sex
Trans
Transexual/Transsexual
Trans Person
Two-Spirit
Woman

This ancient had to Google a couple of the above, but I've always believed anyone can call themselves whatever they want, as long as they're not committing a crime.

But I don't understand why some identifiers with which we have all been familiar for a long time—Heterosexual, Homosexual, Bi-sexual, Queer, Gay—didn't make the list. Can anyone hipper and less Cis than me explain?

THE BEAUTY AND SIMPLICITY OF EINSTEIN'S GENERAL THEORY OF RELATIVITY

Carlo Rovelli

(Excerpted from *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*.)

Among the leaps forward in our understanding that have succeeded one another over the course of history, Einstein's is perhaps unequaled. ...

Newton had tried to explain the reason why things fall and the planets turn. He had imagined the existence of a "force" that draws all material bodies toward one another and called it "the force of gravity". How this force was exerted between things distant from each other, without there being anything between them, was unknown – and the great father of modern science was cautious of offering a hypothesis. Newton had also imagined that bodies move through space and that space is a great empty container, a large box that enclosed the universe, an immense structure through which all objects run true until a force obliges their trajectory to curve. What this "space" was made of, this container of the world he invented, Newton could not say.

But a few years before the birth of Einstein two great British physicists, Michael Faraday and James Maxwell, had added a key ingredient to Newton's cold world: the electromagnetic field. This field is a real entity that, diffused everywhere, carries radio waves, fills space, can vibrate and oscillate like the surface of a lake, and "transports" the electrical force. Since his youth Einstein had been fascinated by this electromagnetic field that turned the rotors in the power stations built by his father, and he soon came to understand that gravity, like electricity, must be conveyed by a field as well: a "gravitational field" analogous to the "electrical field" must exist. He aimed at understanding how this "gravitational field" worked and how it could be described with equations.

And it is at this point that an extraordinary idea occurred to him, a stroke of pure genius: the gravitational field is not *diffused through* space; the gravitational field *is* that space itself. This is the idea of the general theory of relativity. Newton's "space", through which things move, and the "gravitational field" are one and the same thing.

It's a moment of enlightenment. A momentous simplification of the world: space is no longer something distinct from matter – it is one of the "material" components of the world. An entity that undulates, flexes, curves, twists. We are not contained within an invisible, rigid infrastructure: we are immersed in a gigantic, flexible snail shell. The sun bends space around itself, and Earth does not turn around it because of a mysterious force but because it is racing directly in a space that inclines, like a marble that rolls in a funnel. There are no mysterious forces generated at the center of the funnel; it is the curved nature of the walls that causes the marble to roll. Planets circle around the sun, and things fall, because space curves.

How can we describe this curvature of space?

The most outstanding mathematician of the nineteenth century, Carl Friedrich Gauss, the so-called prince

of mathematicians, had written mathematical formulas to describe two-dimensional curvilinear surfaces, such as the surfaces of hills. Then he had asked a gifted student of his to generalize the theory to encompass spaces in three or more dimensions. The student in question, Bernhard Riemann, had produced an impressive doctoral thesis of the kind that seems completely useless. The result of Riemann's thesis was that the properties of a curved space are captured by a particular mathematical object, which we know today as Riemann's curvature and indicate with the letter R . Einstein wrote an equation that says that R is equivalent to the energy of matter [$R=GE$]. That is to say: space curves where there is matter. That is it. The equation fits into half a line, and there is nothing more. A vision – that space curves – became an equation.

READERS RESPOND

To the Editor: Great [May] issue! I am still going through it. "Of Time, Butter, Risotto, and The Here-And-Now", by Carlo Rovelli, was certainly food for thought.

Regarding the effort to synthesize a human genome, discussed in June PIQUE: How about we re-create the genome of some of the animals we are about to send to extinction, e.g., the bears, the big cats? – *Brian Lemaire*

To the Editor: Kudos! Your publication is among my favorite reading. The word "among" will mean more to you when you know what the rest are: *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Review of Books*, the *London Book Review*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, and the *Jewish Book Review*. Keep it up. – *Jack Herschlag*

DESIGN A BASEBALL CAP FOR SHSNY – WIN \$100

We're going to have baseball caps – "official" Secular Humanist Society of New York headgear that will proclaim your allegiance to the leading freethought organization in New York City and environs. And which will be available for purchase, we hope, this Fall.

So ... what should such a cap look like? That may be up to you, if you submit the \$100-winning cap design.



What should it say and/or show on the front? SHSNY? Secular Humanist Society of New York? Secular Humanist? Humanist? Secular? Something else entirely? You decide.

Should it say/show something on the back? Up to you.

Who can submit an entry? Anyone anywhere, except SHSNY Board members, who will judge the entries.

Send your sketch (artistic ability doesn't count), to editor@shsny.org by September 1. The winner and her/his design will be announced in October PIQUE.

**JENNIFER MICHAEL HECHT AT
ETHICAL CULTURE IN JULY**

Our Honorary Member will teach a four-session course on atheism, history, and art at the New York Society for Ethical Culture, 2 West 64 St., Wednesdays in July.

**FROM THE TOP OF THE WONDER WHEEL: A
POETIC ATHEIST HISTORIAN MAPS THE WORLD**



“Like belief, doubt takes a lot of different forms, from ancient Skepticism to modern scientific empiricism, from doubt in many gods to doubt in one God, to doubt that recreates and enlivens faith and doubt that is really disbelief.” So begins historian and poet Jennifer’s book,

Doubt: A History, on the great doubters and their legacy of innovation. Join her for an exploration of the concept.

July 6: The History of Doubt, Atheism, and Meaning

July 13: Your Favorite Artists and Writers Were Unbelievers

July 20: Taking Absurdity Seriously: A History of Thinkers Finding Purpose in Wonder and the Strange

July 27: A Secular History of the Idea of Purpose in Suffering, Fun, and Creating

NYSEC Members \$30, Guests, \$60 for all four sessions, to run 6:30-8:00 pm. To register, contact Yalitza Garcia-Krawczyk, ygarcia@nysec.org, or 212-874-5210 ext. 117.

KIWI CALLAHAN JOINS THE SHSNY BOARD

At a June 16 meeting, the Directors of SHSNY voted unanimously to elect Kiwi Callahan to the Board. Kiwi, a documentary filmmaker who is also a martial artist and self-described “wino and seriously heavy sleeper”, is the star of our SHSNY “Chronicles of Humanism” videos.



She is a graduate of Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University, where she received a BFA in Musical Theatre, then enjoyed a considerable amount of success as a professional actress, including national tours and Off-Broadway and regional theater. As she got older, Kiwi found herself growing more politically and globally aware, more interested in what was happening to people in real time and in the present tense, and decided to change directions and pursue a career in documentary filmmaking.

She started by launching “Where I Don’t Belong”, a series of documentary shorts dedicated to exploring the lives of people who live outside the proverbial “box”. She is also developing two full-length feature documentaries and three more web series. You can follow her on social media:

www.Facebook.com/KiwiCallahan

www.YouTube.com/KiwiCallahan

**We Join Jennifer Hecht
& Kiwi Joins the Board
Page 12**

**Design our Cap, Win \$100
Page 11**

**31 Flavors of Gender
Page 10**

**Billionaire Bullies & Media
Whores: You Choose
Page 8**

**We Go To Reason Rally 2016
Pages 4-5**

**Atheism Goes to College
Page 2**

