

SECULAR
HUMANISTS



The Separationist

April 2020

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 newsletter editors 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 editors can be contacted at the following hot button.

[NewsletterEditors](#)

President's Corner

April 2020 - Pandemic Edition

For the past few weeks, we're social distancing to contain the spread of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Around the globe, every person is faced with the challenge of this global pandemic. In some democratic countries, though, the rise of aspiring authoritarian leadership adds a devastating dimension to the crisis.

Demagogues seize power — often with the population's consent — during a crisis.

Yale Professor Timothy Snyder, who studies authoritarian regimes and, in particular the Holocaust, wrote an essential book for our time. *"On Tyranny"* is a succinct list of 20 actions to take to defend our republic against authoritarianism. Our humanist values figure prominently among Snyder's list, including (5) believe in truth, (11) investigate, (15) contribute to good causes and (16) learn from peers in other countries.

We, as individual citizens, must speak up to defend the rule of law — and not to compromise our values — either individual values or societal values — during this scary time. Now is the time to hold onto our humanist values — and soon may be the time it's excruciating to do so.

We're already divided in this nation. A large minority believe at least some of the propaganda. They mistrust the media and scientists — and they mistrust experts in general.

On the other hand, so many people are making sacrifices to contain the epidemic. Local humanist Renee Orth created the Charleston United Covid Response Facebook page, where people are providing food to those who can't afford it, running errands for those under quarantine or at higher risk from the virus, donating money to local charities, sewing and 3D printing masks, and helping the unhoused.

However, as the crisis drags on, even the helpers are subject to serious disagreement and conflict. People are likely to turn against each other as fear increases. As this drags on — and as resources are more and more limited, people are going to steal, and they're going to fight.

Now, before most of us are truly in crisis mode, is a good time to clarify your own values. What are you willing to sacrifice and for whom? What are you unwilling to sacrifice? What is truly important, and what is petty?

Authoritarianism, pandemics and social breakdown are enemies we can't fight if we're further divided.

Bonnie Cleaveland
President, Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

Interested in reviewing information and videos from the
FFRF National Convention?
Click Here!



**You can make
a difference.**
↔
Get Involved
Keep Informed
Join or Donate



An Opportunity in August

Have you ever wondered if there are humanists like us in Africa? South America? Europe? There will be an opportunity to meet humanists from many countries at the 2020 World Humanist Congress on August 6 – 9 in Miami, Florida. The Congress will be hosted by the American Humanist Association and Humanists International. Humanist, atheist and skeptic organizations from around the globe will present speakers, seminars, panel discussions and networking. Find out more at humanism2020.org or call 202-238-9088.

For complete information and registration, click this link: <https://conference.americanhumanist.org>

SHL Main Events

Activities and Events Past and Future

The Gathering at Gage Hall

April's meeting is on hold. Look for more information on social media. Bonnie has been hosting on line Zoom events. Stay tuned.

**SHL Happy Hour
Be Happy
This too shall pass
Have a Corona**



As with all SHL events Happy Hour for April is postponed. We hope to see the return to Happy Hour social events soon. In the meantime,
BE SAFE

April Pandemic Book Group

**Our regular April Book Group meeting is cancelled.
A Zoom online Book Group to discuss our March selection,
21 Lessons for the 21 Century by Yuval Harari, is currently being
arranged for April 26th. Keep posted.**

Our ongoing pandemic is a great time to catch up on reading.
Here is the SHL Book Group READING LIST compiled by Yvonne Michele.
Be safe, stay home, read a book.

