

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

November, 2009

Herein we celebrate Poetic Atheism, the rise of the Nones (not Nuns) and the return of Deism, sing the season's first Christmas carol, start our own "resurrection" project with Q-tips, end world hunger, condemn faith-based and celebrity child abuse, expose the real media bias, pray for liberals, boot liberals out of the Bible and sneak Scripture into Darwin. We end by mourning more mishagos in Amherst — but begin by celebrating reason and godlessness right here in the Big Apple — JR

BIG APPLE COALITION OF REASON and BigAppleCoR.org ARE LAUNCHED

The cats (most of them, anyway) are herded. About a dozen New York City freethought organizations (we're still counting), thanks to the work of Jason Torpy of American Humanist Association, have organized themselves into the Big Apple Coalition of Reason, the local but entirely independent incarnation of the national United Coalition of Reason (UnitedCoR), and have created a common website — BigAppleCoR.org — on which the curious and the searching can learn about and link to each of the organizations.

How will "the curious and searching" learn about the website? Thanks to thousands of dollars in funding from UnitedCoR, fourteen 6-foot-by-4-foot full-color ads were posted in twelve high-traffic Manhattan subway stations on October 23 — where they will remain, sending our message to tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands of commuters and travelers, for four full weeks.

Visit the website: <http://newyorkcity.unitedcor.org>
Put Yourself in the Picture

So, get yourself to one of these stations — 14th and 6th (L,V trains); 14th and 7th (1,2,3); 14th and 8th (A,C,E,L); 23rd and 8th (C,E); Penn Station/Hilton Passage (3 ads); 86th and Lex (4,5,6); 96th and Lex (6); Bryant Park (B,D,F,V); 66th and Broadway, Lincoln Center; 72nd and CPW (B,C); 86th and CPW (B,C); West 4th (B,C,D,E,F,V) — and take a picture of you and your freethinking family and friends next to the poster.

E-mail the picture to everyone you know.

Better yet, make it your holiday greeting card.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS: John Rafferty, *President/Editor*; Elaine Lynn, *Vice President/Secretary*; Donna Marxer, *Treasurer*; Remo Cosentino; Arthur Harris; Lee Loshak; Irv Millman; Robert A. Murtha, Jr.

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SHSNY is affiliated with the Council for Secular Humanism.

FAITH-BASED DISCRIMINATION

(Reprinted from an editorial in The NYTimes, 10/14/09)

President Obama promised in his campaign to preserve President George W. Bush's faith-based initiative aimed at helping social service programs sponsored by religious organizations win federal grants and contracts. He also promised a vitally important change: groups receiving federal money would no longer be allowed to hire employees on the basis of their religion.

The idea was to prevent discrimination and preserve the boundary between church and state. But Mr. Obama has not made good on the promise. His February executive order revamping the White House office for religion-based and neighborhood programs left untouched a 2002 presidential directive authorizing religious-oriented programs that receive federal financing to hire and fire on religious grounds.

Also left untouched was a constitutionally suspect 2007 memo concluding that the government cannot order religious groups not to discriminate as a condition of federal financing – even in programs like Head Start, where religious discrimination is outlawed. The memo, based on a far-fetched interpretation of the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act, was produced by the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel. That is the same outfit that wrote the memos authorizing torture.

A coalition of 58 religious, educational and civil liberties groups is now seeking to reverse the 2007 memo. A group letter last month to Attorney General Eric Holder Jr. asked him to direct the current Office of Legal Counsel to review and withdraw the memo. Mr. Holder should do so, and Mr. Obama should revise his February executive order to include the anti-discrimination language that he omitted the first time around.

As a candidate, Mr. Obama drew the right line. Effective social service programs should not be ineligible for federal dollars just because they have a religious affiliation.* But they should be required to abide by the same anti-discrimination laws as everyone else. Public money should not be used to pay for discrimination.

* Yes they should be ineligible. – JR

FOUR WAYS THE “NO RELIGION” BOOM WILL ALTER AMERICAN POLITICS

Dan Gilgoff

(Reprinted from the God & Country blog on US News & World Report site: usnews.com, 9/22/09)

How will the boom in Americans claiming “no religion” – 25 percent of the country will fit into that category in 20 years, according to a Trinity College survey – alter national politics? I see four big ways:

1. Secular voters will become an increasingly impor-

tant component of the Democratic base.

In the 1990s, so-called religious Nones comprised 6 percent of the Democratic Party and 6 percent of the GOP. Today, there are two and a half times as many Nones – 34 million Americans, or 15 percent of the country – and they account for 16 percent of Democrats, compared with just 8 percent of Republicans. Three in four of them voted for Barack Obama in the last election. Every indication is that these political trends will continue.

Even as the Democratic Party has seriously stepped up its faith outreach, the fact that the fastest-growing religious group in the United States is those with no religious affiliation – and that members of that group are leaning dramatically in the Democratic direction – will make the Dems pay closer attention to them.

2. American politics will become more polarized.

As more Americans leave religion, the ones left in the pews are those most committed to their faith. In a nation where church attendance is one of the best predictors of voting behavior – the more often you attend, the more likely you are to vote Republican – this polarization of religious life will spill over into the political arena, setting off more culture-war battles.

3. Republicans will have to choose between becoming a more overtly religious party and reaching out more seriously to the growing secular middle.

Secular voters once constituted an important part of the GOP coalition, but fewer than 10 percent of religious Nones under age 30 are Republican. “Republican nones are getting older and continue to show an affinity to the GOP,” says Juhen Navarro-Rivera, a Trinity College research fellow who helped compile the new report. “But they’re not making new Republican Nones.”

