

Rationalists of East Tennessee Newsletter

August 2014
Edited by Carl Ledendecker

First Sunday Meeting

August 3 Sunday 10:30 - 12:30

Pellissippi State Community College, Goins Building, Cafeteria Annex

Nan Woodbury

The story of her 8000 mile bike trip

Come join RET member Nan Woodbury for the morning as she tells her story about her 8000 mile bicycle adventure from California to Peru. She will share pictures and stories of her 20 months, 13 counties, 2 sets of tires, and more patches than she can count.

To travel at the speed of a bicycle is to see the world in a different perspective. Bicycle speed is slow enough to become part of the landscape, and just fast enough to make progress. This journey was one of discovery about herself, the world we live in, and the connections we make along the way.

"This adventure changed me, and how I understand the world. This is what I want to share with you and maybe my story will change how you see the world too."

Refreshments and coffee at 10 am before this presentation.

Lunch Bunch, Taste of Thai

August 13 Wednesday 11:15

Join the Rationalists of East Tennessee for a Lunch-Brunch on Wednesday August 13, at 11:15 am. The get-together will be held at the restaurant "A Taste of Thai", just off North Peters Road, across from Best Buy and Lowe's Home Improvement. If you have not signed up or if you have signed up and need to cancel, please contact Pauline, 437-9966 or hpauline0719@yahoo.com so tables will be ready.

The RET Skeptic Book Club

August 10 Sunday 4:00 – 6:00 pm

“Deconverted: A Journey from Religion to Reason” by Seth Andrews.

Barnes and Noble Booksellers, 8029 Kingston Pike.

"...and then Noah loaded the dinosaurs onto the ark." Assertions like these seem comical until you realize that many Christian parents aren't kidding when they teach them to their children as facts. Every day, impressionable young minds are conditioned to blindly accept wild biblical tales of floating zoos, talking shrubbery, 900-year-old humans, the undead, curses, levitation, demon/human hybrids and men who obtain super-human strength from the length of their hair. Allegiance to these teachings is expected, often demanded. Curiosity is muted. Doubt is frowned upon as a sin. And for those who dare to raise a dissenting hand, the threat of Hell looms ominously. A former religious radio host raised in the cradle of Christianity, Seth Andrews battled his own doubts for many years. His attempts to reconcile faith and the facts led him to a conclusion previously unthinkable, and this once-true believer ultimately became the founder of one of the most popular atheist communities on the internet. (Amazon Review)

RET Third Sunday Meeting

August 17 Sunday 10:30 p.m. – 12:30 pm

Pellissippi State Community College, Goins Building, Cafeteria Annex

**"Intelligently Designed: How Creationists Built the Campaign Against Evolution."
by University of Tennessee professor Edward Caudill.**

Rather than looking at the issue as a scientific controversy, professor Caudill approaches it as a political exercise, grounded in creationists' appeal to cultural values such as rights and individualism, the astute use of media, and legitimate scientists' inability to address the general public. The problem is not whether intelligent design/creationism is science. It is not. The compelling issue, instead, is "How did such a silly idea as a 6,000-year-old earth win so many followers in the most scientifically advanced culture in the history of humanity?"

RET Reflections Meeting

August 24 Sunday 1:00 to 4:00 pm

By Special request there will be an unscheduled Reflections this month

Who are We? How do we see ourselves, and how should others see us?

There is no question about the position of the Rationalists with respect to the encroachment of religious dogma upon the sphere of public policy. In this area we are all of one mind. Where members may differ is in the way we view the makeup of the organization itself and the way we wish to be perceived by the general public, individually and collectively. Are we rationalists necessarily all staunch non-believers, or might some of us just be naturalists or secularists uninterested in the issue, and might others of us even be theists who feel the interests of organized religion are not well served by institutional theocracy? Should we adopt a confrontational stance toward believers, challenging the validity of religions faith; a conciliatory view, recognizing that religion satisfies basic human needs; or even an embracing posture, seeking common ground with religious organizations to further our common interest in maintaining the strict separation of religion principles and governmental institutions? Members should come to this discussion prepared to propound and defend their view of the complexion and orientation they would like to see the Rationalists pursue.

Location:

At the home of William Behr at 3104 Broadway (in north central Knoxville at the intersection with Atlantic Avenue.)

Exit I40 at Hall of Fame Drive, turn north and proceed to merge onto Broadway. When you reach the traffic light at Atlantic Avenue, turn right into Carriage Lane. Park in any unmarked space near the pool, go to the third building (building "C") and look for unit #17 at the foot of the stairway with "Bill Behr" on the door.

If you have any trouble, call Bill at 865-281-9450. Following the discussion the pool will be available for anyone who would like to take a dip before their long trip home.

Book Club List for Voting

As noted in the last newsletter, Joan has passed the Book Club baton to me, Bob Morris, and I am filling some tough shoes! Many thanks to her for her leadership and the training wheels she has offered to get me going.

