



THE SEPARATIONIST

SEPTEMBER 2012

DAVID NIOSE: NONBELIEVER NATION

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2012, 4 PM, GAGE HALL, 4 ARCHDALE ST.

Please note that this meeting will not take place on the third Sunday of the month as usual, but rather on the fourth Sunday, September 23.

The American Humanist Association has stood as the voice of humanism in the United States for over 70 years.

AHA strives to bring about a society where being good without gods is an accepted way to live life. The organization accomplishes this goal by defending civil liberties and secular governance, by reaching out to the growing number of people without traditional religious faith, and through a continued refinement and advancement of the humanist worldview. (SHL is an AHA chapter.)

David Niose has served since 2009 as AHA's president. Having practiced law in Massachusetts since 1990, Niose has also worked in print and broadcast media, taught both history and law, and written extensively on a wide array of issues.

Upon joining the AHA board in 2005, Niose initiated and helped develop the AHA's media campaign. Niose has appeared in national media and spoken to groups around the country, emphasizing the importance of utilizing mass media to inject humanist ideas into the public dialogue, improve the public image of humanists, and sway public opinion away from the religious right. His TV appearances include Fox News, the BBC, and The Daily Buzz. Niose

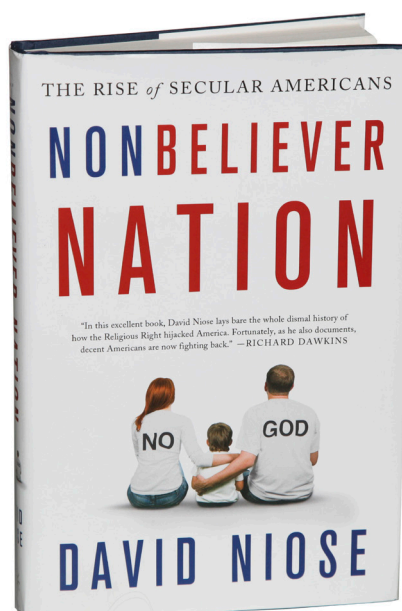
has also appeared on numerous local media outlets all across the United States and has been interviewed by the Associated Press and National Journal. Since 2011, Niose has written on humanist and secular issues for *Psychology Today*.

Other magazines and newspapers have included Niose's articles, including *Humanist* magazine, *Lawyer's Weekly* publications, and *Progressive Populist*.

As an attorney, Niose has advocated for church/state separation and the rights of humanists and other nontheists, and he is currently involved in implementing a legal strategy to enforce the rights of humanists and other nontheists via the avenue of equal protection law. He has worked with the Secular Coalition for America in various positions to help advocate for the rights of Secular Americans, and has served on the boards of Greater Worcester Humanists and Greater Boston Humanists.

Niose is the author of *Nonbeliever Nation: The Rise of Secular Americans*, published in July of this year.

On September 23, 2012, at our first meeting of the new season, David Niose will be our speaker. We'll meet at 4:00 pm 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.



ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2012, 8:50 AM
FIRST FEDERAL OF CHARLESTON BANK
HARBOR VIEW ROAD, JAMES ISLAND**



The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry are active in the South Carolina Adopt-a-Highway program. We pick up litter from a two-mile stretch of Harbor View Road on James Island four times a year. Our official SC Department of Transportation sign is on the corner of Harbor View and Fort Johnson Roads and lets the community know that SHL partici-

pates in this program. Our next trash pick up will be on Saturday, September 8. We will meet at 8:50 am in the parking lot of the First Federal of Charleston Bank on Harbor View Rd, James Island. It's right next to the Piggly Wiggly. The pick up usually last about an hour and a half.

Please join us if you can. If you have any questions, write to our volunteer coordinators, Alex and Laura, at kasmansc@comcast.net or call our Adopt-a-Highway liaison Roger at 843-224-9360.

CAROLINAS SECULAR CONFERENCE

**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, TO SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2012
CHARLESTON MARRIOTT, 170 LOCKWOOD BOULEVARD**

The Carolinas Secular Conference is an annual opportunity for Freethinkers from across the Carolinas region to come together and share ideas, plans, and initiatives.

Last year at our first annual event we met in Carolina Beach, North Carolina, and began to establish a true network of communities across the region. Since that time we have seen established groups and programs thrive, and also new groups of Freethinkers from every viewpoint spring up in many areas.

The conference provides a ground for learning and sharing, bringing in speakers to inform and train, as well as awarding grass roots achievement by individuals across both states.