Navarro-Rivera is still running the numbers, but his hunch is that the new generation of religious Nones has been scared away from the Republican Party because of its ties to the Christian right. Does the GOP continue to embrace that movement or move more to the middle? Call it the Sarah Palin option versus the John McCain option. (Though opposition to healthcare reform, it should be noted, is helping bring the two camps together.)

4. If secular voters become more aggressively anti-religious, the Democrats' newfound faithiness faces big challenges.

If religious Nones congeal into a coherent voting bloc with their own issues, Democrats will have to pay more attention to their political agenda. Most religious Nones aren't hostile to religion; few are atheists. “They're aligning with the Democrats because the party has lots of religious people, but they're not pushy about it,” says Navarro-Rivera*.

At the same time, religious Nones aren't crazy about a huge role for religion in government and politics. And as their numbers grow, some expect them to turn more

overtly antireligious. Will they continue to tolerate a party leader who invites Rick Warren to his inauguration and who refuses to decide whether religious groups can hire based on religion with government funds?

Doubtful.

**Maybe it's time to get pushy. – JR*

WORD UP John Rafferty

"In the Beginning was the Word."

Oh yeah? Well, the political way-right-wingers of the Conservative Bible Project want to change a lot of the words in The Word. They want to correct the "corruption by liberal bias" of the most widely-used edition of the Bible, the New International Version (NIV), but no currently available translation escapes their beady-eyed scrutiny, not even one of the English language's grandest accomplishments, the 17th-century King James version (KJV).

For instance, that "rich man" in KJV's Matthew 19:24, Mark 10:25 and Luke 18:25, the one who'll have more trouble getting into the Kingdom than a camel trying to go through the eye of a needle? On the project's Conservapedia website,* he morphs into "a man who loves only money." Take *that*, socialist King James!

Other changes? They're only working on the New Testament so far, but "Pharisees" has become "elitists," "scribes" is now "intellectuals" and "die the death" has been transformed into "death penalty."

I am *not* making this up.

For their "conservative" ("screwball" might be more accurate) Hell-fire and Damnation translation of the Good Book, the new Word-smiths have established ten guidelines, including: Utilize Powerful Conservative Terms (instead of suspects like "comrade"); Express Free Market Parallels; Exclude Later-Inserted Liberal Passages (like the adulteress story, i.e.: "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone"); Not Emasculated (you know, "gender inclusive"), and Credit Open-Mindedness of Disciples, "like the eyewitnesses Mark and John, the authors of two of the Gospels."

Really? "Eyewitnesses"? Have these guys not heard of the last 200 years of Bible scholarship, which long ago established that none of the Gospel writers were eyewitnesses, and they were probably not even contemporary with Jesus? And "open-mindedness"? This from guys who want to make up a new translation just to fit their own political biases? Mark Shea, quoted by Rod Dreher in "Conservatizing the Bible" on beliefnet.com, says:

"Right wing dementia marches on apace. Some of this has a grain of sense to it, as ideological mad-

ness always does. For instance, the dumb attempts to feminize Scripture are pernicious and need to stop. But seriously: the story of the woman taken in adultery is "liberal"? Free market as sacred tradition? Liberal wordiness?

"You really need to read the whole Conservapedia entry to grasp how crazy this is. It's like what you'd get if you crossed the Jesus Seminar with the College Republican chapter at a rural institution of Bible learnin'."

**www.conservapedia.com/Conservative_Bible_Project*

MONKEYING WITH DARWIN Mary Elizabeth Williams

(Excerpted from "Kirk Cameron Monkeys with Darwin" on salon.com, September 24, 2009)

In November, Charles Darwin's history-changing *On the Origin of Species* turns 150. And after a century and a half of archaeological discoveries and biological advances lending credence to his evolutionary theories, even Darwin would have to be impressed with the sheer endurance of those who prefer the literal, biblical version of how we all got here. People like '80s sitcom star-turned-Christian action hero Kirk Cameron.

Celebrations and exhibitions commemorating *Origin's* publication are gearing up across the world, but Cameron and his God squad are not going to sit around quietly while monkey ancestry gets peddled to America's youth. On November 21, they're handing "the truth" straight to them—in the form of 50,000 free copies of Darwin's book, amended with a 50-page introduction refuting the whole megillah—at the top 50 college campuses across the country. [Ed: Search "Origin Into Schools" on YouTube.]

You can say there's inherent idiocy in the creationist worldview (you'd be right), but this is not the worst idea ever. Rather than resorting to the old tried-and-true method of simply attempting to silence evolutionary teaching, they're leaning on the classic American standby: freedom of speech. Emphasis on the "free." ...

It's easy to laugh at the absurdity of the project. It's already being widely mined for its rich comic value, notably by a hot blond Romanian woman [Ed: also on YouTube – she'll come up when you search Cameron], who suggests maybe we get Richard Dawkins to do a new introduction to the Bible.

But what's not funny is what happens when "the opposing—and correct—view" gets into the hands of "our future doctors and lawyers and politicians." That's when they realize they're holding a sneaky defilement of one of the most important books ever written. Nowhere



Lefty liberal propaganda



New and "Improved"

on the front of the “beautiful, full-color-cover edition” are the words “extremist Christian version.” Because maybe if those targeted 50,000 students knew they were getting their free book from a ministry that advises its practitioners on how to “shut up” a Jew or explain to a homosexual that he’s damned, they might not be so keen on it. They might feel duped and angry at accepting something from a group that proclaims free speech but doesn’t have the courage to put its true intentions right there on the cover.