CHOSEN FOR MARCH 23 BOOK CLUB MEETING:

21 Lessons for the 21st Century by Yuval Harari (2018) PB \$14.95, HC \$19.88, 400pgs. “While his previous best sellers, *Sapiens* and *Homo Deus*, covered the past and future respectively, his new book is all about the present. The trick for putting an end to our anxieties, he suggests, is not to stop worrying. It’s to know which things to worry about, and how much to worry about them. . . . Harari is such a stimulating writer that even when I disagreed, I wanted to keep reading and thinking. . . . [Harari] has teed up a crucial global conversation about how to take on the problems of the twenty-first century.”—Bill Gates, *New York Times* Book Review

NEW BOOKS FOR CONSIDERATION FOR FUTURE BOOK CLUB MEETINGS:

Epidemics and Society: From the Black Death to the Present by Frank M. Snowden (2019) HC \$28.49, Kindle \$16.99, 600 pgs. This was an issue that raises really deep philosophical, religious, and moral issues. And I think epidemics have shaped history in part because they’ve led human beings inevitably to think about those big questions. The outbreak of the plague, for example, raised the whole question of man’s relationship to God. How could it be that an event of this kind could occur with a wise, all-knowing and omniscient divinity? Who would allow children to be tortured, in anguish, in vast numbers?

Frank M. Snowden, a professor emeritus of history and the history of medicine at Yale, talks about how pandemics can change history.

https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/how-pandemics-change-history?te=1&nl=coronavirus-briefing&emc=edit_cb_20200304&campaign_id=154&instance_id=16486&segment_id=21875&user_id=cd07fb7a08f44d5016513157e7348ec8®i_id=65997595

Recommended by Richard.

Lifespan: Why We Age and Why We Don't Have To by David A Sinclair, PhD, with Matthew D. LaPlante (2019) HC \$19.57, PB \$14.57, Kindle \$14.99, 432 pgs. A *New York Times* BESTSELLER. A paradigm-shifting book from an acclaimed Harvard Medical School scientist and one of *Times'* most influential people. Recommended by Herb.

Until The End of Time: Mind, Matter, and Our Search for Meaning in an Evolving Universe by Brian Greene (2020) Knopf, \$30, 326 pgs. Few humans share Greene's mastery of both the latest cosmological science and English prose. Here the best-selling physicist takes on our deepest mysteries: consciousness, creativity and the end of time. Our reviewer, Dennis Overbye, writes that the book is "a love letter to the ephemeral cosmic moment when everything is possible. Reading it is like riding an escalator up through a giant department store. On the lower floors you find things like time, energy, gravity and the Big Bang, and biology." Recommended by Yvonne.

The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life by David Brooks (2019) HC \$13.99, PB \$20.14, Kindle \$13.99, 384 pgs. #1 *New York Times* BESTSELLER. Everybody tells you to live for a cause larger than yourself, but how exactly do you do it? The author of *The Road to Character* explores what it takes to lead a meaningful life in a self-centered world. Recommended by Yvonne. He speaks about how to balance between belonging to a group and not judging those not in your group as enemies. Brooks is a believer, yet does not use such belief as necessary or a prerequisite for a moral life.

The Power Worshippers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism by Katherine Stewart (Bloomsbury). Kindle \$10.99, HC \$18.39, 347 pgs.
"A must-read for those interested in the influence of religion on politics and the effects on our political institutions." —*Library Journal*, starred review
"Stewart provides a comprehensive, chilling look at America's Christian nationalist movement, which she convincingly portrays as a highly organized political coalition that has 'already transformed the political landscape and shaken the foundations upon which lay our democratic norms and institutions.' . . . Her insightful investigation places the power of Christian nationalism into full context."
—*Publishers Weekly* Recommended by Richard.

Expose Yourself: How to take Risks, Question Everything, and Find Yourself by Erin Louis (2019). PB \$14.99, 222 pgs. Erin Louis offers us her new self-help book promoting critical thinking and self-confidence through humor, challenging insights, and her own true stories. A cross between "*Fifty Shades of Grey*" and "*The God Delusion*". Recommended by Richard.

PREVIOUS GROUP SELECTIONS WITH 4 VOTES.