Many thanks to all of you who sent in book suggestions. I hope I got them all; one was on a piece of notepaper and I couldn't figure out which book was wanted, but otherwise I think I got them all. Everyone who suggested a single book got it on the list. Those of you who suggested several books got two books on the list; I selected them to round out the topics to avoid concentrating too much on one subject. At worst, one person could end up doing two books, but we can work that out. I saved the extra books for next time. So there should be a book for everyone, even if you are an atheist astronaut who lost all his money in the recent economic downturn and can't remember who he is.....

Even though we are in Tennessee you do not need an ID to vote.) Please select 9 of the 13 books and number them in your order of preference; 1 being the most desired. Please return the list by August 9, 2014 to rmorris126@comcast.net

1) "Zoobiquity: The Astonishing Connection Between Human and Animal Health" by Barbara Natterson Horowitz

We may think our problems are uniquely human. But animals and humans get the same diseases. How might we better understand human health and illness if we harnessed knowledge from veterinarians, the doctors that take care of other animals? Zoobiquity explores how jaguar breast cancer, dolphin diabetes, flamingo heart attacks, canine PTSD—and more—are transforming human medicine.

2) "House of Debt: How They (and You) Caused the Great Recession, and How We Can Prevent It from Happening Again" by Atif Mian

The Great American Recession resulted in the loss of eight million jobs between 2007 and 2009. More than four million homes were lost to foreclosures. Is it a coincidence that the United States witnessed a dramatic rise in household debt in the years before the recession—that the total amount of debt for American households doubled between 2000 and 2007 to \$14 trillion? Definitely not. Armed with clear and powerful evidence, Atif Mian and Amir Sufi reveal in *House of Debt* how the Great Recession and Great Depression, as well as the current economic malaise in Europe, were caused by a large run-up in household debt followed by a significantly large drop in household spending. Though the banking crisis captured the public's attention, Mian and Sufi argue strongly with actual data that current policy is too heavily biased toward protecting banks and creditors. Increasing the flow of credit, they show, is disastrously counterproductive when the fundamental problem is too much debt. As their research shows, excessive household debt leads to foreclosures, causing individuals to spend less and save more. Less spending means less demand for goods, followed by declines in production and huge job losses. How do we end such a cycle? With a direct attack on debt, say Mian and Sufi. More aggressive debt forgiveness after the crash helps, but as they illustrate, we can be rid of painful bubble-and-bust episodes only if the financial system moves away from its reliance on inflexible debt contracts. As an example, they propose new mortgage contracts that are built on the principle of risk-sharing, a concept that would have prevented the housing bubble from emerging in the first place. Thoroughly grounded in compelling economic evidence, *House of Debt* offers convincing answers to some of the most important questions facing the modern economy today: Why do severe recessions happen? Could we have prevented the Great Recession and its consequences? And what actions are needed to prevent such crises going forward?

3) "A Troublesome Inheritance" by Nicholas Wade

Fewer ideas have been more toxic or harmful than the idea of the biological reality of race, and with it the idea that humans of different races are biologically different from one another. For this understandable reason, the idea has been banished from polite academic conversation. Arguing that race is more than just a social construct can get a scholar run out of town, or at least off campus, on a rail. Human evolution, the consensus view insists, ended in prehistory. Inconveniently, as Nicholas Wade argues in *A Troublesome Inheritance*, the consensus view cannot be right. And in fact, we know that populations have changed in the past few thousand years—to be lactose tolerant, for example, and to survive at high altitudes. Race is not a bright-line distinction; by definition it means that the more human populations are kept apart, the more they evolve their own distinct traits under the selective pressure known as Darwinian evolution. For many thousands of years, most human populations stayed where they were and grew distinct, not just in outward appearance but in deeper senses as well.

4) "NONBELIEVER NATION: the rise of secular Americans" by David Niose

Today, one in five Americans are nonbelievers—a rapidly growing group at a time when traditional Christian churches are dwindling in numbers. Still we see almost none of them openly serving in elected office, while Mitt Romney, Rick Santorum, and many others continue to loudly proclaim the falsehood of America as a Christian nation. In *Nonbeliever Nation*, leading secular advocate David Niose calls for nonreligious Americans from all backgrounds to step out of the shadows and signal their opposition to the long-dominant Religious Right. Exploring all the hot-button issues that divide the country—from gay marriage to education policy to

contentious church-state battles—he shows how Secular Americans—a group comprised not just of atheists and agnostics, but lapsed Catholics, secular Jews, and millions of others who have walked away from organized religion—are mobilizing and forming groups all over the country (even atheist clubs in Bible-belt high schools) to challenge the exaltation of religion in American politics and public life. This is a timely and important look at a growing demographic that is flexing its muscles for the first time.