Darwin might have been amused. “I love fools’ experiments,” he once said. “I am always making them.”

A THOUGHTFUL CREATIONIST ANALYSIS

Despite creationists’ objections and threats of boycott, “Creation,” the new Darwin film that “explores the personal agony of the famous naturalist who struggles with doubt and grief following the death of his daughter,” will open in the U.S. in December.

The distributor? Newmarket, which also distributed Mel Gibson’s “The Passion of the Christ.” Go figure.

And what kind of reception can we expect from the foam-at-the-mouth fundamentalists? The right-wing website “Movieguide.org,” in its review written before “Creation” was released, repeats the Darwin-equals-Hitler idiocy, calling him “a racist, a bigot and a 19th century naturalist whose legacy is mass murder.”

DEISM: IT’S BACK

Steven Waldman

(Excerpted from *Beliefnet.com*, 9/23/09)

When historians refer to some of the Founding Fathers as “Deists,” it’s as if they’re talking about an extinct philosophy, like alchemy or phrenology. Very few Americans go around describing themselves as Deists.

Perhaps that ought to change. A new study reveals that a rapidly growing number of Americans hold the belief system that used to be described as Deism.

Deism was a philosophy, especially popular in the 18th century, holding that God had created the universe and its laws but then receded from the action. It was treated as heretical—akin to atheism—because Deists rejected Biblical authority. Thomas Jefferson, for instance, wrote that the authors of the canonical Gospels were “ignorant, unlettered men” who laid “a groundwork of vulgar ignorance, of things impossible, of superstitions, fanaticisms, and fabrications.” He famously crafted his own Bible sans miracles.

And this brings us to a new study about the rise of “Nones,” Americans who profess no religious affiliation. Trinity College analysts now conclude that Nones make up 15 percent of the population and that, given their rate of rapid growth, they might surpass the nation’s largest

denominations.

The rise of the Nones is usually decried by religious leaders as a sign of secularization or atheism’s ascent but get this: 51 percent say they believe in God. Now some of those folks might just be religious people in between churches. So the Trinity folks asked them to describe what kind of God they believed in. 24 percent say they believe in “a higher power but no personal God.”

That would mean about 3.6 percent of Americans could be considered Deists, making them more common than Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, or Mormons.

And that’s if you use a pretty narrow definition of Deism. In my book, *Founding Faith*, I argued that even the so-called Deists of the 18th century were a bit more religious than we think. Both Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin believed that God intervened in history. A recent study by the Pew Religion Forum revealed that 35 percent of Nones pray weekly or daily.

I suspect that some modern American Deists are actually quite like Jefferson and Franklin. They don’t believe in Scripture, or cotton to organized religion. But in the privacy of home, they think that the distant, aloof God occasionally checks in to listen to their prayers.

Comment: “And somewhere,” Andrew Sullivan writes in his blog, “Thomas Jefferson is smiling.” — JR

SARAH SILVERMAN’S PLAN TO END WORLD HUNGER

(Transcribed and excerpted from her video. For the full, unexpurgated 2 minutes, go to YouTube)

Hi, it’s me, Sarah Silverman. You know, lately I’ve noticed a lot of really sad, really long commercials on TV with really gross, really sick people from all over the world. And it turns out they look that way because they don’t have food.

And I know what you’re thinking: “Hey, Silverman, if you don’t like it, Tivo past it.” I did — but you still see them, especially since I have a 48” plasma hi-def TV, and so every devastating image is in crisp, vivid — it’s like they’re in my apartment.

So, how do I get these people out of my apartment, basically? And I think I’ve figured it out: all I have to do is end world hunger. And then I’m like, Okay, how you gonna end world hunger? And then it hit me.

Sell the Vatican and feed the world.

Think about it — we need a hero, and who is more prime to be our hero than the Pope? He’s literally a caped crusader!

What is the Vatican worth? Like 500 billion dollars?



Great, then sell the Vatican, take a big chunk of that money and build a gorgeous condominium for you and all your friends to live in, all the amenities – swimming pool, tennis courts, *water slide*. And with the money left over, feed the whole f***ing world!

You preach to live humbly, and I totally agree. So now maybe it's time for you to move out of your house that is a city. On the ego level alone, you'll be the biggest hero in the history of ever.

(*Whispering*) And by the way, any involvement in the Holocaust?

Bygones.

THE LIBERAL (USUALLY HUMANIST) LEFT TURNS ITSELF INSIDE OUT FOR AN "ARTIST"

Calvin Trillin

(Reprinted from the 10/26/09 issue of *The Nation*)

What Whoopi Goldberg ("Not a Rape-Rape"), Harvey Weinstein ("So-Called Crime") et al. Are Saying in Their Outrage Over the Arrest of Roman Polanski

A youthful error? Yes, perhaps.
But he's been punished for this lapse –
For decades exiled from LA
He knows, as he wakes up each day,
He'll miss the movers and the shakers.
He'll never get to see the Lakers.
For just one old and small mischance,
He has to live in Paris, France.
He's suffered slurs and other stuff.
Has he not suffered quite enough?
How can these people get so riled?
He only raped a single child.

Why make him into some Darth Vader
For sodomizing one eighth grader?
This man is brilliant, that's for sure –
Authentically, a film auteur.
He gets awards that are his due.
He knows important people, too –
Important people just like us.
And we know how to make a fuss.
Celebrities would just be fools
To play by little people's rules.
So Roman's banner we unfurl.
He only raped one little girl.