The Year of Living Biblically: One Man's Humble Quest to Follow the Bible as Literally as Possible by A.J. Jacobs (2008) PB \$14.53, HC \$14.50, Kindle \$12.99, 416 pgs. From the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Know-It-All* comes a fascinating and timely exploration of religion and the Bible. A.J. Jacobs chronicles his hilarious and thoughtful year spent obeying—as literally as possible—the tenets of the Bible. Now a TV series, 'Living Biblically' streams on CBS All Access! Recommended by Yvonne.

PREVIOUS GROUP SELECTIONS WITH 3 VOTES.

A Year in the South: Four Lives in 1865 by Stephen Ash (2002) PB \$16.41, HC \$35.78, 304 pgs. The true story of four ordinary people who lived through the most tumultuous twelve months in American History. Recommended by Sharon & Herb.

CONSIDERING FICTION:

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood. I've been wanting to read it for a long time; guess I need just a little more push to do so. Recommended by Richard.

The Leading Edge of Reason

Contributions from our Community of Free Thinkers



Family: The United Nations and Conservatism.

By Scott Douglas Jacobsen.

Dr. Herb Silverman is the founder of the Secular Coalition for America, the founder of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry, and the founder of the Atheist/Humanist Alliance student group at the College of Charleston. He authored *Complex Variables* (1975), *Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt* (2012) and *An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land: Selected Writings from the Bible Belt* (2017). He co-authored *The Fundamentals of Extremism: The Christian Right in America* (2003) with Kimberley Blaker and Edward S. Buckner, *Complex Variables with Applications* (2007) with Saminathan Ponnusamy, and *Short Reflections on Secularism* (2019), and *Short Reflections on American Secularism's History and Philosophy* (2020).

Here we talk about family.

Scott Douglas Jacobsen: Conservatives take the family as the fundamental unit of societies, the building block. It becomes a divine mandate in many theologies and religious social commentaries. The United Nations is fundamentally allied with this vision in its foundational and associated documents with the description of the family as the fundamental group unit in the society, an almost unacknowledged unifying vision between a nationalist and a globalist vision of the world. So, why is family fundamental? They both seem right from different views of the world.

Dr. Herb Silverman: A family is usually viewed as people connected by blood, adoption, or marriage. The question then becomes how we should treat family members. Surprisingly, I like what Jesus said

about blood relatives, though with some objections and a different perspective.

This is from Mark 3:32–35: A crowd was sitting around Jesus and said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.” And Jesus replied, “Who are my mother and brothers?” And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and my mother.”

Of course, I disagree with defining family in terms of faith. On the other hand, there is something to be said about counting friends we choose after we are born as more important than people we are related to through no personal decisions. I would say that family is fundamental if we include those we are close to, whether or not we are related to them. Nevertheless, even if we are not close to blood relatives, I think we owe them respect and help when they are in need. I have no siblings and wasn't particularly close to my parents, but I know they made many sacrifices for me and I appreciate that they tried to raise me as best they could. I also tried to make things comfortable for them when they became too old and sick to care for themselves.

Jesus challenges our notions of family loyalty when he says, according to Luke 14:26, “Whoever does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” Perhaps this is why when Jesus' family heard what he was doing, they said, “He is out of his mind.” (Mark 3:21). In John 7:5, we learn that even Jesus' brothers didn't believe him.

Christians continually bemoan the breakdown of “family values” in our culture. Do they only count as family members those who worship Jesus the same way that they do?

I don't think Christians can take much solace in the Hebrew Bible, where many men had more than one wife. In fact, according to 1 Kings 11:3, Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. Perhaps Solomon's brain was not his most noteworthy organ. When it comes to nationalist and globalist views of family, I include extended families, who go beyond the nuclear family of father, mother, and their

(Continued on Page 6)

children. It can include aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins, all living in the same household. In a lot of cultures, the extended family is the basic family unit.