BOOK GROUP

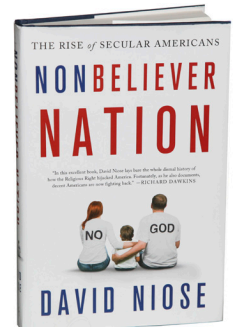
**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2012, 4 PM
WEST ASHLEY BARNES & NOBLE
1812 SAM RITTENBERG, CHARLESTON**

On September 16, 2012, the Book Group will meet to discuss *Nonbeliever Nation: The Rise of Secular Americans* by David Niose (September's speaker).

The number of nonbelievers is rapidly growing as traditional Christian churches are shrinking. David Niose explores what this new trend means for the unchallenged dominance of the Religious Right. Hitting on all the hot-button issues that divide the country, he shows how this movement is gaining traction and fighting for its rights. Disenchanted at how far America has wandered from its secular roots, nonbelievers are emerging to fight for equality and rational public policy.

We'll meet at the West Ashley Barnes & Noble, located at 1812 Sam Rittenberg Blvd. Our discussion runs from 4 pm to 5:30 pm and we usually go out to dinner afterward.

Please note that, for this month only, the book group meets on the third Sunday of September, not the fourth Sunday.



**CHARITY OF THE QUARTER
LEUKEMIA AND LYMPHOMA SOCIETY/LIGHT THE NIGHT**

In association with Camp Quest South Carolina, SHL is joining the Foundation Beyond Belief event “Light The Night” for our local walk here in Mount Pleasant. The walk will be held on November 1, 2012, and will begin at 7:00 pm, with registration beginning at 5:30 pm and a Remembrance Ceremony at 6:45. Walks are 1 to 3 miles in distance and will be held rain or shine. In case of extreme weather. (Strollers are welcome, please no pets, skateboards, bicycles or skates.)

Foundation Beyond Belief has formed an international fundraising walk team for The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society’s (LLS) Light The Night Walk in an effort to raise \$1 million to support LLS’ efforts to find cures for blood cancers. Many all organizations have already formed teams of fundraising walkers under the Foundation Beyond Belief umbrella. With your help, Foundation Beyond Belief can become the first team in LLS history to raise more than \$1 million in its first year! To support this goal, the Stiefel family has pledged to match the first \$500,000 the teams raise for LLS!

Light The Night is an annual evening fundraising walk that raises funds to advance the LLS mission: Cure leukemia, lymphoma, Hodgkin’s disease and myeloma.

The funds we raise will help families like David and LaShaye and their daughter Linnea.

David and LaShaye tell the story: “Affectionately known as Diva, Linnea was usually a friendly outgoing little girl. But when her sparkle began to diminish, we were very concerned. Either sleeping on the couch or watching TV, little Diva began to lose all interest in playing outside with her siblings. Acting so out of character, nothing was able to get Linnea up. She then developed a fever and could no longer walk.

“After rushing her to the ER and about five hours of

testing, her doctors broke the news that she had Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia. That was December 9, 2010. After blood transfusions, a bone marrow aspiration and a spinal tap, chemotherapy was started. After two months Linnea was in remission, and still is a year later.

“Linnea will continue with chemotherapy until 2014. She is back to being the affectionate and loving child she always was and continues to be an inspiration to everyone she meets. We have our little Diva back.”

To learn more about this effort, watch a short video at <http://bit.ly/llsvideo> or visit <http://bit.ly/llsfbb>.



**SEPTEMBER FAMILY OUTING
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2012, 1 PM**

On Saturday, September 15 at 1 pm we will have a surf seining trip to Beachwalker Park on Kiawah Island. A Charleston County Park & Recreation staff member will help us pull a net through the surf and learn about the critters we find (they will be released afterward). We did this same program a couple of years ago and it was a huge hit! Although this program is primarily directed toward school-aged children, all are welcome. The cost is \$5 each for adults and children 4 years old and older and includes admission into the park. Space is limited, so RSVPs are required. The program starts promptly at 1pm, but those who are interested in more time for socializing can arrive at noon for a byo picnic lunch. For more information or to RSVP (by 9/14), please email SecularCharleston-Mom@gmail.com.

THE HIGGS BOSON: WHAT DOES IT MEAN? ALEX KASMAN

On July 4th, newspapers around the world announced the discovery of “the God particle” by teams of scientists at CERN. Both the appearance of the word “God” and the excitement with which it was presented convinced many readers that this had to be a tremendous leap forward in an area of physics with fundamental importance to theological questions and the daily lives of ordinary people.

