

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

July, 2017

Happy Independence Day! Um, maybe. We look at the founding and making of the nation from different points of view, including those of our greatest poet and best-yet philosopher, while your friendly neighborhood Editor vents loud and (I hope) clear on “Real Americans”. We offer advice on addiction, question the price of “community”, cobble together Science & Buddhism once more, consider the utter fatuity of the Mango Mussolini in the Oval and, finally, muse on a marriage. – JR

Thoughts for Independence Day:

WHAT IF WE HADN'T?

Adam Gopnik

(Excerpted from “We Could Have Been Canada: Was the American Revolution such a good idea?”, in *The New Yorker*, May 15, 2017 issue)

And what if it was a mistake from the start? The Declaration of Independence, the American Revolution, the creation of the United States of America—what if all this was a terrible idea, and what if the injustices and madness of American life since then have occurred not in spite of the virtues of the Founding Fathers but because of them?

The Revolution, this argument might run, was a needless and brutal bit of slaveholders’ panic mixed with Enlightenment argle-bargle, producing a country that was always marked for violence and disruption and demagoguery. Look north to Canada, or south to Australia, and you will see different possibilities of peaceful evolution away from Britain, toward sane and whole, more equitable and less sanguinary countries. No revolution, and slavery might have ended, as it did elsewhere in the British Empire, more peacefully and sooner. No “peculiar institution”, no hideous Civil War and appalling aftermath. Instead, an orderly development of the interior—less violent, and less inclined to celebrate the desperado over the peaceful peasant. We could have ended with a social-democratic commonwealth that stretched from north to south, a near-continent-wide Canada.

The thought is taboo, the Revolution being still sacred in its self-directed propaganda. One can grasp the scale and

strangeness of this sanctity only by leaving America for a country with a different attitude toward its past and its founding. As it happened, my own childhood was neatly divided between what I learned to call “the States” and Canada. In my Philadelphia grade school, we paraded with flags, singing “The Marines’ Hymn” and “Here Comes the Flag!” (“Fathers shall bless it / Children caress it / All shall maintain it / No one shall stain it.”) We were taught

that the brave Americans hid behind trees to fight the redcoats—though why this made them brave was left unexplained. In Canada, ninth grade disclosed a history of uneasy compromise duality, and the constant search for temporary nonviolent solutions to intractable divides. The world wars, in which Canadians had played a large part, passed by mostly in solemn sadness. (That the Canadians had marched beyond their beach on D Day with aplomb while the Americans struggled on Omaha was

never boasted about.) Patriotic pageantry arose only from actual accomplishments: when Team Canada won its eight-game series against the Russians, in 1972, the entire nation sang “O Canada”—but they sang it as a hockey anthem as much as a nationalist hymn.

Over the years, we have seen how hard it is to detach Americans from even the obviously fallacious parts of that elementary-school saga—the absurd rendering of Reconstruction, with its Northern carpetbaggers and local scalawags descending on a defenseless South, was still taught in the sixties. It was only in recent decades that schools cautiously began to relay the truth of the eighteenth-seventies—of gradual and shameful Northern acquiescence

NO PIQUE IN AUGUST

For our annual recharging-of-the-batteries holiday, all the editorial, production, and advertising-sales departments of PIQUE, in all our worldwide offices and bureaus, will be closed during the month of July, so there will be no August issue of the newsletter. See you in September.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS: John Rafferty, *Pres./Editor*; Claire Miller, *V.P.*; Brian Lemaire, *Secty.*; Donna Marxer, *Treas.*;

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in the terrorist imposition of apartheid on a post-slavery population.

The Revolution remains the last bulwark of national myth. Academics write on the growth of the Founding Father biographical genre in our time; the rule for any new writer should be that if you want a Pulitzer and a best-seller you must find a Founding Father and fetishize him. While no longer reverential, these accounts are always heroic in the core sense of showing us men, and now, occasionally, women, who transcend their flaws with spirit (though these flaws may include little things like holding other human beings as property, dividing their families, and selling off their children). The phenomenon of "Hamilton", the hip-hop musical that is, contrary to one's expectations, wholly faithful to a heroic view of American independence, reinforces the sanctity of the American Revolution in American life.

Academic histories of the Revolution, though, have been peeping over the parapets, joining scholarly scruples to contemporary polemic. One new take insists that we misunderstand the Revolution if we make what was an intramural and fratricidal battle of ideas in the English-speaking Empire look like a modern colonial rebellion. Another insists that the Revolution was a piece of great-power politics, fought in unimaginably brutal terms, and no more connected to ideas or principles than any other piece of great-power politics: America was essentially a Third World country that became the battlefield for two First World powers. Stirred into the larger pot of recent revisionism, these arguments leave us with a big question: was it really worth it, and are we better off for its having happened? In plain American, is Donald Trump a bug or a feature of the American heritage? ...

Had the British won, we might now be taught about a fight between brave British emancipators and indigenous slaveholders, with the black slaves who defected to the British-loyalist side seen as self-emancipators, as the blacks who defected to the Union Army are now, and with Washington's and Jefferson's rhetoric of liberty shown the same disdain we have for the not-very-different libertarian and individualist rhetoric of their heirs in the Confederacy. We would perhaps wonder, far more than we are now allowed to, how radical Whigs like Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Paine ever allowed themselves to betray their own Enlightenment principles by making the tragic error of entering into a compact with slaveholders.

That historical account would be as self-serving and tendentious, in its own way, as our current glorious one. Against the skeptical view of the achievement of the American Revolution, one can easily posit a view more radical than even the ideology of radical Whigs quite suggests. Three decades ago, Gordon Wood, in *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, asked us to see the Revolution in the broadest historical scale, and to realize that, whatever its failings and brutalities and hypocrisies, it represented a decisive break with doctrines of inherited power and monarchical rule, and a move toward democracy

that had scarcely been so dramatically accomplished since very ancient times. ...