Many families move in with one another for financial and emotional support, especially when children are involved. Demographic and cultural shifts, such as the increasing number of immigrants and the rising average age of young-adult marriages, along with difficulties in finding jobs paying a living wage, have also created a need for extended families. Approximately 49 million Americans live in homes containing three or more generations.

Jacobsen: Most people want a family. Most will create one. What are some good principles for getting from point A to point Z?

Silverman: You can create family by first establishing close and fulfilling relationships. Sometimes these relationships are formed when you get involved with activities you enjoy. This is a good way to meet people with whom you have things in common. When it comes to coupling (as in dating), it's important to make sure the other half of your couple is a friend (and contraceptives have been considered). You should be honest, not just about your feelings for the person, but also about your perceived weaknesses and fears.

When the relationship grows closer, you might consider living together. By now you should have discussed boundaries, what you feel is permitted and what is not. Is it an exclusive sexual relationship? If it appears that this loving relationship might become permanent, you may want to consider marriage. But first discuss what you both want out of marriage. Financial arrangements? Kids? If so, how many and how should they be raised? Such plans might change, but it's still a good idea to discuss such things in advance.

Though couples usually marry with the best of intentions, about half of marriages end in divorce. I recommend couples-counselling before considering divorce, especially if kids are involved. I definitely don't recommend following Mark 10:9, "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder." This means, according to the Catholic Church, that a woman should stay in her marriage even if her husband abuses her. There is a Catholic out, known

as annulment, in which the Church can declare that the marriage was never really valid. It can be expensive to get such an annulment.

My wife is an adulterer in the eyes of the Catholic Church. She is married to a second man (me), even though she received a civil divorce from the first many years ago. The Catholic Church does not recognize or permit a second marriage like hers when the first took place in a Catholic Church. I enthusiastically endorse my wife's two divorces: one legally from her first husband, and one metaphorically from the Catholic Church.

Jacobsen: How do you keep a family life, or simply a family without children, fresh, vibrant, and stimulating rather than dull, a deteriorator, and stultifying?

Silverman: You sometimes hear that in a marriage, two become one. I disagree. I think it's important for two to remain two. While each has his or her interests, it's good for couples to also have lots in common, things that they enjoy doing together. Often one of the partners develops an interest that the other partner has. It's also nice to share new adventures.

If you don't get along with a family member, perhaps a relative, that's fine as long as you don't resent it and hold a grudge. Such feelings not only make the relationship worse, but they can also hurt your body and your mind.

To keep a marriage from stultifying, it helps to have a sense of humor. Most mornings my wife says to me, "It's so nice to wake up next to you." She laughs when I respond, "I'm sorry I can't experience that pleasure." Despite the cliché, I don't know what it means to be "beside myself."

Jacobsen: Thank you for the opportunity and your time, Dr. Silverman.

Further Reading from Herb Silverman

<https://medium.com/humanist-voices/if-youth-knew-if-age-could-19-archimedean-pivot-to-take-a-stand-and-to-move-the-earth-549ca22ea795>

<https://medium.com/humanist-voices/if-youth-knew-if-age-could-18-platos-demon-and-platonic-friends-or-a-mathematician-who-can-64a14cefd9ec>

Editor's note: The Leading Edge reflects the writings of our own SHL freethinkers. Rather than ask for submissions, we will be reviewing various local social media to be included each month on this designated page in *The Separationist*. Suggested writings are welcome. Please send letters or articles to newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org.

Reasonable Humor & Secular Wisdom

Quips and Cartoons offered by membership from online sources



Voices Beyond SHL

Articles and Opinions Beyond Our SHL Community

FFRF admonishes Okla. governor for coronavirus-related religious theatrics



March 27, 2020

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is reproaching the Oklahoma governor for engaging in religious shenanigans instead of real action in the face of the coronavirus pandemic. Gov. Kevin Stitt issued an official proclamation declaring March 26 as a “Statewide Day of Prayer.” He cited Psalm 34:17-18: “When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.” He then urged “Oklahomans of all faiths and religious backgrounds to join together in prayer for all those affected by COVID-19, including our health care professionals on the front lines and those who have suffered harm or lost loved ones.”