Every man thinks God is on his side. The rich and powerful know he is. – *Jean Anouilh*

America has a custom of turning criminals into heroes after their deaths, like Billy the Kid, Bonnie & Clyde, and Jesus Christ. – *Fictional newscaster Kent Brockman, on the TV show, "The Simpsons."*

SHSNY CELEBRATES FREETHOUGHT MONTH AND "POETIC ATHEISM" WTH JENNIFER MICHAEL HECHT

A little late for Freethought Day, October 12, but all October is Freethought Month, and not even cold winds and rain on October 18 could keep nearly fifty SHSNYers and friends from filling the room at Pete's Tavern for a lunch and lecture on "Poetic Atheism" with poet/historian Jennifer Michael Hecht.

After lunch and introductions by Michael De Dora of CFI-NYC, who spoke of the new Coalition of Reason association (see page 1), and SHSNY President John Rafferty's talk on the background and history of the Freethought Day holiday, Ms. Hecht took the floor.

"I knew I wanted to be a poet, but I also had to make a living," she said, explaining how she became a scholar (and professor) of the history of science. Researching her first book, *The End of the Soul*—on 19th century anthropologists whose work overturned centuries-old ideas about the "soul" and bolstered their own atheism—she found that atheism had a long, long history, and that led to her second book, *Doubt*.

"There were atheists in every century—the Carvaka were attacking Hinduism in India before 600 B.C., before the Buddha"—but not just among the scientists. Poetry has always had its atheists and rationalists, too.

"Most of the great poets don't believe in God," she announced. "Ecclesiastes and some of the Psalms are full of atheism. Shelley wrote *The Necessity of Atheism*. Keats never referred to God. The first thing Emily Dickinson refused to leave the house for was to go to church. Wallace Stevens proclaimed his atheism. Yeats' poem *Vacillations* is about his struggle between belief in a rational world and religious faith. Even Milton," she said, "by the time he died was a monist – believing not in Christianity but that God and the world were one."

Fascinating stuff, but more controversial for some in the audience was Ms. Hecht's opinion that as important as science is, "when you get close to individual people, where lives happen, science isn't enough," that people need ritual and community. And poetry. – JR



Jennifer & Jessie



(L-R) John Rafferty, Jennifer Michael Hecht (and Jessie), Michael De Dora, Rich Sander, Harry Graber

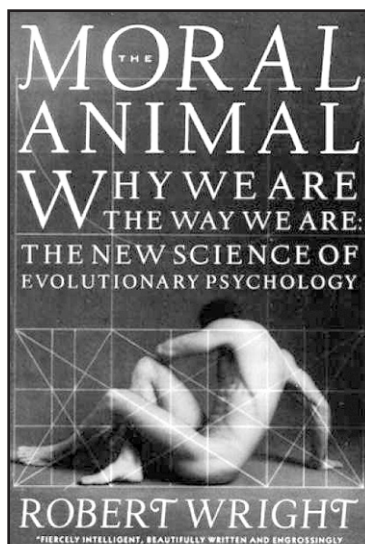
SHSNY BOOK CLUB: NOVEMBER - JANUARY

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.

**The SHSNY Book Club meets at
The 58th Street Branch Library
127 East 58 Street (bet. Park & Lexington)
to discuss**

***THE MORAL ANIMAL:
Why We Are the Way We Are:
The New Science of Evolutionary Psychology*
by Robert Wright**

Are men literally born to cheat? Does monogamy actually serve women's interests? These are among the questions that have made *The Moral Animal* one of the most provocative science books in recent years. Wright's account of the latest trends in Darwinian theory unravels the evolutionary logic behind subjects ranging from friendship and romance to xenophobia and sibling rivalry. Wright unveils the genetic strategies behind everything from our sexual preferences to our office politics—as well as their implications for our moral codes and public policies. This is an accessible introduction to the science of evolutionary psychology and how it explains many aspects of human nature. Unlike many books on the topic, which focus on abstractions like kin selection, *The Moral Animal* focuses on Darwinian explanations of why we are the way we are—emotionally and morally. Wright deals particularly well with explaining the reasons for the stereotypical dynamics of the three big “S’s”: sex, siblings, and society. — *Paperback*



NOTE: NEW WEEKNIGHT AND NEW LIBRARY!

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

Every SHSNY Book Club Meet is a Book Swap, too.

Bring the books gathering dust on your shelves and take your pick of other readers' castaways. The leftovers? Donated to the Library.

What book(s) would you like to read and discuss?

Anyone can suggest any book that would be of interest to our secular humanist readers, and everyone's opinion is valued. Final choices are made by our Book Club Editor, Elaine Lynn, but please email your suggestions to editor@shsnny.org

**Thursday, December 10
6:30 – 8:00 p.m.**

**The Muhlenberg Library
209 West 23 St. (at 7th Ave.)
*ACQUIRING GENOMES:
The Theory of the Origins
of the Species*
by Lynn Margulis
and Dorion Sagan**

From one of the great iconoclasts of modern biology, Lynn Margulis, a groundbreaking new theory of the origins of species.

How do new species evolve? Lynn Margulis and her science-writer son Dorion Sagan take a radically new approach to this question – symbiogenesis. They show that speciation events are not, in fact, rare or hard to observe. Genomes are acquired by infection, by feeding, and by other ecological associations, and then inherited. — *Paperback*

**Thursday, January 14
6:30 – 8:00 p.m.**

**The Muhlenberg Library
209 West 23 St. (at 7th Ave.)**

To Be Announced



SHSNY CALENDAR: NOVEMBER, 2009

MONDAY, NOV. 2, 7:00 p.m.
SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)
ANIMAL FARM



Adapted from George Orwell's biting black satiric novel of the same name in 1954, this full-length animated film employs farm-yard animals to depict the foibles inherent in political systems. The animals of Manor Farm, led by the pigs, stage a successful coup against their cruel master (they're rebelling against substandard conditions in their sty) and attempt to establish a prosperous new regime, only to learn that absolute power always corrupts ... absolutely.

