

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

March, 2012

Who gets to call who an atheist? Or a fundamentalist, an evangelical or a journalist? We worry this month about Jesus's politics, Mitt Romney's father-in-law, and where Maureen Dowd came from; about wearing veils in Tunisia, eating babies in America, and the poison in your fireplace; about the pharmacological future of morality and, of course, the end of the world. All this in the month in which the blinkered bishops, once again, tripped over their swirling skirts. *Erin go bragh!* – JR

THE CHURCH NEVER MISSES AN OPPORTUNITY TO MISS AN OPPORTUNITY

Andrew Sullivan

(Excerpted from "How Obama Set a Contraception Trap for the Right" in *Newsweek*, 2012/02/13)

Who knew the sexual and religious politics of the 1990s were suddenly back, under the president who promised he'd try to end them? And who knew the president himself—who has made an elegant art form out of avoiding exactly these kinds of controversies in his first three years—would have made the final call on the one that suddenly united the entire Republican right in roiling rage? That decision was the now-infamous one to propose a new rule to mandate coverage of contraception, sterilization, and morning-after pills in all health-insurance plans, exempting purely religious institutions, but including Catholic-run hospitals, colleges, and charities that serve the general public and employ many non-Catholics. ...

Take a look at the polling. Ask Americans if they believe that contraception should be included for free in all health-care plans and you get a 55 percent majority in favor, with 40 percent against. Ask American Catholics, and that majority actually rises above the national average, to 58 percent. A 49 percent plurality of all Americans supported the original Obama rule forcing Catholic institutions to provide contraception coverage. And once again, American Catholics actually support that more controversial position by a slightly higher margin than all Americans, with 52 percent backing it. So on religious-freedom grounds, the country is narrowly divided, but with a small majority on Obama's side.

And on the issue of contraception itself, studies have shown that a staggering 98 percent of Catholic women not only believe in birth control but have used it. How is it

possible to describe this issue as a violation of individual conscience, when no one is forced to use contraception against their will, and most Catholics have already consulted their conscience, are fine with the pill, and want it covered? This is not like abortion, a far, far graver issue. Even the church hierarchy—in a famous commission set up by Pope John XXIII to study birth control—voted to allow oral contraception under some circumstances, only to be controversially vetoed by Pope Paul VI in 1968. And the truth is, there is no real debate among most actual living, breathing American Catholics on the issue, who tend to be more liberal than most Americans. They long ago dismissed the Vatican's position on this. And after the sex-abuse scandal, they are even less likely to take the bishops' moral authority on sexual matters seriously. ...

If the Catholic bishops and the religious right reject the proposed Obama compromise, they will be digging themselves even deeper into positions that are fast losing traction. Time after time, they have rejected compromises on social issues because of fundamentalist rigidity, not Christian engagement with a changing world. They could have agreed, for example, to secular civil unions for gays—and not full "marriage" rights—but instead they insisted that neither was acceptable at all. They could have made a strong and vital case for the immorality and evil of abortion as a civil-rights issue, without demanding it be criminalized by the state. They could have accepted a compromise on contraception in health-care policies, but they have refused. And their fundamentalist intransigence has not worked in persuading anyone.

Over the past decade, for example, we have seen a dramatic increase in support for gay marriage—to the point where it is supported by a majority of Americans. And the most supportive of religious groups—after Jews—are

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

SHSNY, P.O. Box 7661, F.D.R. Station, New York, NY 10150-7661 / 212-308-2165 / www.shsny.org

Individual membership \$40 per year; Family membership \$65; Subscription only \$30.

Articles published in PIQUE are archived in <http://www.shsny.org>. They may be reprinted, in full or in part, in other newsletters. The URL (<http://www.shsny.org>) should be referenced.

SHSNY is an Affiliated Local Group of the Council for Secular Humanism, and a Charter Chapter of the American Humanist Association.

Catholics, with 56 percent of white Catholics and 53 percent of Latino Catholics supporting full marriage rights for gay couples. Only on abortion do Catholics come remotely close to agreeing with their leaders. Which is one reason why so many Catholics support contraception in health-care plans, especially for the poor: because it prevents the far greater evil of abortion.

There was a time not so long ago when Catholics and other Christians weighed various moral claims to find a balance. Sometimes, the lesser of two evils was preferable. For centuries, for example, Catholic theologians, including the greatest, Thomas Aquinas, argued that human life begins not at conception but at some point in the second trimester. For centuries the Catholic Church allowed married priests. For centuries Catholics believed that extending the end of life by extreme measures like feeding tubes was a violation of natural death, which Christians of all people should not be afraid of. But this ancient, moderate, pragmatic reasoning has been rejected by the last two popes, who have increasingly become rigid, fundamentalist, and hostile to prudential balancing acts in the real, modern world we live in. Their radical fundamentalism—so alien to the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and to so many lay Catholics—has discredited the core priorities of Christianity, failed to persuade their own flock, and led to increasing politicization.

And the obsession among Catholic and evangelical leaders with an issue like contraception stands in stark contrast to their indifference to, for example, the torture in which the last administration engaged, the growing social inequality fostered by unfettered capitalism, the Christian moral imperative of universal health care, and the unjust use of the death penalty. That's why younger evangelicals are also alienated. They want to refocus on issues of the poor, prison rape, human trafficking, and the kind of injustices Jesus emphasized, rather than on these sexual sideshows the older generation seems so obsessed with.

ON CATHOLIC "BIRTH CONTROL"

What's wrong with the rhythm method anyway? That's how I got here. — *Maureen Dowd*

EVANGELICALS AND FUNDAMENTALISTS

We non-theists often confuse or conflate the terms "evangelical" and "fundamentalist". A writer to the January 29 *New York Times Book Review* offered a concise explanation and distinction worth noting.

"'Evangelicals' (he wrote) is a term that should not be confused with 'fundamentalists'. Many Christian fundamentalists are indeed evangelicals, but that isn't always the case. Nor are all evangelicals fundamentalists.

"Fundamentalism pertains to a set of beliefs, sometimes referred to as 'the five points', that were adopted by the Presbyterian General Assembly in 1910, including the belief in the divine inspiration and thus inerrancy of the Bible; the authenticity of miracles; Jesus' virgin birth; Christ's atonement for the sins of the world; and the physical

resurrection of, and the eventual second coming of, Christ.

