

SECULAR
HUMANISTS



OF THE
LOWCOUNTRY

About SHL

The *Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry* was founded in 1994 by a group of local non-theists in Charleston, South Carolina.

Our members are freethinkers of many kinds. We call ourselves agnostics, atheists, skeptics, secular humanists, rationalists, and scientific naturalists. We welcome you and all who are interested in participating in our friendly community, either as members or observers.

The purpose of our non-profit, educational organization is to promote the non-theistic, human-centered viewpoint as a valid contribution to public discourse and to strive to maintain the First Amendment guarantee of separation of state and church.

The Separationist is 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 SHL president (president@lowcountryhumanists.org) with any questions or comments about this publication. Contributions such as short articles, news items, letters to the editor, or other information of interest to SHL members are always welcome.

The Separationist

Volume 25, Issue 1

January 2018

A Roundtable Discussion: Be Your Own Philosopher!

Sunday, January 21, 2018, 4:00 PM, Gage Hall
4 Archdale Street, Charleston, SC



One of the best things about SHL is the opportunity to have philosophical discussions with other bright, rational people. In lieu of a speaker in January, we'll celebrate our own expertise and opinions.

Psychologist Bonnie Cleaveland, SHL's VP and Secretary, will facilitate a round-table discussion. Two topics are on the agenda for the hour:

- **Free Speech:** Some people consider free speech to be absolute. Others believe that hate speech should be suppressed. What are the practical consequences of allowing vs. suppressing certain kinds of speech, and who gets to decide?

- **Atheism:** New Atheists mock religion relentlessly. Friendly Atheists take a gentler approach. What is, or should be, the "atheist agenda"? Are both strategies important, or is one clearly better?

Afterward, stay if you wish and continue the discussion over pizza. Join us and be heard!



President's Corner: How Journalism Works

Suppose a respectable news source like *US News and World Report* (*USNWR*) prints a statement indicating that someone said that he and his group are going to be watching closely to ensure that elected officials behave in a certain way. You might think that means that this news source actually knows that person actually said something at least a bit like that. I would have thought so, too, but now I know better.

In November, I was contacted by Dave Munday of the *Post and Courier* (*P&C*). He asked for my opinion on the efforts of a local politician to make it the official Charleston policy to not ticket churchgoers for parking violations on Sunday mornings.

I responded to him quickly, and the *P&C* *correctly* quoted exactly what I said: "We all seem to agree that the government cannot persecute people because of their religions. But, in practice, there is no difference between rewarding the followers of some religions and punishing the people with other religious views. This policy, which seems designed to exempt churchgoers from the usual laws, therefore runs against the Constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion."

I stand by what I said, but let me elaborate on it a bit here in our newsletter. There are really two issues:

Letting people park in illegal spaces is a bad idea even if done

fairly. In the case that prompted the news story, some people were ticketed while attending a church on St. Philip Street because they parked in a location that was not a legal space at all; it was part of a turn lane. It is for safety reasons that some locations along roads are not considered legal parking spaces. So, a policy that allows people to park in them would endanger other people.

Moreover, it isn't fair to make an exemption to a law for people of a certain religion without offering the same exemption to everyone else. This isn't exclusively a religious issue. If the City Council excused the parking tickets of people who were their relatives or who belonged to the same golf club as them, that would be unfair. But it is even worse in the case that the City Council (most, if not all, of whom are presumably Christian) to offer this special favor only to those who share their faith. The fact that it is a government favoring one religion over another makes it a Constitutional issue as well as merely a matter of fairness.

But, let me not digress too much from the main point of this article. The most interesting thing about this is that the *USNWR* also picked up this news story. (I saw it in an online article with the byline "Nov. 25, 2017, at 12:02 p.m."). The last sentence in the *USNWR* article was "**Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry President Alex Kasman said the group will**

watch the issue to make sure church members aren't given preferential treatment."

The thing is, I never said that. I did offer my opinion on the matter when Munday wrote me to ask, but, I never promised to watch the issue, nor did I make any sort of threat, as the *USNWR* article implies. I don't think they simply made it up either, but it is the result of a misunderstanding. They must have gotten that idea from a line from the *P&C* article. Just before my quote it said: "At least some citizens will be watching the outcome." But that was Munday saying that, not me!

Let me be clear: I am not accusing them of reporting "fake news." I think this was an *honest* mistake, even if I am surprised to see them make it. I actually think it is rather funny. I learned something from the experience about how journalism works in the 21st century. (Apparently, the reporters at one news outlet can see an article in another and read between the lines to create fantastical quotes from the people it mentions.) And, hey... maybe the Charleston City Council will read the *USNWR* article and be intimidated by the last sentence into doing the right thing.