In confrontations between empire and rebels, though, our hearts are always with the rebels. We take it for granted that rebels are good and empires bad; our favorite mass entertainment depends entirely on the felt familiarity of this simple division. But there is a case to be made that empires can be something other than evil. People mocked the beginning of the "Star Wars" cycle, turning as it did on a trade dispute, but trade disputes are real, and begin wars, and whom would you really rather have running the government when a trade treaty has to be negotiated on a galactic scale: Senator Palpatine or Han Solo?

Thoughts for Independence Day:

INFIDELS!

Gilbert Seldes

(Excerpted from The Stammering Century, and reproduced on DelanceyPlace.com, 3/29/2017)

When the time came to frame a constitution, God was considered an alien influence and, in the deliberations of the Assembly, his name was not invoked. "Inexorably," say Charles and Mary Beard in their story of *The Rise of American Civilization*, "the national government was secular from top to bottom. Religious qualifications ... found no place whatever in the Federal Constitution. Its preamble did not invoke the blessings of Almighty God ... and the First Amendment ... declared that 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.'" In dealing with Tripoli, President Washington allowed it to be squarely stated that "the government of the United States is not in any sense founded upon the Christian religion." ...

Among the evangelizing religions, Methodism alone was favored by the breakdown and change in authority which came with the creation of the Republic, and Methodism created, in the first years of the century, the characteristic revival form, the camp-meeting. Baptists and Presbyterians were eventually to shriek and fall into fits as their preachers were driven to emulate the enthusiasm of the Methodist itinerant but, at the beginning, religion fell away, was lost in the jumble of new interests and opportunities, or was rejected because it was not spiritually appropriate to the new order. Essentially, the established religion, which had its roots in English soil, taught obedience; America taught freedom. Calvinism looked backward to the glorious past before the Fall: the eyes of new America were toward the future. The great hope offered by Congregationalism was redemption from sin; America had definitely begun to be interested only in Progress.

Wherever we turn, the irreligion of the early republic is evident. In the churches themselves, the movement away from Calvinism, theocracy, and the trinity, toward religions of universal forgiveness, is marked. ... The association of Church and State, abolished in the Federal Government, grew gradually weaker in the several states. The association of the church with education, art, literature, science,

mechanical progress, and international policy was either totally lacking or persistently on the losing side. In the home, romances supplanted volumes of sermons. And even New Englanders learned to go to the theater instead of being satisfied with “meetings”. Colleges which had been founded to supply ministers of the Gospel began to be heretical or infidel. The New World, which had been exploring the mysteries of Heaven, began to press across the frontiers of the West, to search out the mysteries of the Mississippi basin or of the Oregon. The American Republic had come into existence at the beginning of the scientific era which was to reach its climax with the trans-continental railway and the publication of *On the Origin of Species*.

If all this shows how irrelevant the Great Awakening was to the problems of the new country, or how disappointing the fruits of that revival had been, it also shows why the revivalists of 1800 felt their call so deeply. The infidelism of “Voltaire, Paine, and Volney” (to adopt the usual grouping of the time) had made headway. The French Revolution had not entirely discredited the Encyclopedia. Infidels were in the Federal Government. They were representing us abroad. They were making fortunes as merchants in Philadelphia. Everywhere they were breaking down the authority of God’s word. A thousand new names were spoken daily: names signifying political conflict, westering convoys, ships around the Horn, research into the nature of things, speculation (in both the philosophic and financial sense), material problems, material ambition, material conquest. Only the name of the Lord was not heard. Infidelism was the sour to the evangelical’s spirit; the enemy was the universal, gross, unmitigated materialism of the early Republic.

Thoughts for Independence Day:

AMERICA’S FOUNDING HUMANIST PRINCIPLES
Ed Brayton

(Reprinted from Foundation Beyond Belief, 7/12/2013)

As Americans celebrate the 4th of July, the day that the Declaration of Independence was adopted by the Continental Congress ... we pause to reflect on the fact that this document and the ideas that animated it were drawn largely from Enlightenment humanism.

The Declaration of Independence was written primarily by three men—Thomas Jefferson, who did the primary writing, and John Adams and Ben Franklin, who made edits to the draft before it was adopted by the larger group. It was a list of grievances against King George III, explaining why the 13 colonies were in revolt against his rule, as well as a statement of the principles of liberal democracy. Perhaps the most famous statement from the Declaration is this:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Despite the appeal to a creator, this is a statement quite in line with humanist principles and can be clearly tied to the ideas of Enlightenment humanism in Europe. It is no coincidence that Jefferson, Adams, and Franklin had all

spent time in France and were well acquainted with many of the leading philosophers of that age, including Diderot, Voltaire, d’Holbach, Buffon, Condorcet, and many others. They were also influenced by earlier Enlightenment thinkers like Locke and Montesquieu.

The focus on liberty and the pursuit of happiness reflects the humanist principle that all people should be free to maximize their own personal development and fulfillment, so long as their actions do not prevent another from doing the same. This is mirrored in Jefferson’s famous statement:

“The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods, or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.”

But these men also recognized that while we are all individuals endowed with rights, we are also members of societies and dependent on one another to a great degree. Thomas Paine, one of the great Enlightenment thinkers himself and perhaps the Founding Father most responsible for rallying public opinion to the cause of independence from England, wrote in *The Age of Reason* that he believed in “the equality of man” and that our duties “consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavoring to make our fellow-creatures happy.”

But above all it was the belief in the primacy of reason, that human rationality alone can provide solutions to our problems and improve the condition of the world, that is the most important humanist principle held by these men. As Jefferson told his nephew, Peter Carr,

“Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion. Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blindfolded fear.”

It should be noted here that while these ideas are humanist, they are not necessarily secular humanist. All of these men believed in God, though not necessarily the Christian one. The historian Gregg Frazer describes the religious views of the leading founders (Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, and Franklin) as “theistic rationalism”.

But the basic principles of our founding are accepted by humanists, religious and secular alike.

We owe the authors of the Declaration a debt of gratitude for bringing the principles of Enlightenment humanism, then sweeping through Europe, across the Atlantic and establishing the first country based primarily on those powerful ideas. In so doing, they sparked a fire that swept through much of the world, tearing down monarchies and creating liberal democracies in their place. That is indeed a cause for celebration.