"Evangelicalism, on the other hand, pertains to spreading the Gospel. It's an action rather than a set of beliefs. Although many 'mainstream' Christians do not consider Mormonism or the Jehovah's Witnesses to be true forms of Christianity, their persistent door-knocking means that members of both organizations are evangelicals par excellence."

THE EVANGELICAL BRAIN TRUST

Molly Worthen

(Excerpted from *The NYTimes Book Review*, 2012/01/06)

The central question of the culture wars that have raged since the 1970s is not whether abortion is murder or gay marriage a civil right, but whether the Enlightenment was a good thing. Many evangelical Americans think the answer is no, according to *The Anointed*, a field guide to the evangelical experts you haven't heard of — but should.

Many evangelicals, authors Randall J. Stephens and Karl W. Giberson say, get their information on dinosaurs and fossils from Ken Ham, an Australian with a bachelor's degree from the Queensland Institute of Technology. Ham believes human reason should confirm the Bible rather than reinterpret it, and teaches that God created the world a few thousand years ago. His ministry, "Answers in Genesis", includes a radio program broadcast over more than 1,000 stations, a magazine with a circulation of 70,000 and the multimillion-dollar Creation Museum in Kentucky. ...

When it comes to history, many evangelicals reject the world-class historians in their own fold — such scholars as Mark Noll and George Marsden, who advocate a balanced account of Christianity's role in early America — in favor of the amateur David Barton's evangelical makeover of Washington and Madison.

Why would anyone heed ersatz "experts" over trained authorities far more qualified to comment on the origins of life or the worldview of the founding fathers? Drawing on case studies of evangelical gurus, Stephens and Giberson argue that intellectual authority works differently in the "parallel culture" of evangelicalism. In this world of prophecy conferences and home-schooling curriculums, a dash of charisma, a media empire and a firm stance on the right side of the line between "us" and "them" matter more than a fancy degree.

To the evangelical experts profiled in this book, the chief purpose of science or historical research is not to expand human understanding, but to elucidate God's will. That doesn't require academic scholarship — just a "common sense" reading of the Bible and a knack for finding evidence in today's headlines rather than in the record of the past: "America's worrisome slide into immorality, liberalism and unbelief was caused by the widespread acceptance of evolution and its pernicious influence in areas like education, law, sexual mores, politics and so on," in the authors' paraphrase of creationist logic. Similarly, amateur Christian historians "have pressed history into the service of politics and religion," twisting facts to support their feelings

that the country has veered from its biblical moorings.

The Anointed condemns the current state of evangelical intellectual life, but Stephens and Giberson avoid monolithic stereotypes. They are careful to note that evangelicals disagree wildly among themselves about almost everything. Their interview subjects range from a home-schooled Baptist who has never had a non-Christian friend to academics trained in the Ivy League. Still, a reader of *The Anointed* is likely to conclude that the average evangelical hates the academic establishment almost as much as he loves Jesus.

The authors make a strong case that serious scholars are prophets without honor in a culture in which successful leaders capitalize on “anti-intellectualism, populism, a religious free market, in- and out- group dynamics, endorsement by God and threats from Satan”. The most influential expert in their pantheon, James Dobson, the founder of Focus on the Family, studied at the University of Southern California and, early on, published research in peer-reviewed journals, but later resigned from the American Psychological Association and turned his back on secular accolades in favor of the anointing power of the evangelicals who buy his best-selling books on child-rearing. ...

Two centuries ago evangelicals retaliated against science’s incursions on biblical authority by trying to out-rationalize the scientists, appropriating Enlightenment principles and treating Scripture as a “storehouse of facts”, as the 19th-century theologian Charles Hodge put it. The point was that Christianity is eminently reasonable. Even the untutored layman can understand the Bible’s meaning. Stephens and Giberson note their subjects’ zest for “unmediated” truth, for bypassing professionals and presenting “evidence” directly to the Christian masses – just as Martin Luther, with his calls for *sola Scriptura*, bypassed Catholic priests. “I don’t interpret Scripture; I just read it”, Ken Ham says. Glenn Beck, when he made David Barton a darling of his media empire, contrasted him with historians who “bring in their own ideas instead of going back to the original sources.”

At its best, evangelicals’ commitment to applying the “Christian worldview” to every dimension of life has led young people to “reflect on their deepest beliefs” in a manner that “lacks a secular counterpart”, Stephens and Giberson write. This is the crux of their book, and a point they might have developed further. In the Christian worldview, human reasoning, without God’s guidance, will always err: faith must precede the scientific method. Serious evangelical thinkers – not just lightweights like Ham – insist that facts and values are inseparable. The theologian Michael Horton recently complained in the pages of *Christianity Today* that in modern America “reason rests upon public facts, faith, on private values . . .” but that “the Gospel tears down the wall between reason and faith, public and private, objective and subjective truth, by its very content.”

For all evangelicals’ supposed disdain for secular academia, it is telling that their favorite guru is not an undereducated quack, but a thinker that *The Anointed* mentions only in passing: C. S. Lewis. American evangelicals

adore Lewis because he was an Oxford don who defended the faith in a plummy English accent, thus proving that one could be a respected intellectual and a Christian too. The “parallel culture” that *The Anointed* vividly describes, then, is not a bald rejection of Enlightenment reason, but a product of evangelicals’ complex struggle to reconcile faith with the life of the mind.

Self-styled experts like Ham appear to be spokesmen of certitudes. But their promises to reconcile the Bible with modern thought do not conceal that this balancing act has forced evangelicals to live in a crisis of intellectual authority – a confusion so unabating it has become the status quo.

WHAT WOULD JESUS BE?

Giddian Beer

A while back lots of folks were speculating about what would Jesus do, drive, eat, wear, etc. It seems no one asked What Would Jesus *Be*. Here are some clues, from: “The Teachings of Jesus - Gospel Mysteries”, www.gospel-mysteries.net/teachings-jesus.html.

In Mark 10:25, Jesus says, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God.” Mark 10:17-22 indicates that the only way a rich person can go to heaven is, in Jesus’ words, to “sell everything you have and give to the poor”.

Jesus also warned against the accumulation of wealth ... in Matthew 6:19 he says, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth”; in Matthew 6:24, he says, “You cannot serve both God and Money”. In Luke 6:24 he says, “Woe to you who are rich.” Jesus disapproved of wealth because he thought it was wrong for some people to live in wasteful luxury while others starved.