Coming Attractions

December 7: Julia Sweeney's "Letting God of God: Breaking up is hard to do" – her hilarious solo show.

January 4: "1984," Orwell's terrifying vision of the future.

February/March: What do you want to see? Come and tell us.

Admission to SHSNY Movie Night is free, but Stone Creek's management expects a "one drink minimum" per person for the use of their back room.

Check out the Stone Creek menu and prices online at www.stonecreeknyc.com.

SPECIAL TELEVISION EVENT
A PBS "NOVA" 3-Part Series
BECOMING HUMAN:
Unearthing Our Earliest
Ancestors
Tuesdays, November 3, 10 & 17
Channels 13 and 21



Nothing is more fascinating to us than, well, us. Where did we come from? What makes us human? An explosion of recent discoveries sheds light on these questions, and NOVA's comprehensive, three-part special, "Becoming Human," examines what the latest scientific research reveals about our hominid relatives – putting together the pieces of our human past and transforming our understanding of our human origins and our earliest ancestors.

For previews and details, go to www.pbs.org/wgbh

FOR UPDATES ON ALL SHSNY EVENTS

... check the SHSNY website at www.shsnny.org and/or 212-308-2165 and/or our MeetUp site at humanism.meetup.com/155/

And for information about events hosted by freethought groups throughout the area, check *Richie's List*, too, at atheists.meetup.com/515/

If you're not receiving regular e-mails about SHSNY events ...

... e-mail editor@shsnny.org with your e-address and your real-world name (we may not know who pookiebear@hotmail.com is).

SUNDAY, NOV. 15, 12:30 p.m.
OUR MONTHLY SHSNY
BRUNCH GET-TOGETHER

We'll gather again at Wild Ginger restaurant ("Asian fusion at its best"), 226 East 51 Street, between 2nd and 3rd Avenues.

Everyone interested in getting together with like-minded humanists and rationalists for good pan-Asian food and lively talk in a charming East-side setting, is welcome. Bring friends!

Order off the menu; individual checks.

Save the dates:

December brunch: 12/20

January brunch: 1/17

Save the date:

Tuesday, November 24,
6-9:00 pm

CFI-NYC presents
CELEBRATING 150 YEARS OF
THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES
New York

Academy of Sciences
7 World Trade Center

Nobel Laureate neurobiologist Gerald Edelman will share brand new observations about the evolution of the human brain and the emergence of consciousness.

Renowned psychologist Paul Ekman will explain Darwin's insights into the origin and nature of compassion.

And UC Berkeley neuroscience and biological anthropology professor Terrence Deacon will discuss the evolution of language.

Admission: \$25. Info: www.nyas.org/1120

November 24 – 30 is
Church/State Separation Week
 Separate yourself from church
 all week long.

ANOTHER CHILD DIES OF UNANSWERED PRAYERS

Kate Harding

(Excerpted from *Broadsheet* on *salon.com*, 10/9/09)

Two-year-old Kent Schnaible died of bacterial pneumonia on January 24th, after his parents spent a week praying for him to heal instead of taking him to a doctor. The parents, Herbert and Catherine, are now on trial for involuntary manslaughter, conspiracy to commit involuntary manslaughter and endangering the welfare of a child. That's nothing new. Parents have been prosecuted for this kind of thing before, and gone to prison -- but it doesn't seem to deter people from adopting belief systems that put their children at grave risk.

If I defy all my instincts, I can try to muster some sympathy for Herbert and Catherine Schnaible, who have, after all, lost a beloved child. In theory, this should not be that hard. I have no trouble feeling compassion for parents who make the tragic mistake of leaving their children in hot cars, for instance -- in large part because I can't imagine any punishment worse than living with having done it. I can even understand too well how parents might miss the signals that their child was not only sick but dying. Several years ago, family friends of mine lost their two-year-old daughter to pneumonia, after a week of worrying about her cough but being assured by a pediatrician and all four grandparents that it only sounded like run-of-the-mill croup. The mother, in particular, was accused of being overprotective, and by the time it became undeniable that something much more serious was wrong, it was too late. Herbert Schnaible's lawyer says his client "cared for his child and thought his child was getting better" -- just like my friends, with the same horrible outcome. So why does his story make me furious and judgmental, when others' only engender overwhelming sympathy and sadness?

Perhaps because Herbert Schnaible's lawyer also says, "his client did everything in his power to care for his son in the days before he died -- feeding him and giving him liquids." To characterize feeding your gravely ill child as doing everything in your power to care for him in 2009 -- as opposed to, say 1509 -- strikes me as so irresponsible as to be unforgivable. The Schnaibles weren't tragically misinformed by a pediatrician, because they never consulted one. They weren't mocked for overreacting, because by any reasonable standard, they were underreacting.

And really, that's what it comes down to: Whether you can accept that the kind of person who will refuse to seek medical assistance for a sick child, relying instead on some god's will, qualifies as "reasonable" in any context. I can't. Period. When a parent's superstitious beliefs prevent a child from living long enough to accept or reject those beliefs on his own terms, I can understand why the

"new atheists" argue that as a society, we should quit cutting religion so much slack. When someone's demonstrably false ideas lead to the death of a child, how can we prioritize their right to believe such things?