Iam willing to love all mankind, except an American. They are a race of convicts, and ought to be thankful for anything we allow them short of hanging.

– Dr. Samuel Johnson

Thoughts for Independence Day:

**WALT WHITMAN, JOHN DEWEY, AND
DEMOCRACY AS OUR CIVIL RELIGION**

Richard Rorty

(Excerpted from *Achieving Our Country: Leftish Thought in Twentieth-Century America*, excerpted on *Delanceyplace.com*, and forwarded by *Chic Schissel*.)

Walt Whitman and John Dewey were among the prophets of [an American] civic religion. They offered a new account of what America was, in the hope of mobilizing Americans as political agents. The most striking feature of their redescription of our country is its thoroughgoing secularism. In the past, most of the stories that have incited nations to projects of self-improvement have been stories about their obligations to one or more gods. For much of European and American history, nations have asked themselves how they appear in the eyes of the Christian God. American exceptionalism has usually been a belief in special divine favor, as in the writings of Joseph Smith and Billy Graham. ...

Dewey and Whitman wanted Americans to continue to think of themselves as exceptional, but both wanted to drop any reference to divine favor or wrath. They hoped to separate the fraternity and loving kindness urged by the Christian scriptures from the ideas of supernatural parentage, immortality, providence, and—most important—sin. They wanted Americans to take pride in what America might, all by itself and by its own lights, make of itself, rather than in America's obedience to any authority— even the authority of God. Thus Whitman wrote:

"And I call to mankind, Be not curious about God, For I who am curious about each am not curious about God."

Whitman thought there was no need to be curious about God because there is no standard, not even a divine one, against which the decisions of a free people can be measured. Americans, he hoped, would spend the energy that past human societies had spent on discovering God's desires on discovering one another's desires. Americans will be curious about every other American, but not about anything which claims authority over America. ...

Both Dewey and Whitman viewed the United States as an opportunity to see ultimate significance in a finite, human, historical project, rather than in something eternal and nonhuman. They both hoped that America would be the place where a religion of love would finally replace a religion of fear. They dreamed that Americans would break the traditional link between the religious impulse, the impulse to stand in awe of something greater than oneself, and the infantile need for security, the childish hope of escaping from time and chance. They wanted to preserve the former and discard the latter. They wanted to put hope for a casteless and classless America in the place traditionally occupied by knowledge of the will of God. They wanted that utopian America to replace God as the unconditional object of desire. They wanted the struggle for social justice to be the country's animating principle, the nation's soul.

Thoughts for Independence Day:

WHO ARE THE "REAL AMERICANS"?

John Rafferty

We are. We, us, you and me. The liberal, progressive, educated bi-coastal elites whose knowledge of wine goes beyond "red" and "white", who prefer brie to Velveeta, who don't watch "Duck Dynasty" or "Fox & Friends", have never (most of us) been to a NASCAR race or a gun show, and who believe that our neighbors'— and everyone else's— religious, political, gender, and sexual preferences are nobody's business but their own.

Us.

I have, since last November 8, read altogether too many Op-Ed analyses of the election that blame Hilary Clinton's loss (and the disaster of Donald Trump) on us.

In column after column of both right-wing bombast and liberal whinging I read that Hilary's, the Democrats' and our problem was/is how "out of touch" we are with "real" America. How our enthusiasm for globalism closed steel mills and textile factories across "real" America. How the climate change science we promoted has cost tens of thousands more coal-mine jobs. How our godless "theory" of evolution outrages the Bible-belief of "real" Americans. How our acceptance of gender diversity threatens their bedrock "family values". How our demands for racial equality and justice are really a "crusade against cops".

And, most important, how our snotty condescension toward their beliefs and their values caused "real" Americans to rear up in righteousness last November and hurl it all back in our smugly sneering faces by electing a billionaire thief, liar, sexual predator, and (the investigations are just beginning) possible traitor.

Those are the "real" Americans? Those yahoo inheritors of a once-great nation— one that eradicated polio, created a green revolution that has fed the world's billions, and that took humanity to the moon— who now not only deny science but who chant the slogans of the environmental rapists who sluice industrial poisons into their drinking water and blacken their children's lungs with coal dust? Who accuse *us* of "promoting discord" when we call them out for standing shoulder-to-shoulder at Trump rallies with "White Nationalist" thugs waving swastika flags, and at "Southern heritage" rallies with "White Pride", noose-waving racists trying to stop the long-overdue removal of monuments to the slavery of the Confederacy treason?

Where do those people get off who call themselves "real" Americans and dismiss us as, what, Tibetans? Who call their two-thousand-mile swath of "real" America between the coasts "the Heartland" and our birthplace-of-the-nation stretch of coast as a frightening cesspool of "others" with strange accents and darker skins than those heard and seen in Kansas. *They* consign us to a lower order of being and then call *us* condescending?

As the *NYTimes's* new conservative Op-Ed columnist, Bret Stephens, put it recently and sarcastically:

"Bottom line: So-called real Americans are screwing up America. Maybe they should leave, so that we can

replace them with new and better ones: newcomers who are more appreciative of what the United States has to offer, more ambitious for themselves and their children, and more willing to sacrifice for the future. In other words, just the kind of people we used to be – when ‘we’ had just come off the boat.”

I don’t want to read one more “mea culpa” from another liberal pundit, not one. We can’t stop the “told-you-so” gloating by Fox’s friends, but we sure as hell can stop beating ourselves up.

We can embrace who and what we are – *real* Americans – start to fight unapologetically for what we believe in (see below), and kick some ass.

Happy Independence Day.

Thoughts for Independence Day:

BERNIE’S PROGRAM FOR DEMOCRATS IS A HUMANIST PROGRAM

Bernie Sanders

(Excerpted from “How Democrats Can Stop Losing Elections”, an OpEd essay in The NYTimes, 6/13/2017)

(Editor: In his essay, Senator Sanders urged the Democratic party to move leftward to attract and energize young and progressive voters. He concluded his long-ish article with specific recommendations that echo the principles of humanism. – JR)

While Democrats (read “humanists” – Ed.) should appeal to moderate Republicans who are disgusted with the Trump presidency, too many in our party cling to an overly cautious, centrist ideology. The party’s main thrust must be to make politics relevant to those who have given up on democracy and bring millions of new voters into the political process. It must be prepared to take on the right-wing extremist ideology of the Koch brothers and the billionaire class, and fight for an economy and a government that work for all, not just the 1 percent.