According to the Book of Acts, his original followers tried to live by these teachings after he left them. They formed a community in Jerusalem, known as the Nazarenes, in which everyone “had everything in common” (Acts 2:44), and any new member had to sell his or her possessions and give the proceeds to a common fund.

So Jesus would be a Socialist. Certainly he would not and could not be a Republican.

ARE WE READY FOR A “MORALITY PILL”?

Peter Singer and Agata Sagan

(Transcribed from *The Stone*, the NYTimes online “forum for contemporary philosophers on issues both timely and timeless”, 2012/01/28)

Last October, in Foshan, China, a two-year-old girl was run over by a van. The driver did not stop. Over the next seven minutes, more than a dozen people walked or bicycled past the injured child. A second truck ran over her. Eventually, a woman pulled her to the side, and her mother arrived. The child died in a hospital. The entire scene was captured on video and caused an uproar when it was shown by a television station and posted online. A similar event occurred in London in 2004, as have others, far from the lens of a video camera.

Yet people can, and often do, behave in very different ways. A news search for the words “hero saves” will routinely turn up stories of bystanders braving oncoming trains, swift currents and raging fires to save strangers from harm. Acts of extreme kindness, responsibility and compassion are, like their opposites, nearly universal. Why are some people prepared to risk their lives to help a stranger when others won’t even stop to dial an emergency number?

Scientists have been exploring questions like this for decades. In the 1960s and early ’70s, famous experiments by Stanley Milgram and Philip Zimbardo suggested that most of us would, under specific circumstances, voluntarily do great harm to innocent people. During the same period, John Darley and C. Daniel Batson showed that even some seminary students on their way to give a lecture about the parable of the Good Samaritan would, if told that they were running late, walk past a stranger lying moaning beside the path. More recent research has told us a lot about what happens in the brain when people make moral decisions. But are we getting any closer to understanding what drives our moral behavior?

Here’s what much of the discussion of all these experiments missed: Some people did the right thing. A recent experiment (about which we have some ethical reservations) at the University of Chicago seems to shed new light on why.

Researchers there took two rats that shared a cage and trapped one of them in a tube that could be opened only from the outside. The free rat usually tried to open the door, eventually succeeding. Even when the free rats could eat up all of a quantity of chocolate before freeing the trapped rat, they mostly preferred to free their cage-mate. The experimenters interpret their findings as demonstrating empathy in rats. But if that is the case, they have also demonstrated that individual rats vary, for only 23 of 30 rats freed their trapped companions.

The causes of the difference in their behavior must lie in the rats themselves. It seems plausible that humans, like rats, are spread along a continuum of readiness to help others. There has been considerable research on abnormal people, like psychopaths, but we need to know more about relatively stable differences (perhaps rooted in our genes) in the great majority of people as well.

Undoubtedly, situational factors can make a huge difference, and perhaps moral beliefs do as well, but if humans are just different in their predispositions to act morally, we also need to know more about these differences. Only then will we gain a proper understanding of our moral behavior, including why it varies so much from person to person and whether there is anything we can do about it.

If continuing brain research does in fact show biochemical differences between the brains of those who help others and the brains of those who do not, could this lead to a “morality pill” — a drug that makes us more likely to help? Given the many other studies linking biochemical conditions to mood and behavior, and the proliferation of drugs to modify them that have followed, the idea is not

far-fetched. If so, would people choose to take it? Could criminals be given the option, as an alternative to prison, of a drug-releasing implant that would make them less likely to harm others? Might governments begin screening people to discover those most likely to commit crimes? Those who are at much greater risk of committing a crime might be offered the morality pill; if they refused, they might be required to wear a tracking device that would show where they had been at any given time, so that they would know that if they did commit a crime, they would be detected.

Fifty years ago, Anthony Burgess wrote *A Clockwork Orange*, a futuristic novel about a vicious gang leader who undergoes a procedure that makes him incapable of violence. Stanley Kubrick’s 1971 movie version sparked a discussion in which many argued that we could never be justified in depriving someone of his free will, no matter how gruesome the violence that would thereby be prevented. No doubt any proposal to develop a morality pill would encounter the same objection.

But if our brain’s chemistry does affect our moral behavior, the question of whether that balance is set in a natural way or by medical intervention will make no difference in how freely we act. If there are already biochemical differences between us that can be used to predict how ethically we will act, then either such differences are compatible with free will, or they are evidence that at least as far as some of our ethical actions are concerned, none of us have ever had free will anyway. In any case, whether or not we have free will, we may soon face new choices about the ways in which we are willing to influence behavior for the better.

WHY WE LIVE IN NEW YORK #81

Who knew this was a problem? But now, thanks to one far-seeing “pro-life” state senator, Oklahoma will soon be protected from flesh-eating zombies.

On February 13 in the Oklahoma legislature, Senator Ralph Shortey (R – District 44) introduced Senate Bill 1418, which mandates that, starting November 1, 2012:

No person or entity shall manufacture or knowingly sell food or any other product intended for human consumption which contains aborted human fetuses in the ingredients or which used aborted human fetuses in the research or development of any of the ingredients.

The full and august legislative body is considering the proposed law, and we can all sigh a collective “Whew!”

IF YOU WERE WORRYING ABOUT THAT MAYAN-CALENDAR 2012 END-OF-THE-WORLD THING ...

Dear 21st Century:

Please stop freaking out about 2012. Our calendar ends there because some Spanish dirtbags invaded our country and we got a little busy, okay?

Sincerely,

The Mayans

(Thanks to Elizabeth Morris)

OUR DARWIN DAY & ANNIVERSARY BANQUET: A GOOD TIME WAS HAD BY ALL!



Forty-five members and friends turned out February 10 for our fourth annual Darwin Day and SHSNY Anniversary banquet – exactly 24 years, to the evening, after the first 15 members of the Secular Humanist Society of New York met in a recording studio on West 42nd Street in 1988.

The setting at Golden Unicorn was elegant; dinner was delicious and over-the-top ample; conversation flowed and new friendships were made; President Rafferty (him again!) kept his remarks mercifully brief, and entertainer George Hrab capped the evening with a set of witty and provocative songs, including the Hitchens-inspired *God Is Not Great*, and the sunny, upbeat *Everything Alive Will Die Someday*.