This brief essay will explain what was actually achieved, why it is of importance to people doing physics research, and why I believe that hype surrounding it is unfortunate.

Particle physics today is not, as many people would imagine, about tiny spheres of matter flying around in empty space. Rather, it is dominated by quantum field theories (QFTs), which are about waves in space that satisfy complicated mathematical relationships.

As its name implies, “the Standard Model” stands out as one of the most widely accepted of the many QFTs. Its fame derives from the fact that it incorporates so much of what we know about particles and the ways they interact into a compact and beautiful form.

In addition to capturing so much of what we already know from experiments in a neat form, the Standard Model made one prediction which had never been experimentally verified, namely the rest energy of the boson for the Higgs field. Let me explain what that means.

The Standard Model describes what we would normally think of as *forces* in terms of the exchange of tiny ripples of the waves that are the fields. The ripples come in discrete chunks, called quanta, and the quanta responsible for the forces are called “bosons.”

For example, if you are pulling a magnet off of the refrigerator you have to tug pretty hard—harder than you would have had to have pulled if the object had not been magnetized. According to the Standard Model, this is because of an exchange of *photons*, the boson of the electro-magnetic field.

Prior to recent attention to the Higgs Boson, the photon was the only boson that many non-experts had heard of, but, it is not the only one. The Standard Model has a bosonic description for every force *except* for gravity and “dark energy.”

Now, imagine that you have to push a car along a flat road. Because of the wheels, friction really is not much of an is-

sue. Because you are pushing it slowly, air resistance is not a problem. Nevertheless, it takes some effort to push the car. The amount of effort depends on the *mass* of the car (e.g. it’s easier to push if you take all of the gold bars out of the trunk first). It is *this* force that is explained by the exchange of the boson for the Higgs field in the Standard Model. In other words, the Higgs boson gives inertia to the other particles just as the photon is responsible for the pull of a magnet.

However, the algebraic relationships between the fields in this QFT puts a restriction on the amount of energy in the Higgs boson itself. It was known that it had to be in a certain range, not too low, not too high. No particle with that energy had ever been observed in an experiment, making the Higgs boson into a prediction of the Standard Model that had yet to be verified. Because the energy level in question was quite high, it was not the sort of experiment that could be done on just any lab bench. And so, the quest for the Higgs boson was a goal for those scientists with access to a high energy particle collider.

Put bluntly, but accurately, the scientists at CERN were smashing particles together at huge speeds and looking at the debris that flew out, hoping to spot a boson with energy in the range predicted for the Higgs. After conducting many such experiments and analyzing the data carefully, they made the following cautious announcement on July 4th:

“CMS observes an excess of events at a mass of approximately 125 GeV with a statistical significance of five standard deviations (5 sigma) above background expectations.”

In contrast to the less restrained claims in many newspapers, they did *not* say that this was the Higgs boson or that they had confirmed the standard model. What they said was:

“Within the statistical and systematic uncertainties, results obtained in the various search channels are consistent with the expectations for the SM Higgs boson. However, more data are needed to establish whether this new particle has all the properties of the SM Higgs boson or whether some do not match, implying new physics beyond the standard model.”

In other words, what they found is *consistent* with the Standard Model’s predictions for the Higgs boson, but that does not mean that this particle has any of the other impor-

THE HIGGS BOSON: WHAT DOES IT MEAN? (CONT'D)

ALEX KASMAN

tant properties expected of the Higgs boson.

The God Particle was the title of a popular 1993 book by physicist Leon Lederman about the Higgs boson. He has been quoted as saying that he originally wanted to call it the “Goddamn particle” but that the publisher would not allow it. Either name was intended to capture the intensity with which he and his fellow researchers were looking for evidence of the Higgs boson.

However, the fact that it is now regularly referred to as “the God particle” in news articles is somewhat misleading. Obviously, “God” plays a rather unique role in theology: the all-powerful creator and cause of everything. Yet even in the Standard Model, the Higgs boson is no more fundamental nor more powerful than any of the other particles.

The Higgs field does have some implications for the cosmology of the early universe according to current theories. The interesting thing is that it would have behaved differently in the small and hot universe that would have existed immediately after the Big Bang, and so inertial mass would not have been a factor at first until after some expansion. When cosmologists describe the evolution of the early universe, they often make use of this feature which does seem to help explain some of what we see around us today.

This must be what physicist Lawrence Krauss was referring to when he wrote in a Newsweek piece about the CERN announcement “If we can describe the laws of nature back to the beginning of time without any supernatural shenanigans, it becomes clear that you don’t need God.”

