



THE SEPARATIONIST

OCTOBER 2011

SARAH RAGSDALE: PAGANISM 101

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2011, 4 PM, GAGE HALL, 4 ARCHDALE ST.

Sarah Ragsdale was born into a Southern Baptist family. She realized that it wasn't the church for her when, at the age of 2, she was told that girls weren't allowed to say "Amen" along with the Amen Corner at church. It is one of her first memories, and it had a profound effect on her belief about a woman's place in worship services.

After spending a couple of teenage years thinking about becoming a missionary in the Wesleyan Church, Sarah discovered Paganism. The principle of an inherent sacredness of all beings, a reverence for the Earth, and the recognition of the Divine as both male and female appealed to her, and Sarah became a student of traditional Wicca. Her fascination for the ritual practice of a variety of religions led to an broadening of her beliefs beyond the rigid lines of Wicca to encompass a wider view of what it means to be a Pagan.

Sarah served the Charleston Pagan community for over a decade as a priestess. She was an active member of the Charleston CUUPs chapter, then served as High Priestess of The Foundry and the Spring, an eclectic spiritual community cofounded with her partner, Mina. Sarah served

as Co-Chair of the Council of Alternative Spiritual Traditions and co-owned Jumping Water Metaphysical Books and Gifts before taking a sabbatical from public life in order to concentrate on her personal spiritual practice. She lives in Charleston with Mina and makes her living in tourism sales.

Please join us on October 16th at 4:00 pm for an opportunity to learn more about the modern forms of pagan worship that stem from ancient religions. Sarah will give us a general overview of the various sects and belief systems currently in practice.

This is not the first time that our meeting will feature a lecture from someone whose religious views differ from our own. In the past, we've had Christian ministers, a Muslim imam, a religious biology professor, and yes, another pagan. It is not only interesting and healthy for our members to learn about other viewpoints, but also important for us to maintain ties with the larger community.

We'll meet in Gage Hall, located at 4 Archdale Street in downtown Charleston. The meeting runs until 5:30 pm, and we'll go out to dinner afterward.



FIND US ONLINE! WE'RE (ALMOST) EVERYWHERE!



<http://bit.ly/shlmeetup>



<http://bit.ly/shlhome>



<http://on.fb.me/shlFB> (main)
<http://on.fb.me/shlfamFB> (family)



<http://bit.ly/shlyoutube>



<http://bit.ly/shllist>



<http://yhoo.it/shlyahoo>

SHL HAPPY HOUR

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2011, 6 PM

HUNLEY'S

1750 SAVANNAH HIGHWAY, CHARLESTON



Please join us for our first-ever SHL Happy Hour! Come relax among friends and enjoy a drink and friendly conversation. Everyone is welcome—alcohol is optional and no topic is taboo.

We'll meet on Wednesday, October 12, from 6 pm until 8 pm or so, at Hunley's, 1750 Savannah Highway. If you're heading south on Savannah Highway, Hunley's is on the right a little past the Nissan dealer and immediately before Wappoo Road. Hope to see you there!

FALL PICNIC

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2011, 5 PM

WEST FARM CORN MAZE

2641 COOPER STORE ROAD, MONCK'S CORNER

Our third annual Fall Picnic will be Saturday, October 29, from 5 to 9 pm. Like the previous years, it will again be held at the West Farm Corn Maze. The 6-acre corn maze features 3 miles of trails as well as a mini maze for small children and a mystery to solve by collecting clues within the maze. Other attractions include a children's play area, small petting zoo, and hay rides. There is something for everyone, so come on out and join us! We will have a potluck dinner in the party shed, so please bring a dish to share. Admission to the farm includes the corn maze and is \$6 for ages 12 and up, \$2 for kids 3-12 and free for those 2 years and under. If you'd like to come, but don't want to do the maze, a reduced admission-only rate of \$3 is available. These admission prices reflect a group discount, so please tell the cashier that you are with SHL to ensure you receive the discounted rate. And please note that West Farm accepts cash and checks only—no debit or credit cards.

For directions and more information, please visit <http://bit.ly/shlpicnic>. RSVPs are not necessary, but are helpful. To RSVP or if you have any questions, email Amy Monsky (SecularCharlestonMom@gmail.com).

Hope to see you there!

BOOK GROUP

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2011, 4 PM

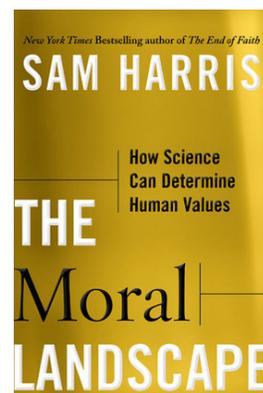
WEST ASHLEY BARNES & NOBLE

1812 SAM RITTENBERG, CHARLESTON

On October 23, 2011, from 4 to 5:30 pm, the book group will meet to discuss *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* by Sam Harris. Sharon Strong will lead the discussion.

Sam Harris's first book, *The End of Faith*, ignited a worldwide debate about the validity of religion. In the aftermath, Harris discovered that most people agree on one point: science has nothing to say on the subject of human values. Indeed, our failure to address questions of meaning and morality through science has become the primary justification for religious faith.