Video highlights of the evening are (by the time this is printed, I hope) on the website, at shsny.org.



THIRD TIME IS THE CHARM! NEWT GINGRICH WINS THE SHSNY DUMBTH-OF-THE-YEAR 2011 AWARD

Is Newt the new “Comeback Kid”? Does his lopsided victory in the 2011 Dumbth-of-the-Year voting (nearly as many votes as the other four contenders combined), after trailing in the early returns, presage a similar come-from-behind victory in the 2012 Republican nominating process? Is this just the first step on the road to glory?

Nominated twice before – in 2008 for “*There is a gay and secular*

fascism in this country that wants to impose its will on the rest of us, is prepared to use violence, to use harassment”, and in 2010 for “*The secular socialist machine represents as great a threat to America as Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union once did*” – the born-again, married-again, foaming-at-the-mouth-again former Speaker finally copped the horse’s-ass trophy this year for his sublime illogic that unless America

turns rightward, we could become “*a secular atheist country, potentially one dominated by radical Islamists*”.

Final tally:

Gingrich: 49

O’Reilly: 33

Palin: 7

Bachman: 7

Cain: 5

We have received no word from Mr. Gingrich as to when he wants to pick up his Award.

SHSNY CALENDAR: MARCH - APRIL 2012

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURS, MARCH 1, 6:30 p.m.
in the Gallery room of
THE COMMUNITY CHURCH
OF NEW YORK

28 East 35 St. (Park-Mad)
(3 doors West of the church - red door)

We'll discuss

THE BETTER ANGELS
OF OUR NATURE: Why Violence has Declined - Part 2
(Sections 5-7)

by Steven Pinker

Part Two of *three* Book Club meetings devoted to

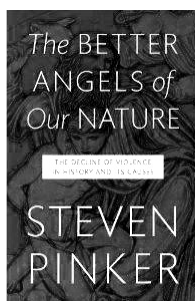
this outstanding new history, an exploration of the essence of human nature, mixing psychology and history to provide a remarkable picture of an increasingly nonviolent world. The key,

Pinker explains, is to understand our intrinsic motives – the inner demons that incline us toward violence and the better angels that steer us away – and how changing circumstances have allowed our better angels to prevail, exploding fatalist myths about humankind's inherent violence and the curse of modernity.

Not everyone at our discussion in February on Part 1 of the book agreed with Pinker's arguments. Join the discussion and let's see if you do. – *Kindle edition available.*

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

Part 3 of our discussion:
Sections 8-10
THURS, APRIL 5, 6:30 pm



SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURS, APRIL 5, 6:30 p.m.
at The Community Church
28 East 35 St. (Park-Mad)
CAIN

by Jose Saramago

In this, his last novel, José Saramago daringly reimagines the characters and narratives of the Old Testament in a "cheeky modernist update to a timeworn biblical tale" that runs from the Garden of Eden, when God realizes he has forgotten to give Adam and Eve the gift of speech, to the moment when Noah's Ark lands on the dry peak of Ararat. Doomed to forever wander, the murderer Cain struggles with the idea of faith in the face of an equally flawed God.

By turns philosophical and hilarious, *Cain* shows off the scope of Saramago's talent and makes a fitting coda for a superlative writing life. "Cain's vagabond journey builds to a stunning climax that, like the book itself, is a fitting capstone to a remarkable career."

– *Paper and Kindle editions.*

BRUNCH!

SUNDAY, MAR 18, 12 NOON

Gather for our
MONTHLY CASUAL BRUNCH
GET-TOGETHER

at BXL East, 210 East 51 St.

We'll meet at Noon just east of 3rd Ave, for outstanding Belgian fare, with dishes ranging from \$7 to \$16, and prix-fixe Sunday Brunch (including a drink) for \$18. Check it out at bxlcafe.pregraphic.com/

Everyone interested in getting together with 15-20 or more like-minded humanists and rationalists for good grub (huge selection of beers!) and lively talk in a charming East-side setting is welcome.

Bring friends!

GREAT LECTURES

TUES, MARCH 27, 7:00 p.m.
"SELLING GOD" (Part 2)
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)

Salvation is yours

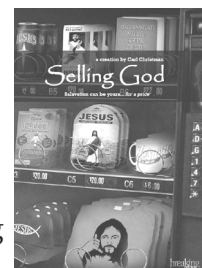
– for a price. This 2009 documentary combines black comedy and serious historical research to examine how the marketing of fundamentalist Christianity has evolved over the years, including the advent of televangelism, the new super-duper megachurches, and the religious right's post-September-11 battle for moral superiority and money.

We watched Part 1 in February, and the viewer reviews were "fascinating" and "fun". Don't miss Part 2 and a lively discussion.

April 24: "The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature", a lecture by Dr. Stephen Pinker.

And coming soon: The "God Delusion" Debate, with Professors Dawkins and Lennox; lectures by Sean Carroll and Robert Wright.

Great Lectures Night is FREE



PLANNING AHEAD

Holidays and disasters aside, the usual monthly schedule of SHSNY events is:

Book Club: First Thursday
at the Community Church of NY
Movie Night: Second Monday
at Stone Creek Lounge.

Brunch: Third Sunday
at BXL East Bistro.

Great Lectures: Fourth Tuesday
at Stone Creek Lounge.

More info: www.shsnny.org and at humanism.meetup.com/515; reasonablenewyork.org/ and 212-308-2165

SHSNY CALENDAR: MARCH - APRIL 2012

MONDAY, MARCH 12, 7:00 pm
SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)
"DEFENDING YOUR LIFE"

What if there really were an "afterlife", one in which people were judged not on "sins" or religiosity, but on how courageous they'd been in life? After Daniel Miller (Albert Brooks) dies in a car crash, he's transported to "Judgment City", where he meets the love of his (after)life, Julia (Meryl Streep).

Unfortunately, Daniel needs to defend his life on Earth before he can ascend to heaven with Julia. It seems that, like most humans, he has lived his life fearfully rather than courageously.

As explained to Daniel, people from Earth use so little of their brains (3-5 percent) that they spend most of their lives functioning on the basis of their fears. "When you use more than five percent of your brain, you don't want to be on Earth, believe me", explains Rip Torn, Daniel's defense attorney. With Lee Grant (the prosecutor) and Buck Henry, *Defending* "is imperfect, like all of Brooks' movies", but it's a sly and quirky comedy that's full of funny (and thought-provoking) ideas.