Stitt also sponsored and participated in a worship event on March 26 called “Let Hope Rise: Together in Prayer for Oklahoma.” He spoke during this occasion, where he was introduced as the “architect” of the event: “My message to Oklahomans tonight is it is not going to last forever. We are going to get through this, and we’re going to get through it together. But we need hope, we need hope from

our heavenly father.” He explained that his office had worked with television stations to broadcast this religious worship service throughout the state. He ended his remarks by reading directly from the bible:

And I want to leave everybody with this one scripture, Phillipians 4:6-7. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, with prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your request known to the Lord. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guide your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Oklahoma, we are going to get through this together. God bless you. God bless the great state of Oklahoma.

By appealing to Oklahomans with such a blatantly Christian message, Stitt abridges his duty to remain neutral and to respect the freedom of conscience of all his citizens, FFRF emphasizes.

“The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution wisely prohibits government sponsorship of religious messages,” FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor write to the governor. “The Supreme Court has said time and again that the ‘First Amendment mandates government neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and non-religion.’”

More than one-third of Americans are non-Christians, including the more than one in four Americans who identify as religiously unaffiliated, FFRF points out. Stitt’s full-throated Christian plea sends this vast group of citizens the message “that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community, and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the political community,” to quote the U.S. Supreme Court. The separation between state and church is one of the most fundamental principles of our system of government, FFRF reminds Stitt. The Supreme Court has specifically stated: “If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what

shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein.”

During times of crisis, citizens look for leadership, and Stitt has been woefully lacking on that front. Oklahomans may decide to turn to a church, but the state may not turn into a church. Stitt has misused his office in asking for the pre-emption of regular programming on several major channels to broadcast a governor-led religious service. He should have instead been busy imparting to Oklahomans proven scientific methods to stem the coronavirus scourge, but he’s been a lamentable laggard in this regard.

As the state’s highest elected official, Stitt is charged with great responsibility and has been given significant trust by citizens, including those who may not share his personal religious viewpoints. Leaving prayer as a private matter for private citizens is the wisest public policy, FFRF advises.



The Freedom From Religion Foundation is a national nonprofit organization with more than 31,000 members across the country, including in Oklahoma. Its purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, based in Madison, Wis., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational charity, is the nation’s largest association of freethinkers (atheists, agnostics), and has been working since 1978 to keep religion and government separate.



Constitution of United States of America 1789

Amendment One:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Editor’s Note: Reason Voices Beyond SHL is a section dedicated to reaching out beyond our SHL community. Persons interested in having articles printed in The Separationist, or members who have read interesting articles relative to secularism and humanism are welcome to send ideas to the link newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org for our consideration.

Want to fight creeping Christian Nationalism?

Join and donate to organizations that defend the First Amendment.

American Humanist Association <https://americanhumanist.org>

Secular Coalition for America <https://secular.org>

Freedom from Religion Foundation <https://ffrf.org>

Satanic Temple <https://thesatanictemple.com>

Americans United for the Separation of Church and State <https://www.au.org>

American Civil Liberties Union <https://www.aclu.org>

Center for Inquiry <https://centerforinquiry.org>

April

SHL's Charity of the Quarter Community Resource Center, Summerville



(Learn more and contribute. [CLICK HERE](#))

Please help SHL make a difference: Contributions can be made at the SHL Website.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
During the Pandemic look for announcements on email, facebook, and meetup about online Zoom SHL Events.			1 	2	3 SHL Zoom Online Social 7PM	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
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19	20	21			24	25
26 SHL Book Group Zoom	27	28	29	30		

SHL Board for 2019-2020

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SECULAR HUMANISTS



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SHL is a non-prophet
organization

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