And yet, if we believe in freedom of religion -- and fear the consequences of diluting it -- how can we not?

We do, at least, have a system in place to punish those whose religious beliefs conflict sharply with the laws of the land, but that doesn't necessarily save any children from death by superstition; to do that would require some intervention before tragedy occurs. And yet, as soon as I start talking about religion and saving children's lives in the same sentence, I can't help noticing the echoes of the fundamentalist anti-choice movement, arguing that their god's definition of child murder must be respected by all. Therein lies the problem with picking and choosing which religious beliefs to respect; others will always choose differently, and believe just as fervently that they are right. (At least the new atheist argument that no belief in any god should be respected, end of story, is comparatively quite fair and consistent.)

If we don't believe in restricting people's right to believe whatever they choose, then there's really not much to do besides hope that the children of people who believe in faith healing are lucky enough to stay healthy on their own, and punish the parents whose children aren't so lucky. It's outrageous, it shouldn't keep happening, and yet, it does. What else is there to say?

Comment: In the 21st century, how is denying a child medical care different from denying him/her food or shelter? -- JR

WHO'S GUILTY?

Alfred Henick

Dale and Leilani Neumann, the Wisconsin couple who let their 11-year old daughter die while they prayed, were just sentenced to six months in prison. They and their friends sat in a circle with their desperately-ill daughter on the floor in the center, praying for God to heal her. When she stopped breathing, someone called 911.

The poor child had very treatable diabetes. She died because of stupidity, pure and simple. The crucial question arises: Who is most responsible for this stupidity, the ignorant parents of the child or the college-trained ministers, priests, rabbis, or other clerical intellectuals who have brainwashed and misled these simple parents with inane, absurd, illogical, and dangerous dogma since they were born? The benevolent omnipotence of God, Jesus loves you, the immense power of prayer, etc., etc.

The judge in this case, when he pronounced sentence, proclaimed in his judicial wisdom, "God probably works through other people -- some of them doctors." Does this mean that the same God who created the universe in several days, who splits oceans with the wave

of a hand, could not save an innocent child without the help of a mere human doctor? Maybe we should be praying to the A.M.A.

I'm surprised that many more incidents of this nature do not occur. Maybe the vast majority of people who are religious, who believe in the power of prayer and the omnipotence of God, are not as faithful as they claim when it comes down to life and death. To admit that would risk being called an atheist or agnostic.

Heaven forbid!

HOW IS VACCINATION "CONTROVERSIAL"?

Herb Silverman

President, Secular Coalition for America

(Reprinted from "Spare Rods, Not Vaccines," in his "On Faith" column in The Washington Post, 10/13/09)

Q: Polls show a majority of Americans are concerned about the H1N1 virus (swine flu), but also about the safety and efficacy of the swine flu vaccine. Is it ethical to say no to this or any vaccine? Are there valid religious reasons to accept or decline a vaccine? Will you get a swine flu shot? Will your children?

The following is my opinion, but not a logical syllogism: There are religious reasons to decline a vaccine, there are valid reasons to decline a vaccine, but there are no valid religious reasons to decline a vaccine.

I think an adult should have maximum decision-making freedom on issues that involve him or her, alone. However, since all viruses are contagious, ethical considerations demand taking into account how declining a vaccine may also affect others.

Society has a special duty to protect children from abuse and physical harm, without regard to religious motivation. If a child dies from a burst appendix because parents neglected to seek effective and proven medical care, it makes no difference to me whether the parents preferred instead to pray or watch television. I don't doubt the sincerity and concerns of most religious parents, but abuse by any other name is still abuse. Not only have some children died because a rod was not spared, some have also died because a vaccine *was* spared.

Ignoring scientific evidence need not just be a side effect of religion. A noted atheist like Bill Maher, for example, has at least one thing in common with some of the religious fundamentalists he derides – an anti-vaccination belief. One may oppose all vaccinations because of a belief that God requires only faith in Him, or because of a belief in pseudo-scientific, alternative health claims. I agree with Bill Maher on most issues, and he should certainly understand why almost all atheists disagree with his vaccination position – the preponderance of evidence that vaccines are safe and effective. Fortunately, Bill Maher neither wants nor has children. I wish the same could be said of the religious anti-vaccinationists.

Of course, decisions about all proposed vaccinations are generally not as clear-cut as with smallpox or polio. On the other hand, when the overwhelming body of health professionals have recommended vaccinations, they have been overwhelmingly correct. With some of the newer vaccines, like H1N1, we may only be sure retroactively about the best decision. As for whether I would like to receive the swine flu shot, I can state an unequivocal "probably." Then again, it's conceivable that I could change my mind tomorrow. One certainty is that I plan to base my decision on what I view as the best available evidence at the time – the scientific, not talk show, evidence.

And that's *not* the god's truth.

STUPIDITY OR IGNORANCE SEEM TO BE OUR CHOICES

Wiley Miller

(Transcribed from Mr. Miller's "Non Sequitur" syndicated newspaper comic strip, 10/14/09)

Customer at diner counter: Is it my imagination or are people really more stupid today?

Waitress: No, stupid is an inability to learn. People haven't lost that.

Customer: Well then why is ignorance so rampant when we have more information available than ever?

(Waitress uses remote to turn on TV)

Voice from TV: ... and there it is, clearly written between the lines ... *they want to tax your use of gravity!!*

Waitress: Stupid is a condition, ignorance is a choice.

Customer: And it grabs better ratings.