However, one should not conclude from Krauss’ statements either that a definitive discovery of the Higgs field will prove once and for all that creation without a deity is possible, nor that its absence would somehow be disastrous for such claims. Even with the Higgs mechanism in place, there are plenty of gaps remaining in our understanding of physics and cosmology. And, as gaps go, the one filled by Higgs seems relatively small and technical. Apparently, some questions about the distribution of matter in the universe become easier to answer if the Higgs field kept inertia from being relevant during the earliest moments in the universe... but even if it was found that the Higgs field does not work as supposed, this hardly seems like something that would

require us to resort to a supernatural explanation. I mean, this phenomenon does not seem like something requiring intellect or intention. If not the Higgs field, then some other natural phenomenon, an inertia canceling property of “dark energy”, could be hypothesized to replace it.

The experimental verification of the existence of a particle with the right energy to be a Higgs boson is of interest to particle physicists and to cosmologists. For the rest of the world, however, I think that the attention it received was quite out of proportion to its actual importance.

One could argue that the fact that this announcement turned into a PR-palooza can only be good for science, because it grows public support and funding for future research. However, I think that this sort of argument overlooks the damage that it can do to science.

It could turn out that the CERN announcement was based on a mistake, or that the particle really did have the right mass but *not* have the other properties of a Higgs boson. This would be seen by many who read the articles in the popular press as a failure of science, when in fact it would be an instance of the scientific method working as it should.

Yet, even if all of the claims turn out to have been justified, if this is a Higgs boson with the properties predicted by the Standard Model, it has little hope of living up to the hoopla surrounding the announcement. Science has a (deservedly) wonderful reputation for objectivity and skepticism, but a media circus like this one leaves even me somewhat jaded.

There may or may not be a Higgs field like the one in the Standard Model. This announcement puts a bit more weight on the “pro” side of the debate, but is far from the last word on the subject. Quoting Lawrence Krauss on this topic again: “Humans, with their remarkable tools and their remarkable brains, may have just taken a giant step toward replacing metaphysical speculation with empirically verifiable knowledge.” I agree, but would like to emphasize that the same would have been true had the announcement been that they were unable to find a particle with the specified energy level. The great thing about science is that every discovery, whether as we had hoped or not quite what we imagined, is a giant step towards replacing speculation with verifiable knowledge.

ATHEIST SEXUAL HARASSMENT: THE GOD IS IN THE DETAILS

HERB SILVERMAN

I've attended countless atheist and humanist conferences and never heard anyone justify sexual harassment. But I've heard heated discussions about what sexual harassment is. Alas, the god is in the details.

In a previous century, when I first became active in the secular movement, participants were mostly old white men who sat around talking about the need for diversity. At an American Humanist Association board meeting in 1998, a fellow board member suggested that a "young" person of 53 would be a good candidate for the board. I said I hoped for the day when some current board members would be too young for AARP eligibility.

That day has arrived. Almost all AHA board members are younger than I, a nice change from when I was the youngest, and many are years away from AARP. Five of the 12 board members and two of the four officers are women. Similar demographic changes have taken place within other national nontheistic organizations, reflected in part by the appearance of relatively new organizations like the children's Camp Quest, the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers, and the Secular Student Alliance. And with diversity in people comes diversity in attitudes and behavior.

I think most atheists view themselves as feminists. There was a mild controversy when the Secular Coalition for America recently hired Edwina Rogers as our new executive director. The controversy was not because she is a woman (we and other nontheistic organizations have had a number of women in leadership positions), but because she is a Republican, a rarity in our movement. But that's a diversity story for another time. Suffice it to say that most atheists were willing to grant Rogers the time and opportunity to show that she is an effective advocate for our mission, because we believe in evidence.

Nontheistic organizations have long had sexual harassment policies that covered their employees and workplaces, but not conference attendees. This oversight is being corrected because of complaints from a number of attendees at such events, still often dominated by men. I don't think women are saying that sexual harassment is more prevalent among atheists than in the general population, but our con-

ventions need to be safe and welcoming places for women.