- Donald Trump wants to throw 23 million Americans off health insurance. Democrats must guarantee health care to all through a Medicare-for-all, single-payer program.
- Mr. Trump wants to give enormous tax breaks to billionaires. Democrats must support a progressive tax system that demands that the very wealthy, Wall Street and large corporations begin paying their fair share of taxes.
- Mr. Trump wants to sell our infrastructure to Wall Street and foreign countries. Democrats must fight for a trillion-dollar public investment that creates over 13 million good-paying jobs.
- Mr. Trump has withdrawn the United States from the Paris Agreement on climate change. Democrats must take on the fossil fuel industry and accelerate our efforts to combat climate change by encouraging energy efficiency and the use of sustainable energy.
- Mr. Trump has proposed deep cuts to higher education. Democrats must make public colleges and universities tuition free, and substantially lower student debt.
- Mr. Trump has doubled-down on our failed approach to crime that has resulted in the United States’ having more people in jail than any other country. Democrats must

reform a broken criminal justice system and invest in jobs and education for our young people, not more jails and incarceration.

• Mr. Trump has scapegoated and threatened the 11 million undocumented people in our country. Democrats must fight for comprehensive immigration reform and a path toward citizenship.

This is a pivotal moment in American history. If the Democrats (“humanists” – Ed.) are prepared to rally grass-roots America in every state and to stand up to the greed of the billionaire class, the party will stop losing elections. And it will create the kind of country the American people want and deserve.

ONE WEEK IN DONALD TRUMP’S AMERICA

(Excerpted from Harper’s Weekly Review, June 6, 2017)

A Republican congressman from Nebraska refused to say whether people were “entitled to eat”... a Democrat in Iowa withdrew from a race for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives because she had received death threats, and a Republican state representative in Texas threatened to shoot his Democratic colleague. A G.O.P. county chair in Oregon recommended that Republicans employ private militias, and a former Trump campaign official was sentenced to seven years in prison for organizing an armed militia to aid in a standoff against the U.S. government. A conservative radio host called for “a more violent Christianity”, a noose was found at the National Museum of African-American History and Culture, a white man in California shouted racial slurs at a black man and then attacked him with a machete, a white man shouting racial slurs ran over two members of the Quinalt tribe with a monster truck, and a white man riding a Portland train drank sangria while shouting racist slurs at a woman wearing hijab, then stabbed to death two people who attempted to intervene. “I’m sorry the world is so cruel,” said a bystander to one of the dying men.

ART HARRIS 1924 – 2017



Arthur Harris, one of the original founders of the Secular Humanist Society of New York, died at his home in Manhattan during the first week of June.

A veteran of World War II and an independent businessman, Art was active, along with his wife, Dorothy, in the original New York Area Skeptics and in the Village Reform Democrats anti-bossism movement, and was among the fourteen people, solicited from the *Free Inquiry* mailing list, who met at Variety Recording Studios on 42nd Street on February 10, 1988, and founded SHSNY.

From that time until 2014, when he stepped down from the Board because of the limitations of age, Art Harris was an active and forceful presence in the organization.

SHSNY CALENDAR: JULY - SEPTEMBER

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

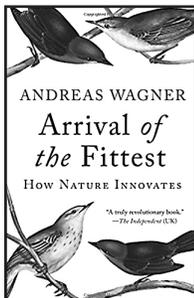
THURS, JULY 6, 7-8:30 pm
THE COMMUNITY CHURCH
OF NEW YORK

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

ARRIVAL OF THE FITTEST:

*Solving Evolution's
Greatest Puzzle*
Andreas Wagner

Darwin's theory of natural selection explains how useful adaptations are preserved over time. But the biggest mystery about evolution eluded him. As genetics pioneer



Hugo de Vries put it, "Natural selection may explain the survival of the fittest, but it cannot explain the arrival of the fittest."

Can random mutations over a mere 3.8 billion years really be responsible for wings, eyeballs, knees, camouflage, lactose digestion, photosynthesis, and the rest of nature's creative marvels? And if the answer is no, what is the mechanism that explains evolution's speed and efficiency?

Using experimental and computational technologies that were heretofore unimagined, Wagner has found that adaptations are not just driven by chance, but by a set of laws that allow nature to discover new molecules and mechanisms in a fraction of the time that random variation would take.

Arrival of the Fittest offers up the final puzzle piece in the mystery of life's rich diversity.

Paperback and 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 3, 7-8:30 pm
Community Church of New York
TALES FROM BOTH SIDES
OF THE BRAIN:

A Life in Neuroscience
Michael S. Gazzaniga

A past favorite of Book Club Readers for his witty and insightful *Who's In Charge?*, Gazzaniga, "the father of cognitive neuroscience", tells the impassioned story of his life in science and his decades-long journey to understand how the separate spheres of our brains communicate and miscommunicate with their separate agendas. "A vivid portrait of his discovery of split-brain theory ... by turns humorous and moving."

Paperback and Kindle available.

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURS, SEP 7, 7-8:30 pm
Community Church of New York
THE RETREAT OF
WESTERN LIBERALISM

Edward Luce

Long an active participant in the Book Club, Elaine Heller will lead the discussion of *Financial Times'* chief U.S. columnist Luce's argument that the weakening of western hegemony and the crisis of liberal democracy, of which Donald Trump and his European counterparts are not the cause, but a terrifying symptom. We take democracy for granted, he tells us; "reality tells us something troublingly different."

Paperback and digital available.

Advance notice for October:

**THE WAR ON SCIENCE:
Who's Waging It, Why It
Matters, What We Can
Do About It**

Shawn Lawrence Otto

SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT

MON, JULY 10, 6:30 pm
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)
**A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S
SEX COMEDY**

In this delight from Woody Allen, loosely based on Ingmar Bergman's "Smiles of a Summer Night", it is the early 1900s.