IT ISN'T "LIBERAL MEDIA BIAS" – IT'S CRAP BIAS

Norman Lear on "Balloon Boy" and CBS, NBC, ABC, CNN, MSNBC and FOX: "Did any of them find a minute to wonder if their scraping of the hogwash/bullshit/celebrity-baked crap from the bottom of the news barrel and serving it up 24/7 doesn't have something to do with creating a climate that mistakes entertainment for news to the extent that it all but seduces a Richard and Mayumi Heene into believing they are—even if what they dream up to qualify is a hoax—entitled to their 15 minutes?"

THE REAL FIRST THANKSGIVING

Tony Horwitz

(From an excerpt of his book, A Voyage Long and Strange, on delanceyplace.com 5/21/09)

Author Tony Horwitz mused on the discovery of America after hearing from a Plymouth Rock tour guide named Claire that the most common question from tourists was why the date etched on the rock was 1620 instead of 1492: "People think Columbus

dropped off the Pilgrims and sailed home." Claire had to patiently explain that Columbus's landing and the Pilgrims' arrival occurred a thousand miles and 128 years apart. ...

By the time the first English settled, other Europeans had already reached half of the forty-eight states that today make up the continental United States. One of the earliest arrivals was Giovanni da Verrazzano, who toured the Eastern Seaboard in 1524, almost a full century before the Pilgrims arrived. ... Even less remembered are the Portuguese pilots who steered Spanish ships along both coasts of the continent in the sixteenth century, probing upriver to Bangor, Maine, and all the way to Oregon. ... In 1542, Spanish conquistadors completed a reconnaissance of the continent's interior: scaling the Appalachians, rafting the Mississippi, peering down the Grand Canyon, and galloping as far inland as central Kansas. ...

The Spanish didn't just explore: they settled, from the Rio Grande to the Atlantic. Upon founding St. Augustine, the first European city on U.S. soil, the Spanish gave thanks and dined with Indians fifty-six years before the Pilgrim Thanksgiving at Plymouth. ...

Plymouth, it turned out, wasn't even the first English colony in New England. That distinction belonged to Fort St. George, in Popham, Maine. Nor were the Pilgrims the first to settle Massachusetts. In 1602, a band of English built a fort on the island of Cuttyhunk. They came, not for religious freedom, but to get rich from digging sassafras, a commodity prized in Europe as a cure for the clap. ...

The Pilgrims, and later, the Americans who pushed west from the Atlantic, didn't pioneer a virgin wilderness. They occupied a land long since transformed by European contact. ... Samoset, the first Indian the Pilgrims met at Plymouth, greeted the settlers in English. The first thing he asked for was beer.

THE WAY-TOO-EARLY CHRISTMAS SONG

Paul & Storm

(Reprinted from paulandstorm.com)

It's not December,
It's barely even November,
Outside it's still too warm for snow to fall.
Halloween was yesterday,
And winter's still a ways away,
But try to tell that to the folks down at the mall.
Inside's a winter wonderland -
I'm sorry, I don't understand,
'cause mistletoe on Veteran's Day seems wrong.
But the shops are filled with Christmas cheer
And on the speakers, all you hear
Is the Way-Too-Early Christmas Song.

Leaves just started changing,
But the stores are rearranging
Their décor to wintry Christmas themes.
See the red and green displays:
"Just 58 more shopping days" -
And cardboard elves are planting plastic trees.
Jesus in his manger cradle,
Plus a little token dreidel
In a big display next to the Cinnabon.
With three wise men and gifts they bring;
Just plug them in, and they all sing
The Way-Too-Early Christmas Song.

I know you need to satisfy your investors
But couldn't you wait at least until
The Savior's third trimester?
Finally, just outside the Master-Cuts
Was Santa, and that fat bastard's
"Ho-ho-ho"-ing drove me up the wall.
Something snapped, I lost control
And kicked him square in his North Pole.
And as he dropped, I decked him in his halls.
So, my friends, I wish you well
From the mall security holding cell -
I hope that they don't keep me here too long.
May you and yours find peace and love
Unless you are the writer of
The Way-Too-Early Christmas Song.

A CATHOLIC FUNDS AN ABORTION

Colin Rafferty

Why would anyone steal a 300-year-old painting of the Virgin Mary, valued at \$100,000, from the St. Cecilia Cathedral in Omaha, Nebraska, and sell it for \$3,000 in Mexico? 39-year-old Aurelio Vallerillo-Sanchez, married with children, had a perfectly good reason: he needed to finance an abortion for his 14-year-old girlfriend.

But he couldn't arrange the procedure in Mexico (perhaps doctors there were a little suspicious of "Uncle Aurelio's" concern for his "niece"?). Arrested back in Nebraska, he now faces up to 70 years in prison.

And if there were a god, he'd be in seriously big trouble.

ISLAMIST ANTI-WOMAN INSANITY

Tracy Clark-Flory

(Based on "Broadsheet" on salon.com 10/16/09)

In a case of Sharia law meets "Girls Gone Wild," the Somali extremist group *al Shabaab* is publicly whipping women for wearing bras, which it says are an anti-Islamic "deception." Crazy enough for you? Wait. The women then have to remove their brassieres—in front of the judges, of course—and shake their breasts.

THANKS, WE THINK Barry Lynn

(Excerpted and adapted from an Americans United press release 10/1/09)

Liberty Counsel, a far-right legal organization affiliated with the late Jerry Falwell's Liberty University, has unveiled a program called "Adopt a Liberal." Supporters are exhorted to pray for one of 11 liberals on a list.