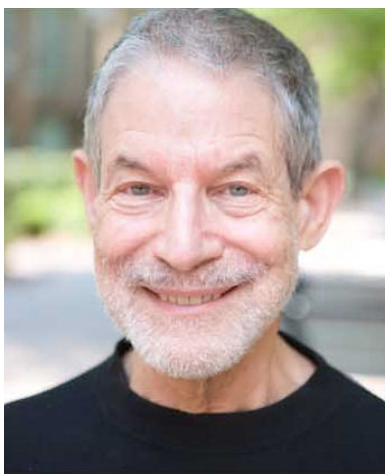
Here are a couple of reasons I think we might have had problems or misunderstandings. Many unattached men and women complain about how difficult it is to find non-religious partners in our religion-saturated culture. So an atheist gathering could be a wonderful meeting place. Sexual attention is not inherently inappropriate in such settings, but "no" still means "no." Also, many open and active atheists have developed thick skins because of insults they have endured from theocrats. So they might falsely assume they are communicating with someone whose skin is equally thick. Inexcusable behavior is inexcusable, which is why some sensitivity information for meeting participants might be in order.

Context is almost everything. It's not unusual to hear a man say at an atheist conference something like, "A woman should not teach or usurp authority over the man, but be silent." Both men and women laugh because they know it comes from 1 Timothy 2, and is actually believed by some Christians. Similarly, my wife laughs when I recite the only prayer she has ever heard from me: "Thank God I was not born a woman." She knows it to be the daily morning prayer of Orthodox Jews, and she is thankful I'm not an Orthodox Jew like some of my relatives who recite this prayer in earnest.

Since sexual harassment is not always clear to both parties, what's an atheist (or anyone else) to do? Here's a general guideline to prevent escalation. If you are asked to stop, stop. Nontheistic groups are beginning to hand out anti-harassment policies at gatherings or, more affirmatively, a conference code of conduct. This is a new code of conduct for American Atheist conferences.

Interestingly, it mentions being dedicated to providing a harassment-free conference experience for everyone, regardless of gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, race, or *religion* (italics mine). Depending on attendees, some might view several talks as a form of religious harassment.

Both theists and nontheists know there are right ways and wrong ways to treat others. Some people just need reminders. (See all of Herb's *On Faith* posts at <http://wapo.st/herb-on-faith>)





GOD FIXATION WON'T FIX THIS NATION

ffrf.org

Freedom From Religion Foundation

In time for the Democratic National Convention, the Freedom From Religion Foundation has placed a patriotic message with a secular twist on two prominent billboards in Charlotte, NC. The billboard, drawn by editorial cartoonist Steve Benson, depicts Uncle Sam wagging his finger and warning: “God fixation won’t fix this nation.”

Those traveling from the airport to the convention will be treated to a highly visible view of FFRF’s red-white-and-blue message on a billboard on Interstate 77 and another near Charlotte’s downtown.

The billboards, which FFRF refers to as an “election-year caveat,” were scheduled to go up on August 30.

“Our equal-opportunity message to both political parties and all public officials is: Get off your knees and get to work!” said FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. “God fixation, the preoccupation by our nation and its elected officials with religion, is holding back progress scientifically, intellectually and morally.”

FFRF put the same message up in Tampa on August 23 for the benefit of this year’s Republican convention. FFRF, a nonpartisan state/church watchdog group, is continuing a tradition started in 2008, when it placed a billboard message saying “Keep religion out of politics” in Denver and Minneapolis for the national party conventions.

FFRF spokeswoman Annie Laurie Gaylor cited as an example of the dangers of religion in politics and government the “pandering” decision by both parties to

give in to a request by the head of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to deliver convention prayers. Cardinal Timothy Dolan gave the closing prayer for the Republicans and will also pray at the Democratic convention.

“The Catholic bishops are trying to unduly influence and interfere with U.S. politics, particularly by trying to kill the health care contraceptive man-date—despite the fact that most American women are not Catholic and most Americans use and support contraception,” Gaylor noted. “It’s disturbing that both parties kowtow to Timothy Dolan.” FFRF ran hundreds of TV commercials this summer in regional markets featuring actress and playwright Julia Sweeney, a well-known former Catholic, objecting to the bishops’ anti-contraceptive attacks.

The Madison, WI-based group represents more than 19,000 freethinking members nationwide, including 485 members in North Carolina, and an active NC chapter, the Triangle Freethought Society.

CHASE COMMUNITY GIVING

The Secular Student Alliance and Camp Quest were both nominated for the Chase Community Giving program. Everyone gets two votes, and they can’t be used for the same organization, so this is the perfect opportunity to support both organizations.

To vote for the SSA, visit <http://bit.ly/chasessa>.

To vote for Camp Quest, visit <http://bit.ly/chasecq>.

Voting is from September 6th through the 19th.

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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OUR OFFICERS

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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>