Distinguished philosopher Leopold (Jose Ferrer) and his much younger fiancée, Ariel (Mia Farrow), are going to spend a weekend in the country with Leopold's cousin Adrian (Mary Steenburgen) and her crackpot inventor husband (Allen). Also on hand is womanizing doctor Maxwell (Tony Roberts) and his latest girlfriend, Dulcy (Julie Hagerty). Old romances reignite, new romances develop, and everyone ends up sneaking off behind everyone else's backs.

After-Film Discussion:

Is sex possible?

SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT

MON, AUG 14, 6:30 pm
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)
THE INVENTION OF LYING

Imagine an alternative reality in which lying does not exist. As a consequence of this premise, religion does not exist.

Ricky Gervais imagined it, and wrote and directed this subtle and witty 2009 comedy in which a hapless writer changes his luck by "saying something that isn't".

After-Film Discussion:

When is it permissible to lie?

SHSNY Movie Night is FREE.
(But put something on the bar besides your elbow.)



SHSNY CALENDAR: JULY - SEPTEMBER

BRUNCH & CONVERSATION
SUN, JULY 16, 11:30 am
and
SUN, AUG 20, 11:30 am
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)



We gather in the saloon's back room, where the pub-grub menu includes a \$13 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, convivial conversation, including the Dorothy Kahn-led ...

July After-Brunch Discussion:
"Is secular humanism a 'white thing'?"

August After-Brunch Discussion:
"How 'green' are we as individual humanists?"

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MEET US ON MEETUP

www.meetup.com/shsny-org/

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GREAT LECTURES ON DVD
WED, JULY 26, 7 pm
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)
A SCIENCE SYMPOSIUM:
BILL NYE & JAMES RANDI
Part 2 - Randi



James "The Amazing" Randi regales with stories from his forthcoming book. *A Magician in the Laboratory*, while explaining how to test paranormal claims, including the claims of the many challengers who have tried to win his foundation's million-dollar challenge.

He inspired a new generation of young skeptics in the audience to go out and make a difference.

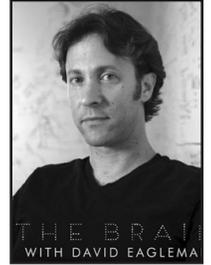
Note: Yes, this is Part 2 of the DVD originally screened in May, which featured Bill Nye, who regaled us with wit, humor and inspiration about the future of science, technology and education, and how he got his start as "the Science Guy".

GREAT LECTURES ON DVD
WED, AUG 23, 7 pm
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)
THE BRAIN – PART 6
Who Will We Be?
Dr. David Eagleman

In the sixth and final episode of this acclaimed, award-winning PBS series, Dr. David Eagleman journeys into the future, and asks what's next for the human brain, and for our species. Mother Nature has evolved a brain that is eminently flexible, able to rewire itself according to whatever environment it finds itself in, which means that as technological advances continue apace, our technology is on a crash course with our biology.

This dramatic series finale explores what's in store for the human brain and human species; and why future humans may be dramatically different from current humans.

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



Why are these men laughing? Page 12.

**AGNOSTIC AA: AN EVOLVING
HUMANIST RESPONSE TO ADDICTION.**

An Anonymous, Evolving, Alcoholic Humanist

Addiction looms as a dangerous and divisive problem in our society: addiction to alcohol, addiction to opiates, addiction to speed, addiction to depressants, addiction to meth, addiction to chemicals that have yet to be synthesized, addiction to so many things. So many are convinced they have the solution. Nancy Reagan advised, "Just say no." Our Secretary of Health, Tom Price, recommends a "faith-based" approach. Our Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, wants to keep people in jail longer. Others, including advocates of Alcoholics Anonymous, say to give yourself over to God. Do humanists have a solution? Not yet, but I can tell a personal story of an approach that works—at least for me. It even made me a better humanist.

One day I heard a bell ring and I had to answer it. I said to myself, "I am addicted to alcohol and I can't live this way anymore." I was career functional, met deadlines, had a decent family life but my life was becoming more and more ruled by the next drink. I knew of one course of action, Alcoholics Anonymous, and I had one very religious acquaintance whose life had been saved by it. She got me to my first meeting. Nevertheless, I dreaded AA because, as a lifelong atheist teetering on the edge of old age, I knew that the religious aspect of the organization was intense. AA was formed 82 years ago out of the Christian Oxford movement but, thankfully, the times they are a-changin'.

The bell I answered was not a church bell, it was a school bell. I had my last drink at 2am before that first, traditional AA meeting, and it was the last drink I ever had. In that dirty room with the peeling paint, I was with my comrades, all sharing the same problem. They gave me a meeting book and I discovered the code: "Meetings without prayers". Thus began my sober education.

Make no mistake, this is a personal narrative; it is not scientific in any sense. Statistics, for instance, are almost impossible to access in AA, because anonymity rules. There are few studies and no possibility of adequate control groups. Everything you know and hear is anecdotal, including my observations and experiences.

In New York City, AA Intergroup publishes "accepted" meetings and, this being New York, they accept "Agnostic AA". They do not accept the word "Atheist", although the membership in these chapters is mostly, but not entirely, "Nones". Meetings are not free-for-all but follow the rules for good manners that characterize all AA meetings: no "cross-talking", little back-talking, few last names, taking one's turn, saving advice for after the meeting, free exchange of phone numbers, and stories galore. That is what AA is: stories. We all love them and they can be inspirational, heart-breaking, or hilarious. Oh yes, lots of laughter.

The difference is that the "Aggies", as I call us, practice free expression. There are no limits on subject matter. Sometimes there is God-bashing, but most often God is

never mentioned. Today, politics are not taboo. We welcome all addictions, not just alcoholism, a difference from fundamentalist AA. We don't go in much for individual sponsorship but rather emphasize group support. We don't automatically follow the "Twelve Steps"; as originally written they heavily reference submission to God. We have our own version that relies more on self-reliance, but that is largely frowned upon by traditional AA, which tends toward punishment. The Aggies tend to be upbeat.