SHSNY Movie Night is FREE.

Check out the menu and prices at www.stonecreeknyc.com

TUESDAY, MAR 20, 6:00 p.m.
New York Philosophy
Cocktails & Conversations:
"The Earth Strikes Back"
at Irish Rogue, 356 West 44 St.

An evening of environmentalism, global warming (if it exists), sustainability, speciesism, and feed-back systems. Food & drink, too!

SAVE THE DATE
for our
FOURTH ANNUAL SHSNY
DAY OF REASON BRUNCH
SUNDAY, APRIL 29, 12 NOON
at historic
PETE'S TAVERN
129 East 18 Street
(at Irving Place)

Proclaim and celebrate the National Day of Reason (first Thursday in May, so May 3 this year) at our annual get-together at historic Pete's, the oldest continuously-operating bar and restaurant in New York.

Enjoy a sumptuous (and reasonable) brunch, with your choice of 11 entrees, a drink (Bloody Mary, Mimosa, etc.), coffee or tea, including all taxes and tips, for just \$25.

Then get engaged in the discussion of SHSNY's next big project:

A DAY OF REASON
PROCLAMATION
IN NEW YORK CITY, 2013!

John Rafferty will sketch the history of the National Day of Reason (and the hijacking of the originally-ecumenical "Day of Prayer" by the Religious Right), suggest the wording of a Proclamation, and outline the plan to win City Council approval of a New York Day of Reason Proclamation in 2013 ... and every year after.

Don't miss this - it's going to be fun, and exciting!

Brunch is \$25
PRE-PAYMENT IS
STRONGLY SUGGESTED!

The room only holds 50, and this event will be a sellout.

Pre-pay now at www.shsny.org
 (credit card or PayPal)

Or mail your check, made out to SHSNY, to the P.O. Box on page 1. Questions? Call 212-308-2165, and leave a call-back number.

TO JOIN THE SHSNY GROUP
AT THE REASON RALLY IN
WASHINGTON MARCH 24,
CONTACT OUR RALLY
LEADER, CARLOS MORA, AT
carlosmmora@nyc.rr.com

OTHER REASONABLE
NEW YORK EVENTS

Check them out at their websites or www.reasonablenewyork.org
NY Society for Ethical Culture:
 Fri., March 2, 7 pm - Ethics in Film: "District 9". Popcorn/Beer 6:30. \$5.
 Fri., March 23, 7 pm - Ethics and the Theater: "I Never Sang for My Father". Wine & Cheese 6:30. \$5.
Dinner & Philosophy Now: Mon, March 12, 7 pm, Bamiyan, 358 Third (at 26 St): "On Personal Identity". \$2 entry fee, plus dinner.

WEEKLY EVENTS
Sundays

Religion on the Line
 6-9:00 a.m. — WMCA, 770 AM
Equal Time for Freethought
 6:30 p.m. — WBAI-NY 99.5FM
Religion & Ethics Newsweekly
 6:30 p.m. — Channel 13

Tuesdays

Socrates Cafe - 6:00 pm
 NY Society for Ethical Culture:

Wednesdays

Atheism History Week - 5:30 p.m.
 Hosted by SHSNY's John Rafferty.
 On MNN Channel 67 and RNN Channel 110 in Manhattan, and simultaneously via live streaming on your computer at www.mnn.org

Fridays

Drinking With Atheists — Meet-like-minded friends for a fun evening of conversation. Details at: www.meetup.com/RichiesList/

Various Dates & Times

Agnostic A.A. — Seven A.A.-endorsed meetings. Schedules: agnosticAAnyc.org/meetings.html

AMERICAN ATHEISTS MUST DEFINE THEMSELVES, NOT BE DEFINED BY THE RELIGIOUS

Part 1

Susan Jacoby

(Excerpted from the [washingtonpost.com/blogs/spirited-atheist/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/spirited-atheist/), 2011/12/28)

Looking back on my five years as a contributor to “On Faith” [her “Spirited Atheist” weekly column in *The Washington Post*] I see a great paradox in the progress of American secularism: The numbers and visibility of atheists and secularists in the United States have increased but their political and social influence has not.

The large audience for the writings of atheists, most notably Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris, has led many American pundits, preachers and politicians to exaggerate the influence of secular thought in the culture as a whole. I only wish they were right.

For the warriors of the Christian right, in particular, this exaggeration serves the purpose of presenting themselves as victims in a nation where they in fact wield a power that they do not enjoy anywhere else in the developed world.

For a true measure of the limited influence exerted by atheism on popular culture, one need only turn to the closing bestseller lists for 2011. Leading the “nonfiction” *New York Times* paperback bestseller list (having been on the list for 56 weeks) is “Heaven Is for Real,” written by the minister-father of a 4-year-old boy who supposedly went to heaven during an emergency appendectomy and saw Jesus (“he had the brightest blue eyes”) and his baby sister, who was actually never born into this world because his mother suffered a miscarriage. This book is also No. 4 on the bestseller list of picture books for small children.

Guess what does not appear on any year-end *Times* bestseller list? Dawkins’s *The Magic of Reality*, an enchanting work which explains the origins of life to children in a non-didactic way that places religious myth in the context of the long human struggle to understand how we came to be, is nowhere to be found.

The point is that there is a much larger American audience for childish (in this instance, literally so) supernatural fantasies, which should no more be classified as nonfiction than Grimm’s fairy tales, than there is for any book that attempts to present the world as it is to the next generation.

That 15 to 20 percent of Americans are no longer affiliated with any church does not replace the default position occupied in American political and cultural life by religion in general and Christianity in particular.

Even more important, the most potent religious influence on American politics is exercised by those on the far religious right, who—while they represent only a minority of all believers—are backed by huge amounts of money and organizational muscle. I have written many times in this column about the organizational and financial shortcomings that make it difficult for the secular movement, and indeed for liberal religious organizations committed to upholding

secular government, to translate their values into real social and political influence.

I have also observed that secularists, unlike the religious right, do not always have the same political values. There is a deep split, as demonstrated every week in the comments about my columns, between American secularists descended from the humanism of Thomas Paine and those descended from the social Darwinists of the 19th century and the Ayn Randian “you’re on your own” anti-government ideologues of the 20th century. The problem for the secular right is that politicians who share its anti-government views are also committed to far-right religion. But the split between the humanists and the neo-social Darwinists is a serious problem for the secular movement as a whole, because the two groups find it difficult, if not impossible, to support the same candidates.