Alex Kasman is a math professor at the College of Charleston. He has been on the board of SHL for 15+ years. During that time he has served various roles including volunteer coordinator, newsletter editor, Webmaster and is currently serving as SHL President.

Upcoming SHL Events

Volunteer Activity: Lowcountry Food Bank

Saturday, January 6
9:00 a.m.—12:00 p.m.
2864 Azalea Dr.
Charleston, SC

Our get-together for January 2018 to give back to the community is at the Lowcountry Food Bank. We'll meet in the lobby of the Food Bank a few minutes before 9:00 a.m.

Look for SHL Volunteer Coordinator Laura Kasman



Feeding the Community

and others wearing SHL T-shirts. The work will be in a large warehouse, so dress appropriately for the day's weather and wear close-toed shoes for safety.

Kids 12 and up are welcome!

In past volunteer days at LCFB we have sorted and wiped down pallets of donated food items and packed bags of non-perishable snacks for school kids at risk for hunger at home. We always feel like we made a difference.

You can RSVP on Meetup (go to www.meetup.com/lowcountryhumanists/). Also please feel free to e-mail any question you may have to volunteers@lowcountryhumanists.org.

January 2018

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1  New Year's Day	2	3	4	5	6: Food Bank 9:00 AM 2864 Azalea Drive
7	8  Earth's Rotation Day	9	10	11	12	13
14	15  MLK Jr. Day	16	17  Benjamin Franklin Day	18	19	20
21: SHL Monthly Meeting 4:00 PM Gage Hall	22	23	24	25	26	27
28: SHL Book Club 4:00 PM Barnes & Noble	29  Thomas Paine Day	30	31			

SHL Book Club

Sunday, January 28, 4:00—5:30 p.m.

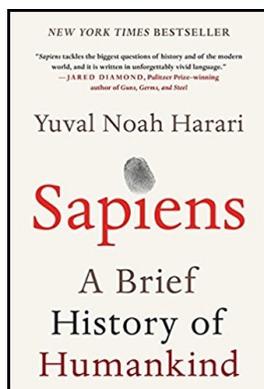
Barnes & Noble

1812 Sam Rittenberg Blvd.

Charleston, SC

Look for us in the music section on the right-hand side of the store, about halfway towards the back.

In January we will discuss ***Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*** by Yuval Noah Harari (2015). Hardcover 464 pages \$27.90, paperback \$8.80, Audible \$12.99 15 hours, Hoopla (free with library card).



Says book club coordinator Yvonne Michel, “Although this book is not brief by any means, it is impressive with it’s presentation of complex science and history in a fully compelling narrative and a depth of understanding that is rarely related with such clarity and comprehension. It also has some challenging stories to tell us all.”

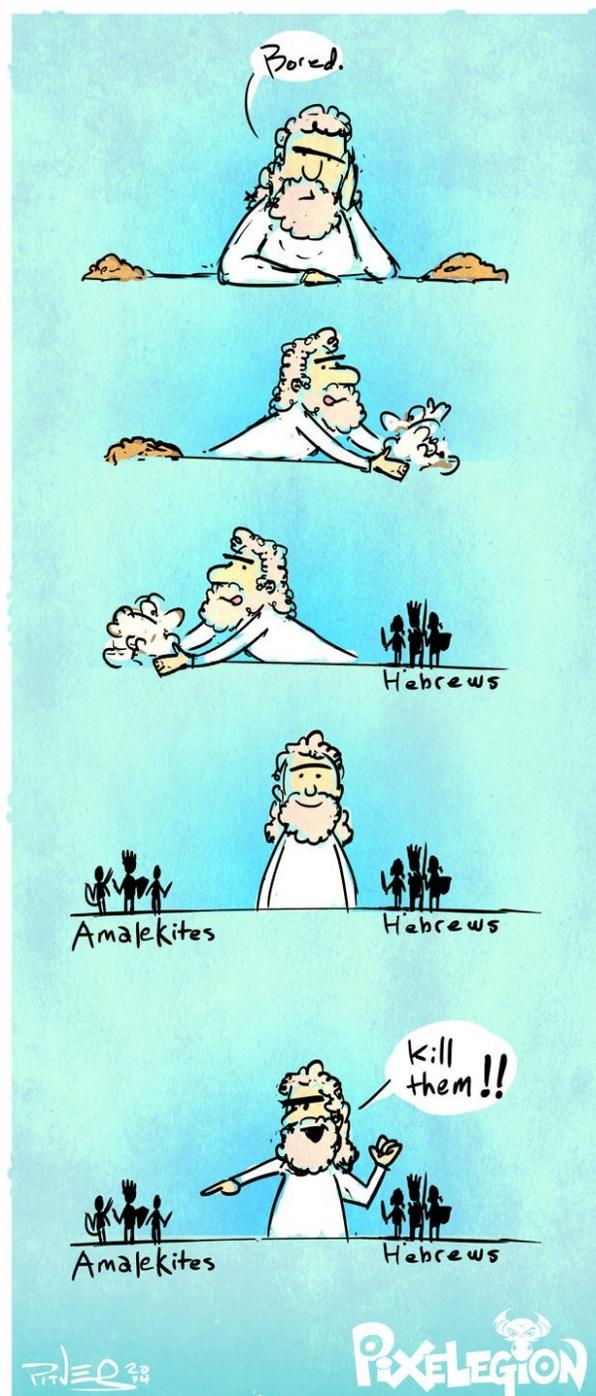
According to an Amazon review, “Tackling evolutionary concepts from a historian’s perspective, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, describes human development through a framework of three not-necessarily-orthodox “Revolutions”: the Cognitive, the Agricultural, and the Scientific. His ideas are interesting and often amusing: *Why have humans managed to build astonishingly large populations when other primate groups top out at 150 individuals?* Because our talent for gossip allows us to build networks in societies too large for personal relationships between everyone, and our universally accepted “imagined realities”—such as money, religion, and Limited Liability Corporations—keep us in line.”