This is what I mean about the school bell. AA can be character building; it can turn one into a philosopher. It got me interested in a discipline, and it turned me into a practicing secular humanist. Atheism is not a philosophy, but humanism is a rich and compelling subject that improves one's life. For example, I am currently interested in Epicureanism and Stoicism and see the parallels with both humanism and AA. As a matter of fact, I think Agnostic AA represents humanism in action. It fosters the good life, a life of pleasure in moderation, a life of doing good for society.

One of our AA sages calls Agnostic AA "Minimal AA". For Aggies it is the fellowship that matters, not the program. Fundamentalist AA supports a rather rigid program with daily prayer, preferably on one's knees, frequent contact with the "parental sponsor", and rigorous study of the Twelve Steps. This does work for some. It works for some young people who have had little parental guidance; they may relish the AA discipline. But for well-educated and informed older folk who do not believe in the supernatural, being "programmed" simply does not work. We end our meetings not with prayer but with "Live and Let Live."

I do not sign this article because of shame but because revealing my identity might out others who don't wish it. I am proud to be a member of the Fellowship and it is the Fellowship that works. It is being with the like-minded who have the same problem – and being honest with one another – that provides the magic. No gods are needed when humanists help and trust one another.

Finally, Aggies are winning. 17 years ago we had five meetings in NYC, and now have 15. NYC has more than 2,500 AA meetings, including every variation you can imagine: gay, Buddhist, gender specific, etc., agnostics among them. If you or someone you know is addicted, agnostic AA offers the possibility of change and the opportunity to help others in our society by doing service – clear, sober, energized, and humanist. "AA Nones" meetings are national and international. For a list of these go to secularaa.org. The New York City website is agnosticaanyc.org.

Suggested Reading (not endorsed by AA): *Drinking, A Love Story*, by Caroline Knapp, and *Getting Better* by Nan Robertson.

I should dearly love that the world should be ever so little better for my presence. Even on this small stage we have our two sides, and something might be done by throwing all one's weight on the scale of breadth, tolerance, charity, temperance, peace, and kindness to man and beast. We can't all strike very big blows, and even the little ones count for something.

– Arthur Conan Doyle

START WITH HUMANISM

J. H. McKenna, Ph.D.

*(Excerpted from HumanistPlus on patheos.com 6/12/2017)
(Ed: Stylistic practice in PIQUE is to not initial-capitalize
"humanism" (it's not a religion), but we bend the rule herein in
deference to the author's theme. - JR)*

Start with Humanism. For your own self-designation, begin with the broadest most relevant category and call yourself a Humanist. This classification encompasses all others. After the word Humanist you may add your preferred subset label: Humanist Muslim, Humanist Christian, Humanist Buddhist, Humanist Atheist, Humanist Agnostic.

It is important that these subset terms do not precede the word Humanist. We are Humanists first, and what we are after that is secondary or tertiary or even further down the line. We are Humanists first because we are human infants first, insusceptible of further branding at that time. No infant is Muslim or Christian or Atheist or Conservative or Liberal or even American or Dutch or Egyptian or any of the like. An infant is simply human, inducted by that condition into a decades-long participation in basic human goods, chief of which are friendship, play, learning, skillful performance, and the rearing of children.

We are Humanists first because Humanism is easiest to believe. There are no fabulist doctrines to embrace. No winged ponies. No uncertain nativities. No staggering saintly pedigrees. No post-possession recoveries. No impracticable moral embargoes. No otherworldly rules on textiles that drape the body. No deistic dietary whims. No lurching angels trumpeting doom. No hellish underworld chambers brutalizing dissent. Humanism says simply that human ingenuity is the source of goodness and therefore a source of delight. Easy assent. ...

We are Humanists first because with human tools we attempt the anatomy of human destructiveness to better ourselves and shed our vices. With human means we devise the ethics of urgency to rapidly contain a rapacity that harms the elements and the animals.

We are Humanists first because we cannot be reduced to anything smaller than the human and we cannot be elevated to anything larger. Even the posthuman and the transhuman are but species of the human—from which, for now, all the metrics of morality emerge and extend to bonobo and cyborg alike.

For what you call yourself, begin with the broadest most relevant term. When someone asks 'What are you?' say 'I am a Humanist.' Search and see what the word has meant. And as you understand it, receive it first and foremost. Afterward, you may array yourself with any other supplementary hue on offer. But start with Humanism.

We are social creatures to the inmost centre of our being. The notion that one can begin anything at all from scratch, free from the past, or unindebted to others, could not conceivably be more wrong. — *Karl Popper*

THE PRICE OF COMMUNITY

Jonathan Engel

Isaw an interesting movie recently, "The Women's Balcony". It's an Israeli movie about a close-knit Orthodox (but not ultra-Orthodox) community in Israel and how it deals with something of a disaster. The congregation's temple had a balcony where women attended services, as it is Orthodox custom and practice to separate men and women in synagogue. During a bar mitzvah service the balcony collapses, injuring several (including the elderly rabbi and his wife) and the congregation needs to find a way to rebuild.

I was raised Jewish, and while I still consider myself to be culturally and ethnically Jewish, I am an atheist and so I don't actually practice the religion. But given my background, I must admit that I found the movie's early scenes (prior to the balcony collapse) to be moving, and they elicited just a wee bit of wistfulness in me. The people all seemed so joyous in preparing for and participating in the bar mitzvah celebration; singing, dancing, hugging. You could just feel a real sense of community among all the participants. It made me wonder for just a minute if maybe I'm missing something in my atheism. But not for long.

As the movie unfolds a young ultra-Orthodox rabbi offers to help the congregation rebuild, and at first his assistance is most welcome. But he soon insinuates himself and his ultra-Orthodox beliefs into the congregation in ways that are not so welcome, especially to the community's women. (For example, he goads the men into giving their wives head scarves so they will appear more "modest". Suffice it to say, these "presents" are not well-received). The men of the congregation are wary, but for the most part they are too cowed by the rabbi's "authority" to resist him.