But there is another, much more important difficulty in the secular struggle to alter default assumptions about religion. Since the 1980s, the far right, especially the religious right, has been masterful at taking control of public language in a way that always places secularism and secular liberalism on the defensive.

First, the anti-abortion crusaders seized the brilliant label “pro-life” to characterize anyone who supported legal abortion as “anti-life.” The women’s movement adopted “pro-choice” as an alternative but was never entirely successful at marketing the label, as evinced by the current efforts of those fighting abortion restrictions to characterize themselves as “the real pro-lifers.” Once you start trying to appropriate the meaning of your opponents’ already twisted labels, you’re already halfway to losing whatever battle you’re fighting.

Second, the right has made a pejorative out of both intellectualism and liberalism, often equating both with godless secularism. Now the same people are trying to take control of the term “religious liberty” and redefine it to mean the freedom of religious groups to accept government money but spend it only on providing services that have their particular faith imprimatur.

At an October hearing, titled “Religious Liberty in the United States,” largely ignored by the mainstream media, Rep. Trent Franks (R-Ariz.), chair of the House Judiciary Committee’s Subcommittee on the Constitution, asserted that religious freedom is under attack in America as it has never been in the past. What Franks actually means by “religious freedom” is the liberty of religion to spend government money as it pleases. He is right, however, that this was never an issue on a national level in the past, because for most of the nation’s existence, the federal government never made the grievous error of giving money for secular purposes to faith-based organizations.

A parade of right-wing evangelical Protestants and representatives of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops testified at the hearings against all attempts by the Obama administration to attach government regulations to taxpayer money. In this view, the administration is waging “war on Christianity” by, for example, mandating that providers

with U.S. government contracts offer a “full range of reproductive services” to sex-trafficking victims in the United States and around the world. The church wants to help pregnant girls forced into prostitution by forcing them to have their abusers’ babies.

Bishop William C. Lori, head of the newly formed Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty formed by the bishops’ conference, attacked provisions of the new domestic health care law that impose any government mandates on religious health providers.

Note, again, the use of the term “religious liberty” to mean liberty for religious institutions to impose their values with taxpayer money. In practical terms, what Bishop Lori means is that when a rape victim walks into a government-funded Catholic emergency clinic, the clinic can not only refuse to offer the morning-after pill to protect her against pregnancy but can even fail to tell her about the existence of such a pill or to refer her to a nonsectarian institution that does provide such services.

The belief that religious institutions have the right to feed at the government trough while rejecting any government rules is the glue of the lobbying alliance between the Catholic bishops and right-wing evangelical Protestant leaders – an odd coupling that has never before existed in American history.

(Part 2 of Ms. Jacob’s essay will appear in April PIQUE)

NEW RULE: ATHEISM IS NOT A RELIGION

Bill Maher

(Transcribed from “Real Time with Bill Maher”, 2012/02/03)

New Rule: Until someone claims to see Christopher Hitchens’ face in a tree stump, idiots must stop claiming that atheism is a religion.

There’s one little difference: religion is defined as the belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power; and atheism is precisely *not* that. Got it? Atheism is a religion like abstinence is a sex position.

Believe it or not, I don’t really enjoy talking about religion all the time. In fact, not only is atheism not a religion, it’s not even my hobby. And that’s the best thing about being an atheist – it requires so little of your time.

But there is a growing trend in this country that needs to be called out, and that is to label any evidence-based belief a religion. Many conservatives now say that belief in man-made climate change is a religion. And Darwinism is a religion. And of course atheism, a total lack of religion, is somehow a religion, too, according to the always-reliable *Encyclopedia Moronica*.

Now, it’s a dodge, of course ... a way of saying, “Hey, we all believe in some sort of faith-based malarkey, so let’s call it a push.” No. No, no, *no!* It’s not fair that people who can’t defend their own nonsense get to create a fake “fair and balanced” argument, the way they do in asserting that evolution and creationism are equally valid.

I’m not saying that atheists are perfect thinkers; everyone has blind spots. I’m sure there are atheists who think ponytails look good on a man ... pineapple belongs on

a pizza ... Ayn Rand was an important thinker.

But when it comes to religion, we’re not two sides of the same coin. And you don’t get to put your unreason up on the same shelf with my reason. Your stuff has to go over there, on the shelf with Zeus and Thor and the Kraken. With the stuff that is not evidence-based, stuff that religious people never change their minds about. That’s not atheism.

I’m open to anything for which there is evidence. Show me a god, and I will believe in him. If Jesus Christ comes down from the sky during the halftime show of this Sunday’s Super Bowl, and turns all the nachos into loaves and fishes, well, I’ll think two things. First, how dare he interrupt Madonna? — she is gonna be *pissed!* And two, Oh, look at that, I was wrong, there He is. My bad, praise the Lord!

But that’s not going to happen. And, short of that, if you still insist atheism is a religion, then it’s only fair that we get to do all the loony stuff that you get to do. And I’m going to start, tonight, by un-baptizing Mitt Romney’s dead father-in-law.

(Shows a framed picture of Edward Davies)

In case you didn’t hear, it was discovered last week that Edward Davies, Ann Romney’s father, and an enthusiastically anti-religious scientist, who called organized faith “hogwash”, was posthumously baptized, in the Mormon tradition, fourteen months after he died. They tried to do it sooner, but he wouldn’t stop spinning in his grave.

So here is history’s first un-baptism ceremony, right now ... *(Puts on a pointed “wizard’s hat” and wields a wand)* ... for the late Edward Davies.

Dearly Beloved, we are gathered here today in the presence of math, gravity, evolution, and electricity to honor Brother Edward, and to send the powers of Seal Team 666 to rescue him from Planet Kolob* so that he may spend eternity with the kind of freethinkers he chose to hang out with on Planet Earth. So by the power granted to me by the Blair Witch, *schlemiel, schlemozel, e pluribus mumbo jumbo, expectum glorium, yo mama*, I call on the Mormon spirits to leave your body the f**k alone.