In this highly controversial book, Sam Harris seeks to link morality to the rest of human knowledge. Defining morality in terms of human and animal well-being, Harris argues that science can do more than tell how we are; it can, in principle, tell us how we ought to be. In his view, moral relativism is simply false—and comes at an increasing cost to humanity. And the intrusions of religion into the sphere of human values can be finally repelled: for just as there is no such thing as Christian physics or Muslim algebra, there can be no Christian or Muslim morality. Using his expertise in philosophy and neuroscience, along with his experience on the front lines of our "culture wars," Harris delivers a game-changing book about the future of science and about the real basis of human cooperation.



MOVIE CLUB

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2011

The SHL Movie Club meets once a month, usually on the first Saturday, to view a film and discuss it over dinner. The movie is announced a few days in advance by email, on our website (<http://bit.ly/shlevents>), and on our information line (843-277-0948). To add yourself to the Movie Club email list, please visit <http://bit.ly/shllist>.

CHARITY OF THE QUARTER CHARLESTON WALK FOR AUTISM



Charleston Walk for Autism is our charity of the quarter. This Charleston-based organization raises funds to help Lowcountry individuals affected by autism primarily by funding scholarships that help pay for behavioral and relational therapies, which are often cost-prohibitive for families. They also hold the annual Walk for Autism every April in downtown Charleston. Learn more about this great organization at www.walkforautism-charleston.com. Please contribute by bringing a check to the meeting or donate via credit/debit card on our website.

VOLUNTEER CORNER MY SISTER'S HOUSE

October's volunteer activity will be preparing and delivering three nights of meals for the women and children staying in the shelter run by My Sister's House, which provides a variety of services to abused women and children in the tri-county area. Since 1980, My Sister's House has provided services, programs and resources to empower domestic violence victims and their children to live free from abuse.



Meals can be cooked ahead of time and frozen before delivery. Maximum shelter occupancy is 36, but the shelter coordinator will provide a more accurate head count for the nights our donated meals will be used.

If you're interested in contributing a main course or side dish for the women and children of My Sister's House, please contact our Volunteer Coordinator, Kristen Channel, by email (kristenchannel@gmail.com) or phone (860-326-6079).

Kristen has ample room in her spare freezer to store any meals prepared before our scheduled delivery on October 15.

UPCOMING REGIONAL EVENTS

The Myrtle Beach Humanists and Free Thinkers will hold their monthly meeting on Sunday, October 2, 2011, from 4 to 5:30 pm. The meeting, a video presentation and discussion, will be held at the Chapin Memorial Library, located at 400 14th Avenue N in Myrtle Beach, SC. (Park behind the library near the park and enter through the rear of the building.)

For more information, visit the group's Facebook page (<http://on.fb.me/mbhft>).

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If you missed SHL's Parenting Beyond Belief seminar last spring (and you don't mind a drive to Raleigh), the Triangle Freethought Society is hosting a seminar on Sunday, October 16, at 1 pm.

Over nine million parents in the U.S. are raising children without theistic religion. The Parenting Beyond Belief seminar, a unique half-day workshop with author and educator Dale McGowan, offers encouragement and practical solutions for secular parenting in a religious world.

The seminar will be held at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, 3313 Wade Avenue, Raleigh, and there is a suggested donation to attend (\$30 individual, \$45 for a couple). For more information and to register, visit <http://bit.ly/tfspbb>.

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For the first time across both North and South Carolina representatives of all groups in the secular community are invited to come together to share their experiences, ideas, and plans for the future at the Carolinas Secular Conference.

Although our philosophies cover a broad range, our similarities outweigh our differences and we all share some key principles and goals. This can be better achieved collectively than alone. If we shout together we make a much bigger noise.

Join us November 11, 12, and 13 to move these ideas forward into the next year. The conference will be held at the Carolina Beach Courtyard, 100 Charlotte Avenue, Carolina Beach, NC. For more information and to register, please visit <http://bit.ly/shlsc>.

THE PALE BLUE DOT JASON GREGORY/CARL SAGAN

On September 11, SHL board member Jason Gregory participated in an Interfaith Gathering for Peace at the Sottile Theater in downtown Charleston. Jason read the following text, first describing the famous “Pale Blue Dot” photograph from Voyager 1, and then concluding with the words of Carl Sagan.

In 1990, The Voyager 1 space probe turned back and took a photo of us on its way out of the solar system.

At this point in time, the space probe was over 3.5 billion miles from earth. I intended to have a photo for you but if I could borrow your imaginations for just a minute...imagine standing in your living room staring at your big screen TV. Picture a dark screen with a few thin bands of light from your blinds stretching across the screen from left to right. Imagine what seems to be a spec of dust in one of those bands - that spec of dust, less than a pixel in size, is earth. This



photo was taken at the request of Dr. Carl Sagan, astronomer, astrophysicist, public educator, and humanitarian. These are his thoughts on that photo:

From this distant vantage point, the Earth might not seem of particular interest. But for us, it's different. Consider again that dot. That's here, that's home, that's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer,

every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every “superstar,” every “supreme leader,” every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there – on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.