So much for wistfulness. I could never live like that. I would never let some guy subvert my ethical beliefs just because he's learned in an ancient book that in my opinion contains questionable ethics itself and was written by people who didn't know that the earth revolves around the sun. Community or no community, there is simply no way that I could accept this. It's just not in me, and it's certainly not worth the price of surrendering my intelligence, common sense, autonomy, and ethical principles.

Besides, there are other places and institutions from which one can gain a sense of community. Religion is not the only game in town. I felt a sense of community participating in the Science March last April. If you've ever been to a concert given by the late Pete Seeger, you've experienced the joy of a communal sing-along, because at Pete's concerts *everybody* sang along. And speaking of sing-alongs, try watching a soccer match from England, and just listen to 40,000 or more fans singing together in support of the home team and their community. Absolutely thrilling.

And so my slight feeling of wistfulness while watching "The Women's Balcony" passed pretty quickly. I'll concede that there's an allure to the strong community bonds exhibited by the congregants in the movie, but the price of

admission to that community is simply too steep for me. (Hell, I would have suggested doing without the balcony and just having women sit with the men in the main room, and they *all* would have thought I was crazy). I can't bring myself to believe in something that I just know isn't there, and pretending to believe isn't an option for me either.

So I'll just have to get my sense of community elsewhere. And if I happen to get invited to a Jewish wedding or bat mitzvah, I'll joyously dance the hora with everyone else. Why not? It's fun! But surrendering my true ethical beliefs so that I can fit in? That's a dance I'll just have to sit out.

SCIENCE AND BUDDHISM AGREE

(say the Buddhists):

THERE IS NO "YOU" THERE

Lori Chandler

(Transcribed from *bigthink.com*, 6/2/2017)

Ev van Thompson of the University of British Columbia has verified the Buddhist belief of *anatta*, or not-self. Neuroscience has been interested in Buddhism since the late 1980s, when the Mind and Life Institute was created by HH Dalai Lama and a team of scientists. The science that came out of those first studies gave validation to what monks have known for years — if you train your mind, you can change your brain. As neuroscience has begun studying the mind, they have looked to those who have mastered the mind.

While Buddha didn't teach *anatta* to lay people, thinking it might be too confusing, the concept is centered on the idea that there is no consistent self. The belief that we are the same one moment to the next, or one year to the next, is a delusion. Thompson says that "the brain and body is constantly in flux. There is nothing that corresponds to the sense that there's an unchanging self."

When there is no consistent self, it means that we don't have to take everything so personally.

It is useful to look at a video of yourself from the past, or read something you wrote years ago. Your interests, perspective, beliefs, attachments, relationships, et al, have all changed in some way. *Anatta* doesn't mean there's no you; it just means that you are constantly changing, constantly evolving, and shape-shifting. Why is this important? Why does it matter if there's no solid "you" or "me"?

Dr. Rick Hanson, author of *Hardwiring, Happiness and Buddha's Brain*, argues that when there is no consistent self, it means that we don't have to take everything so personally. That is, our internal thoughts are only thoughts and don't define us. External events are only external events and aren't happening to us personally. Or as Tara Brach says, our thoughts are "real, but not true".

There is tremendous liberation in not identifying ourselves with thoughts, or a set idea of who we are. It is then that we can grow and change, with the help of neuroplasticity. There is then hope that we can overcome our vices or bad habits (of mind and body), because if we aren't stuck with the self-limiting beliefs inherent with a

consistent self, we may orient ourselves toward becoming more of who we want to be.

The belief that we are the same one moment to the next, or one year to the next, is a delusion.

As science and Eastern thought continue to hang out with each other, there may be more 21st Century studies to back up 2,600-year-old thoughts. But, as HH Dalai Lama said, "Suppose that something is definitely proven through scientific investigation. ... Suppose that that fact is incompatible with Buddhist theory. There is no doubt that we must accept the result of the scientific research." ...

In the end it seems Buddhism and neuroscience have similar goals: What is this thing we call the mind, and how can we use it to make ourselves a little less miserable and a little happier? ... If there is no consistent self, it is at least my intention that my ever-changing self be equanimous and, well, ten percent happier. No matter who I am.

THE SPIRIT OF NON-BELIEVERS

Giles Kelly

To consider the notion that non-believers may be spiritual, let us employ the *Oxford American Dictionary's* definition of spirit. It is: "the nonphysical part of a person that is the seat of emotions and character". It follows therefor that probably most humans have a spiritual quality to some degree and of some sort.

That said, we secular humanists and atheists are automatically included. I believe that persons who feel pleasure from their perception of beauty or harmony, such as from music, nature, dance or other art forms, probably have a "spiritual" side to them. (Is there a better term?)

A scientist observing the cosmos, or a mountain range, or looking at specimens under a microscope can be awed and moved by the beauty observed. We all seem to be wired so that certain events outside us please us inside.

Folks take pride in their spirit because they feel it enriches and uplifts them, and inspires qualities such as empathy, ethics and morality, without the need of religious instruction. Thus I believe we secular humanists can be, and are admired for our spirit within.

AND THE 2017 IRONY CROSS GOES TO ...

John Rafferty

In 2008, Republican lawmaker Steve Scalise authored a Constitutional amendment to "protect traditional marriage", and subsequently has voted No on re-authorizing the Violence Against Women Act, has tried to amend the Constitution to define marriage, and to allow state anti-same-sex laws to supersede federal law.

Rep. Scalise was the most seriously injured of the victims of the June 4 "baseball shooting", and was saved from death by Law Enforcement Officer Crystal Griner and Patrolman David Bailey, who heroically took on the gunman and were wounded themselves.

Officer Griner is in a same-sex marriage. Just sayin'.

The Trump Family Follies, June, 2017

(this month we include the extended family of sycophants)

LEAR TRUMP HOLDS A CABINET MEETING

KING LEAR:

"Tell me, my daughters ...

Which of you shall we say doth love us most ..."

King Lear, Act 1, Scene 1

"On behalf of the entire senior staff around you, Mr. President, we thank you for the honor and the blessing that you've given us to serve your agenda and the American people and we're continuing to work very hard every day to accomplish those goals." — *Chief of Staff Rance Priebus*

"It's been a great honor traveling with you around the country ... and an even greater honor to be serving you on your Cabinet." — *Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin*

"It is the greatest privilege of my life to serve as your vice president." — *Vice President Mike Pence*

"What an incredible honor it is to lead the Department of Health and Human Services at this pivotal time under your leadership. I can't thank you enough for the privilege that you've given me, and the leadership you've shown."