**The “planet” where Mormons believe God resides. Really.*

THE FIREPLACE DELUSION

Sam Harris

(Excerpted from samharris.org/blog/2/2)

It seems to me that many nonbelievers have forgotten — or never knew — what it is like to suffer an unhappy collision with scientific rationality. We are open to good evidence and sound argument as a matter of principle, and are generally willing to follow wherever they may lead. Certain of us have made careers out of bemoaning the failure of religious people to adopt this same attitude.

However, I recently stumbled upon an example of secular intransigence that may give readers a sense of how religious people feel when their beliefs are criticized. It’s not a perfect analogy, as you will see, but the rigorous research I’ve conducted at dinner parties suggests that it is worth

thinking about. We can call the phenomenon “the fireplace delusion”.

On a cold night, most people consider a well-tended fire to be one of the more wholesome pleasures that humanity has produced. A fire, burning safely within the confines of a fireplace or a woodstove, is a visible and tangible source of comfort to us. We love everything about it: the warmth, the beauty of its flames, and – unless one is allergic to smoke – the smell that it imparts to the surrounding air.

I am sorry to say that if you feel this way about a wood fire, you are not only wrong but dangerously misguided. I mean to seriously convince you of this – so you can consider it in part a public service announcement – but please keep in mind that I am drawing an analogy. I want you to be sensitive to how you feel, and to notice the resistance you begin to muster as you consider what I have to say. ...

Here is what we know from a scientific point of view: There is no amount of wood smoke that is good to breathe. It is at least as bad for you as cigarette smoke, and probably much worse. (One study found it to be 30 times more potent a carcinogen.) The smoke from an ordinary wood fire contains hundreds of compounds known to be carcinogenic, mutagenic, teratogenic, and irritating to the respiratory system. ...

Burning wood is also completely unnecessary, because in the developed world we invariably have better and cleaner alternatives for heating our homes. If you are burning wood in the United States, Europe, Australia, or any other developed nation, you are most likely doing so *recreationally* – and the persistence of this habit is a major source of air pollution in cities throughout the world. In fact, wood smoke often contributes more harmful particulates to urban air than any other source. ...

I suspect that many of you have already begun to marshal counterarguments of a sort that will be familiar to anyone who has debated the validity and usefulness of religion. Here is one: Human beings have warmed themselves around fires for tens of thousands of years, and this practice was instrumental in our survival as a species. Without fire there would be no material culture. Nothing is more natural to us than burning wood to stay warm.

True enough. But many other things are just as natural – such as dying at the ripe old age of thirty. ... For nearly two centuries the divide between what is *natural* – and all the needless misery that entails – and what is *good* has been growing. Breathing the fumes issuing from your neighbor’s chimney, or from your own, now falls on the wrong side of that divide.

The case against burning wood is every bit as clear as the case against smoking cigarettes. Indeed, it is even clearer, because when you light a fire, you needlessly poison the air that everyone around you for miles must breathe. Even if you reject every intrusion of the “nanny state”, you should agree that the recreational burning of wood is unethical and should be illegal, especially in urban areas. By lighting a fire, you are creating pollution that you cannot dispose. It might be the clearest day of the year, but burn a sufficient

quantity of wood and the air in the vicinity of your home will resemble a bad day in Beijing. ...

I have discovered that when I make this case, even to highly intelligent and health-conscious men and women, a psychological truth quickly becomes as visible as a pair of clenched fists: They do not want to believe any of it. Most people I meet want to live in a world in which wood smoke is harmless. Indeed, they seem *committed* to living in such a world, regardless of the facts. To try to convince them that burning wood is harmful – and has always been so – is somehow offensive. ... The alternative – burning gas over fake logs – seems a sacrilege.

And yet, the reality of our situation is scientifically unambiguous: If you care about your family’s health and that of your neighbors, the sight of a glowing hearth should be about as comforting as the sight of a diesel engine idling in your living room. It is time to break the spell and burn gas – or burn nothing at all.

Of course, if you are anything like my friends, you will refuse to believe this. And that should give you some sense of what we are up against whenever we confront religion.

The “Fireplace Delusion” comes home ...

John Rafferty

Our February Book Club, which addressed the counter-intuitive ideas in the first third of Steven Pinker’s book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, attracted 25 attendees. Mr. Pinker’s central idea, that the world is becoming increasingly less violent, also attracted some, well, almost violent objections: How can he say that when 50 million died in WW2? When children strap bombs across their chests today?

Charles Heller suggested a vote: How many “mostly agreed” with Pinker? How many “mostly did not”? Marjorie Vai suggested *two* votes: one for those who’d read the book, one for those who had not.

Among readers of the book, eight agreed with Pinker, one did not. One non-reader agreed with what he’d heard of Pinker’s arguments in the discussion so far, but five did not, including a couple of people who said that they *refuse* to believe that now is not the most violent of times.

THINK FOR YOURSELF? NOT SO FAST!

David Brooks

(Excerpted from “How to Fight The Man” on The New York Times Opinion Pages blog, 2012/02/02)

This seems to be a moment when many people – in religion, economics and politics – are disgusted by current institutions, but then they are vague about what sorts of institutions should replace them. This seems to be a moment of fervent protest movements that are ultimately vague and ineffectual.

We can all theorize why the intense desire for change has so far produced relatively few coherent recipes for change. Maybe people today are simply too deferential. Raised to get college recommendations, maybe they lack the oppositional mentality necessary for revolt. Maybe people are too distracted.

My own theory revolves around a single bad idea. For generations people have been told: Think for yourself; come up with your own independent worldview. Unless your name is Nietzsche, that's probably a bad idea. Very few people have the genius or time to come up with a comprehensive and rigorous worldview.

If you go out there armed only with your own observations and sentiments, you will surely find yourself on very weak ground. You'll lack the arguments, convictions and the coherent view of reality that you'll need when challenged by a self-confident opposition. ...

The paradox of reform movements is that, if you want to defy authority, you probably shouldn't think entirely for yourself. You should attach yourself to a counter-tradition and school of thought that has been developed over the centuries and that seems true.

The old leftists had dialectical materialism and the Marxist view of history. Libertarians have Hayek and von Mises. Various spiritual movements have drawn from Transcendentalism, Stoicism, Gnosticism, Thomism, Augustine, Tolstoy, or the Catholic social teaching that inspired Dorothy Day.

These belief systems helped people envision alternate realities. They helped people explain why the things society values are not the things that should be valued. They gave movements a set of organizing principles. Joining a tradition doesn't mean suppressing your individuality. Applying an ancient tradition to a new situation is a creative, stimulating and empowering act. Without a tradition, everything is impermanence and flux.