The size and age of the Cosmos are beyond ordinary human understanding. Lost somewhere between immensity and eternity is our tiny planetary home. In a cosmic perspective, most human concerns seem insignificant, even petty.

Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that, in glory and triumph, they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot. Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of this pixel on the scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner, how frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to kill one another, how fervent their hatreds.

But up there in the immensity of the Cosmos, an inescapable perspective awaits us. National boundaries are not evident when we view the Earth from space. Fanatical ethnic or religious or national chauvinisms are a little difficult to maintain when we see our planet as a fragile blue crescent fading to become an inconspicuous point of light against the bastion and citadel of the stars.

It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known.

OUR PLACE IN THE UNIVERSE

Because of a cancellation, our speaker for September was Dr. Louis Rubbo, an assistant professor of astronomy at Coastal Carolina University. In his talk, Dr. Rubbo discussed the development of the Copernican Principle and its implications concerning our place in the universe and the existence of God.

If you missed Dr. Rubbo's talk, you can still take a look at some of the information he shared—a stunning video that shows our place in the cosmos:

<http://bit.ly/knownuniverse>

and a chart showing our place on the tree of life:

<http://bit.ly/300ospecies>

MITT ROMNEY: A REASONABLE MAN? HERB SILVERMAN

Here's a hypothetical scene in which four presidential candidates are asked about their religious views.

Candidate 1: "It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg." He adds, "And the day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the supreme being as his father in the womb of a virgin will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter."

Candidate 2: "As I understand the Christian religion, it was, and is, a revelation. But how has it happened that millions of fables, tales, legends, have been blended with both Jewish and Christian revelation that have made them the most bloody religion that ever existed?"

Candidate 3: "During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What has been its fruits? More or less, in all places, pride and indolence in the clergy; ignorance and servility in the laity; in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution."

Candidate 4: "When I do good, I feel good; when I do bad, I feel bad. That is my religion."

Were this to take place at a public debate today, I expect Candidates 1 (Thomas Jefferson), 2 (John Adams), 3 (James Madison), and 4 (Abraham Lincoln) would be booed off the stage, their political careers ended.

None of the current Republican candidates seems to have the courage of the man once known as Mr. Conservative (Barry Goldwater), quoted in the September 16, 1981 Congressional Record: "I'm frankly sick and tired of the political preachers across this country telling me as a citizen that if I want to be a moral person, I must believe in 'A,' 'B,' 'C,' and 'D.' Just who do they think they are? And from where do they presume to claim the right to dictate their moral beliefs to me?" Are we better off with today's presidential candidates who pander to religious factions and cannot end a speech without "God bless America"?

I think the most reasonable Republican candidates are the two Mormons. My bar here is set pretty low: they

never talk about their deity telling them to run or how to vote. Perhaps they have a good reason to downplay their Mormonism. The only thing atheists and Mormons have in common is that a significant number of Americans admit they wouldn't vote for either.



As far as the role of faith in the 2012 election, I can't say because I don't know the faith of the candidates. I can take them all at their publicly religious word, but why should I? The major truth-telling test for me among candidates is whether a candidate expresses a view that he or she knows will be politically detrimental. That's why I'll believe any candidate in this country who says he is an atheist, and I'll believe any candidate in Iran who says he is a Christian.

The important question to ask all candidates is if and how their private faith would impact their stands on public policy. I could be comfortable with a candidate who says she would compartmentalize her irrational, faith-based beliefs and govern rationally on evidence-based information.

I was appalled by the Christian values expressed by both the candidates and the audience in the most recent presidential debate. The audience cheered when Rick Perry proudly talked about how many citizens he was responsible for executing in Texas. And the audience again cheered when Ron Paul said the government should ignore the plight of a young person with a deadly disease because he failed to pay for health insurance. Even worse, in my mind, was that none of the other candidates publicly disagreed, though they had no problem challenging anyone who favored government money for health care.

As an atheist, I pick and choose from many books-including the Bible. I particularly like how the quote from Matthew 7:16 applies to the presidential candidates who were on stage that night: "By their fruits you shall know them."

See all of Herb's On Faith posts at <http://wapo.st/herb-on-faith>

THE SEPARATIONIST

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SECULAR HUMANISTS OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

*Opinions expressed in *The Separationist* are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of SHL.*

Please contact the editor with any questions or comments about this publication. Contributions of short articles, news items, letters to the editor or other information of interest to SHL members are always welcome. Contact the editor at newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org.

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JOIN SHL

SHL is a group of freethinkers who believe in the humanist philosophy. Members come primarily from the greater Charleston, South Carolina, area. SHL is affiliated with American Atheists, American Humanist Association, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, Atheist Alliance International, Council for Secular Humanism, and the South Carolina Progressive Network. Annual tax-exempt membership fees are \$35 (individual) or \$50 (couple or family). Additional donations are always welcome. To join, visit our website at <http://bit.ly/joinshl>, and for more information about our activities, visit <http://bit.ly/shlevents>