— *Secretary of Health and Human Services Tom Price*

"I just got back from Mississippi. They love you there."

— *Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue*

And more:

OUR DEAR LEADER:

Magnetic! Brilliant! Extraordinary!

"President Trump has a magnetic personality and exudes positive energy, which is infectious to those around him. He has an unparalleled ability to communicate with people, whether he is speaking to a room of three or an arena of 30,000. He has built great relationships throughout his life and treats everyone with respect. He is brilliant with a great sense of humor . . . and an amazing ability to make people feel special and aspire to be more than even they thought possible." — *White House Director of Strategic Communications Hope Hicks, 5/29/2017*

"I want to begin by recapping the incredible, historic trip that the President and the First Lady have just concluded, because it truly was an extraordinary week for America and our people. ...

"We've never seen before at this point in a presidency such sweeping reassurance of American interest, and the inauguration of a foreign policy strategy designed to bring back the world from growing dangers and perpetual disasters brought on by years of failed leadership. ... This was an extraordinarily successful and historic nine-day trip the President took." — *Press Secretary Sean Spicer, 5/30*

The first method for estimating the intelligence of a ruler is to look at the men he has around him.

— *Niccolo Machiavelli*

ONE MORE ATROCITY: SAME OLD, SAME OLD

To the Editor: You will have read about the latest atrocity here in England, in Manchester (*the May 22 bombing at an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester, UK, that killed 23 adults and children, and injured 119 more – Ed.*). No spokesperson that I have heard has said that the motivation of the murderer is his religion. There is endless condemnation, assertions that Manchester will "stand together" (whatever exactly that might mean), denunciations of the bombing as an act of cowardice (since when did cowards strap bombs to themselves and blow themselves to pieces) and, of course, your President's helpful description of the bomber as a "loser".

No one has said that he was a devout Muslim and no one has referenced any of the sections in the canonical works that condone or even encourage these hideous acts.

It is another grim day. — *Professor John C Adams*

READERS RESPOND WITH A FEW WORDS ABOUT "A FEW WORDS" IN JUNE PIQUE

To the Editor: My two cents on your item about quotation mark placement ("A Few Words About Words", June PIQUE): I have noticed your usage and wondered, knowing you to be a copywriter, so I'm glad to have your explanation.

As a transcriptionist who sometimes prepares manuscripts for submission, I have to conform to the norm, which is second nature to me. But there's an element of appearance, too. Your way may be more logical, but the stylebooks' way just looks better. Maybe that's just the result of familiarity.

I haven't read the stylebooks in a long time and don't remember if they touch on appearance. To me, the period and comma after the quotation marks look feeble and lost. Within the quotes they're secure and the quoted segments look finished. — *Sunny Barnhardt*

To the Editor: I enjoyed reading your column in the June 2017 issue of PIQUE, but it does include one small error: Brits would use single quotes, e.g., 'word', not "word". (But I digress.)

Throughout my 30-year stint in publishing, I've become enamored of the modified up-and-down style. For the uninitiated, here's how it's done:

1. Set all words in initial caps, including parts of compound words.
2. Set as lowercase all articles, prepositions, and conjunctions.
3. Capitalize first and last words.

I Know I'll Never Convince the Masses (Including Our Beloved President and PIQUE Editor) that Modified Up-and-Down Capitalization Is the Style to Go with, but this Is the Reason I Translate All Caps at Every Chance I Get. It Won't Save the World, but It's a Pesky Little Thing that Keeps Me Busy.

And, to quote Churchill, it's something up with which I will not put. — *Claire Miller*

To the Editor: John, I recall you once used the piquant cliché “like herding cats” to describe the diversity of the freethought community, so I suppose we shouldn’t be surprised at finding a critic who cites strictly American prescriptive sources to accuse you of “grammatical ignorance” for your refusal to follow the collective ignorance referred to as American exceptionalism.

British usage of course is different, as is practice in languages other than English. Spanish is particularly logical, extending to the use of double punctuation when the mark that ends the quote is different from the one that follows it.

But it’s not only the English speakers who drive on the left (to include Australia and New Zealand; I don’t know how Canadians handle quotation marks) who use logic and clarity to determine placement of punctuation. According to slate.com, the logical rule is catching on even here in the Benighted States as well.

“*Language*, the journal of the Linguistic Society of North America, for instance, has adopted the British way,” the article states, although the link to the LSNA article appears to be broken.

Anyway, for better or worse, language evolves. The leftward drift of the close-quotation mark is one of “for better”s. Please don’t back down. — *Harvey Wachtel*

THE REVOLUTION WAS TELEVISED

John Rafferty

On Memorial Day in Central Park I officiated at the wedding of Hugh McConville and Bruce McRae (see page 7). In full kilt regalia, those two handsome and happy Scotsmen attracted smiles and requests for selfies from passersby even before we grouped for the ceremony at the edge of The Pond with Bowbridge in the background.

How normal now, I thought, this, my seventh, eighth? same-sex marriage. How almost conventional, two men celebrating their love in broad daylight. Even natural, to have Bruce’s ex-wife and his daughter as witnesses. And yet still how new, unusual enough to collect thirty-or-so more witnesses—New Yorkers and tourists, bird-watchers and babies, representatives of every “race” in the human family— who watched as quietly as invited guests, who laughed at the uninvited duck that waddle-crashed the party, and who started softly applauding as I began the familiar formula: “By the power invested in me ...”

How happily, joyfully normal.

If you think that fuss in the Sixties was only about the Beatles and not a “real” revolution, if you don’t appreciate how vastly the world has changed in our lifetime, you haven’t been paying attention.

NO PIQUE IN AUGUST

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Trump Family Follies

Page 9

What price “community”?

Page 4

“Real” Americans

Pages 1-5

(Suppose we hadn’t)

The Independence Day Issue

Happy Fourth of July!

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