New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg;
Secretary of State Hillary Clinton;
Massachusetts Congressman Barney Frank;
John Holdren, White House Director of Science and Technology;
Mr. Barry Lynn;
Janet Napolitano, Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security;
President Barack Obama;
Harry Reid, Senate Majority Leader;
Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House;
California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger;
Maine Senator Olympia Snowe.

Liberty Counsel hopes the prayers of its supporters will lead "the liberals" to change their political views.

"Please pray daily for the liberal(s) of your choice," their website exhorts, "so each can become a good influence on our Nation's culture. Prayer is powerful! It allows God to change the minds of those for whom we are praying. In fact, we fully expect that many of our adoptees will 'graduate' from this prayer program with vivid testimonies of God having changed their lives and worldviews!"

Americans United for Separation of Church and State Executive Director Barry W. Lynn—the only non-government official on the list—says having prayers said on his behalf by supporters of a Religious Right group certainly beat the prayers being said for his death. Recently, two Religious Right activists, Gordon James Klingenschmitt of Colorado and the Rev. Wiley Drake of California, have announced that they are praying for Lynn's death (*PIQUE*, October, 2008, "Pulpit Freedom Sunday"). Lynn said he much prefers the approach of the Liberty Counsel.

But, he also notes, that any Liberty Counsel supporter who chooses to adopt him had better be prepared. "I like to stay up late, and I'm not doing any chores around the house."

Correction: In October *PIQUE*, the name of the organization of freethinking service men and women and veterans, the acronym of which is MAAF, was garbled. The correct name is the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers.

OCTOBER 7, 2009, A DATE THAT WILL LIVE IN SOMEDAMNTHING OR OTHER

"It's a freedom of religion issue: atheists should have as much right to resurrection by means of science as Christians have to resurrection by means of faith."

— Flash Light

In his nomination statement for the SHSNY Board of Directors election in 2008, Flash Light proposed an unusual platform:

"I propose to clone a willing dead atheist, and thereby attempt to resurrect her/him from the dead by means of applied genetic engineering science. I believe if atheists succeed in raising their dead before theists, they can call Pascal's wager, and win converts to science & reason."

"I don't intend to attempt this cloning on some remote island, but rather to pursue the right to resurrect dead atheists via cloning through proper legal channels, if only for the sake of addressing fundamental metaphysical questions in a new legal light: that of genetic engineering science."

He lost the election, but the dream didn't die (actually, not dying is the dream). On October 7, in John Rafferty and Donna Marxer's apartment, Flash took the first step toward the eventual cloning of an atheist.

With a DNA-Archive sample collection kit from DNAdirect ("Guidance & Decision Support for Genomic Medicine") Flash had Dr. Marvin (Chic) Schissel swab cheek cells from inside his mouth with three cotton swabs, which were then mailed back to DNAdirect for processing and preservation.



Chic signs himself over to posterity



The modern Flashenstein at work

When the three samples are returned, we'll have an appropriate ceremony at an SHSNY event (stay tuned for details), then one each will be kept by Flash, Chic and John (room temperature storage is okay, but we'll keep them in fridges) in anticipation of the day when Flash finds a way to (legally) clone an atheist. As he e-mailed to Chic:

Dr. Schissel: Thank you for your courageous act of having your DNA sample taken for preservation and future resurrection by means of science. You will help prove whether science can raise the dead by using genetic engineering to clone a new copy of your body, and using psychological reha-

bilitation therapy to help your cloned brain recover from the amnesia caused by death. Thank you for having the courage to risk your immortal soul to further the cause of science. — Cheers, Flash

For his part, Dr. Schissel is delighted with the prospects of his second-hand immortality.

The future of humanity is now assured: I will be cloned! Despite my celebrated humility, selection for this honor makes me swell with uncharacteristic pride. However, there have been some unexpected and unsettling consequences. My wife has taken to calling me "Dolly." More troubling, I have discovered that she has asked Flash and John to keep me and send her back the clone.

I urge all of us to keep up membership in SHSNY to see how this will all play out.

While not, repeat not, holding your breath. — JR

MORE UNRAVELLING IN AMHERST

Following the unseemly June 2 ouster of Council for Secular Humanism founder Paul Kurtz as Chairman of the Center for Inquiry/Transnational ("What a Mess," July, 2009 PIQUE), Paul's son Jonathan has resigned his several posts with CSH, CFI, the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry and Prometheus Books. In an October 12 letter to the CFI Board, he wrote:

"Over the last several months I have been completely disheartened by the direction and overall

management of CFI. I believe that a once great organization is cutting and slashing its way to ruin. It has in my opinion reduced itself into a culture of small-minded ideas and misguided philosophy. It has also become painfully obvious to me that my voice is neither listened to nor respected among the leaders of this organization.

To think that in its current state this organization will inspire and motivate the new generation of Secular Humanists and Scientific Rationalists is laughable and very sad. It seems to me that this organization has lost sight of its original goals.

"I see the major problem as the board rushed into a situation that it was not prepared to deal with. The Board's succession plan [i.e.: for a successor to Paul Kurtz] didn't have a plan, and they have been forced to react to situations ever since. I tried to offer compromises and maintain my neutrality during all of this as best I could. But I see now that I have no other choice.

"It is with great sadness that I, Jonathan Kurtz, resign from the Board of Directors of all five corporations of the Center For Inquiry effective immediately. I also resign as Vice Chair."

Question: Why can't we have a forthright statement of exactly what happened and what the hell is going on from CFI CEO Ron Lindsay and/or Richard Schroeder, President of the CFI Board? — JR

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