For additional background on the author’s main points, you can search for his name at www.TED.com and see some of his curated TED talks. He has some

powerful things to say about liberal humanism. You can also view an online course based on the book on [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/).

You are welcome to RSVP on SHL’s Meetup page (www.meetup.com/lowcountryhumanists/) or Facebook group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/90436456767/>).

When God Gets Bored...



Charity of the Quarter: People Against Rape



We believe you.

 people against rape
free & anonymous 745-0144

The pervasiveness of sexual abuse has been in the headlines a good deal in recent months. Those who have endured an attack also frequently suffer from isolation in attempting to cope with the aftermath. But here in the Lowcountry we are fortunate to have an advocacy organization ready to help women and men recover from the trauma of sexual assault.

Since 1974, People Against Rape (PAR) has been offering support services for adult survivors of sexual assault in Charleston,

Berkeley, and Dorchester Counties. PAR has been selected as SHL's Charity of the Quarter for January through March 2018.

PAR works to assist survivors in a variety of ways. The organization operates a 24-hour hotline; offers accompaniment during Sexual Assault Forensic Exams, police and law enforcement meetings, and court appointments; can assist with follow-up services in the days after an assault; and provides support groups. PAR services are provided free of charge to all adult victims of sexual assault and their loved ones.

Donate Today!

Four times a year, SHL collects donations on behalf of a worthy charity. You can donate by cash, credit card, or check at our monthly meeting or by mailing a check to:

SHL

P.O. Box 32256

Charleston SC 29417-2256

Make checks payable to SHL and note "COQ" in the memo line.

Or securely **donate online** on our website (go to lowcountry-humanists.org and select "Join/Donate > Donate to our Charity of the Quarter" from the top menu.)

In addition, PAR has expanded its education department to teach sexual assault prevention in high schools, colleges, medical facilities, churches, and other community locations. Find out more at www.peopleagainstrape.org.

Some Myths About Sexual Assault

Myth: Only women are affected by sexual assault and rape.

Truth: Sexual assault does not discriminate based on gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, or religion. Rape affects us all.

Myth: Most rape accusations are false.

Truth: Studies show that approximately 2 percent of rape accusations are false, the same rate as for other crimes. If a survivor

comes to you, always start by believing.

Myth: If someone is wearing a tight dress, drinking a lot, or flirting, they're "asking for it."

Truth: No one deserves to be raped, and it is never the victim's fault. We need to hold the perpetrator accountable, not blame the victim.

Myth: Men rape because they can't control themselves.

Truth: Sexual assault is about power and control, not sex, and everyone has the ability to respect other people's boundaries.

Myth: Sexual assault is a private subject, and we should mind our own business.

Truth: If we stay silent, we chose the side of the oppressor. If you see something or hear something, say something.

SHL Board for 2017-2018

Alex Kasman, President

Bonnie Cleaveland, Vice President/
Secretary

Garrett Gehlhausen, Treasurer

Tom Amon

Steffi Green

Vera Hannaford

Ed Stephens

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Newsletter editor:

Sharon Strong

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SHL is a non-prophet organization!

Find us online! We're (nearly) omnipresent!



Web (check out SHL's one-stop-shop)



Meetup (find future events and RSVP)



Email Lists (manage your notifications)



YouTube (watch video debates etc.)



Zazzle (buy SHL T-shirts & more)



Yahoo Families Group (parenting info)



Facebook Page (public postings)



Facebook Group (closed group for conversations about atheism/humanism)



Facebook Lounge (closed group for wide-ranging discussions)



Facebook Families Group
(closed group for parenting support)



Facebook Pay-It-Forward Group
(exchange free stuff & info on good causes)