Most professors would like their students to be more rebellious and argumentative. But rebellion without a rigorous alternative vision is just a feeble spasm.

If I could offer advice to a young rebel, it would be to rummage the past for a body of thought that helps you understand and address the shortcomings you see. Give yourself a label. If your college hasn't provided you with a good knowledge of countercultural viewpoints — ranging from Thoreau to Maritain — then your college has failed you and you should try to remedy that ignorance.

Effective rebellion isn't just expressing your personal feelings. It means replacing one set of authorities and institutions with a better set of authorities and institutions. Authorities and institutions don't repress the passions of the heart, the way some young people now suppose. They give them focus and a means to turn passion into change.

THE "RIGHT" TO WEAR THE VEIL

Martine Reed

A French weekly magazine, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, recently published an article on the changes occurring in Tunisia under that country's new regime. The revolution known as the "Arab Spring" happened in Tunisia last year as well as in many North African and Mideast countries. Tunisia's former president, Ben Ali, had to leave in January, 2011. Under the new head of state, Moncef Marzouki, many changes have taken place,

including the legalization of the *niqab*, a veil that covers the entire face and body, which had been illegal before.

In his inaugural speech, the new president declared that all women "need protection", and went on to enumerate three categories of women: those who wear the *niqab*; those who wear the *hidjab* (scarf); and, finally, the *safirat*, who wear neither. *Safirat* translates approximately as "disreputable women".

When Tunisia won its independence from the French in 1962, the new constitution gave many rights to Tunisian women. A family planning group has observed many recent changes. Now, women who want to use contraception or terminate a pregnancy are told that it is contrary to Islam to do so. Doctors see more and more women who refuse to let a doctor examine their bodies. According to pediatricians, the mounting Islamicization even affects infants who develop trouble sleeping or eating because they cannot see their mothers' always-veiled faces.

The *Nouvel Observateur* article begins with an account of an interview/demonstration of the *niqab* by two female university students at the main campus in Tunis, the capital. The two young women, surrounded by a group of bearded "escorts", proclaim how proud they are to wear the full-body veil.

The article goes on to describe demonstrations that have taken place on that campus and on others since the revolution, with protesters demanding that men and woman now be separated, that classes be segregated, that women wear the veil, and that the universities make spaces available for prayer.

The majority of university administrators and faculty are very much against these changes. They argue, with respect to the veil, that it is psychologically difficult to teach a student whom you cannot even see, and that security concerns on campus demand that people's faces be visible. There have been clashes between the university police and the students in recent months.

One woman, a professor of English, recounted how a completely veiled student appeared at one of her classes. The professor asked her to remove the veil, the student refused, screamed some threats, then left and came back with a group of about twenty people who called the professor a whore and broke the door of the classroom. Such incidents have become commonplace.

It is a great disappointment to me to see that the "Arab Spring" has in fact been a way for fanatic Islamists to get their way. I am sure I do not need to make any commentary as to the evils of religion for the readers of PIQUE. Just this:

I was born and raised in France. In the sixties, I was a student in Paris. I participated in demonstrations to protest French colonial rule and gain independence for North African countries, including Tunisia. I remember being threatened and seeing a male friend standing next to me beaten by the police.

I find it hard to accept that 50 years later, a free, independent Tunisia is now plunging into the nightmare of fanaticism.

MORE BOOKS: TWO AT A TIME

What books should be read by every intelligent person? That was the question answered in February PIQUE by Neil deGrasse Tyson, who chose eight: *The Bible*, *The System of the World* (Newton), *On the Origin of Species*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *The Age of Reason*, *The Wealth of Nations*, *The Art of War*, and *The Prince*.

We asked readers to add two to the list, to fill out a Top Ten. Only three (including this Editor) responded, so the pickings were slim. But, as Spencer Tracy famously said of a certain slim actress, "What there is, is cherce", i.e.:

It seems that Neil deGrasse Tyson's list is not a list of favorite literature (like *Hamlet* or *Huck Finn*) but a list of essential instruction relying on science and reasoning. I could add many more, but two that come to mind now are:

Innumeracy, by John Allen Paulos, and

Fads and Fallacies, by Martin Gardner. — *Chic Schissel*

I'll bet you get a barrelful of nominations! My picks to round out the Top Ten are:

An Essay on the Principle of Population (Malthus) — to learn how humanity impinges on our environment.

On Liberty (Mill) — to learn how individuals can or should interact with government. — *Phil Appleman*

This may be rooting for the home team, but I'd add two books the SHSNY Book Club has recently discussed:

Guns, Germs and Steel (Diamond) — an eye-opener that overturns the accepted ideas of Why The West Has Won.

The Better Angels of Our Nature (Pinker) — which says that maybe the best of times really is now. — *John Rafferty*

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS? WE'RE #47

(Excerpted from "U.S. Press Freedom Fell 27 Places Last Year to 47th in the World" on theatlantic.com, 2012/02/02)

Here are a few of the countries that, according to watchdog Reporters Without Borders, currently enjoy greater press freedom than the United States: Ghana, South Africa, El Salvador, Niger, Mali, Jamaica, Slovakia, Uruguay, and virtually all of the developed world, from Western Europe to East Asia. ...

Reporters Without Borders' just-out World Press Freedom Index ... describes a number of countries eroding rights in the past year, including the U.S. Our own ranking dropped to 47th place from 20th the year before. According to the report, the decline came as police cracked down on journalists who were covering mass gatherings, often as part of the "occupy" movements. From the report:

In the space of two months in the United States, more than 25 [journalists] were subjected to arrests and beatings at the hands of police who were quick to issue indictments for inappropriate behavior, public nuisance or even lack of accreditation. ...

One irony of the growing restrictions is that a number of the affected outlets play an important role in many of the world's closed societies, especially in China and the Middle East, where American journalists are allowed a degree of freedom that domestic reporters never would be. The American press may have brought disinfecting sunlight into the early American colonies ... but in 2011 they had about the same freedom at home as would a Romanian.

Who you calling
an atheist?
Page 8

We celebrate Darwin Day
(and the Dumbth-est)
Page 5

The Church gets it wrong.
Again.
Page 1

Secular Humanist
Society of New York
FDR Station
PO Box 7661
New York, NY
10150-7661