5) “Astronaut’s Guide to Life on Earth” by Chris Hadfield

Colonel Chris Hadfield has spent decades training as an astronaut and has logged nearly 4000 hours in space. During this time he has broken into a Space Station with a Swiss army knife, disposed of a live snake while piloting a plane, and been temporarily blinded while clinging to the exterior of an orbiting spacecraft. The secret to Col. Hadfield's success-and survival-is an unconventional philosophy he learned at NASA: prepare for the worst-and enjoy every moment of it. In *An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth*, Col. Hadfield takes readers deep into his years of training and space exploration to show how to make the impossible possible. Through eye-opening, entertaining stories filled with the adrenaline of launch, the mesmerizing wonder of spacewalks, and the measured, calm responses mandated by crises, he explains how conventional wisdom can get in the way of achievement-and happiness. His own extraordinary education in space has taught him some counterintuitive lessons: don't visualize success, do care what others think, and always sweat the small stuff. You might never be able to build a robot, pilot a spacecraft, make a music video or perform basic surgery in zero gravity like Col. Hadfield. But his vivid and refreshing insights will teach you how to *think* like an astronaut.

6) “Diatribes, Vol 1, 50 Essays from a Godless Misanthrope” by Noah Lugeons

Do you occasionally suffer from bouts of irrationality, cognizance and literacy? Are you constantly baffled by the failure of your fellow hominids to comprehend simple principles like evidence, statistical significance, confirmation bias and logic? Do your jaws ache from constantly holding your tongue in polite company? Do you find yourself tempted to stand on tables and scream “The bible also says rabbits chew their cud! That’s not an allegory and I’m not reading it out of context, you frothing nincompoops, it’s just wrong!”? Then this may be the book for you. *The Scathing Atheist* is a weekly podcast about religion that uses all the expletives the subject deserves. In its first year of production, host Noah Lugeons has earned a reputation for vindictive wit that is on full display in these fifty essays; each an expanded version of a tirade that first appeared on the podcast. More than a third of the book is all new material so whether you're a fan of *The Scathing Atheist* podcast or just a fan of vulgar and blasphemous wordplay, these bite-sized nuggets of vitriolic rationality are the perfect catharsis for atheists who are too polite to tell people what they really think.

7) “Hope after Faith” by Jerry DeWitt

A former Louisiana pastor’s courageous memoir chronicling his conversion to atheism. Atheism’s leading lights have long been intellectuals raised in the secular and academic worlds: Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and the late Christopher Hitchens. By contrast, Jerry DeWitt was born and bred into the church and was in fact a Pentecostal preacher before arriving at atheism through an extraordinary dialogue with faith that spanned more than a quarter of a century. *Hope After Faith* is his account of that journey.

8) “Stuff Matters: Exploring the Marvelous Materials That Shape Our Man-Made World” by Mark Miodownik

Why can we see through glass windows? What makes steel so versatile? Materials scientist Miodownik intertwines humorous vignettes of daily life in London with subatomic behavior to explain the feats of engineering that brought us samurai swords, skyscrapers, pool balls and even chocolate. From concrete in Roman architecture to atom-thick graphene, Miodownik builds on a historical framework to give readers an idea of future applications. Clever in every sense of the word, *Stuff Matters* may leave you looking at windows rather than through them.

9) “How Jesus became God” by Bart Ehrman

In a book that took eight years to research and write, leading Bible scholar Bart D. Ehrman explores how an apocalyptic prophet from the backwaters of rural Galilee crucified for crimes against the state came to be thought of as equal with the one God Almighty Creator of all things. Ehrman sketches Jesus's transformation from a human prophet to the Son of God exalted to divine status at his resurrection. Only when some of Jesus's followers had visions of him after his death—alive again—did anyone come to think that he, the prophet from Galilee, had become God. And what they meant by that was not at all what people mean today. As a historian—not a believer—Ehrman answers the questions: How did this transformation of Jesus occur? How did he move from being a Jewish prophet to being God? The dramatic shifts throughout history reveal not only why Jesus's followers began to claim he was God, but also how they came to understand this claim in so many different ways. Written for secular historians of religion and believers alike, *How Jesus Became God* will engage anyone interested in the historical developments that led to the affirmation at the heart of Christianity: Jesus was, and is, God.

10) “The Answer to the Riddle Is Me: A Memoir of Amnesia” by David Stuart MacLean

On October 17, 2002, David MacLean “woke up” on a train platform in India with no idea who he was or why he was there. No money. No passport. No identity. Taken to a mental hospital by the police, MacLean then started to hallucinate so severely he had to be tied down. Soon he could remember song lyrics, but not his family, his friends, or the woman he was told he loved. All of these symptoms, it turned out, were the result of the commonly prescribed malarial medication he had been taking. Upon his return to the States, he struggled to piece together the fragments of his former life in a harrowing, absurd, and unforgettable journey back to himself. *The Answer to the Riddle Is Me*, drawn from David MacLean’s award-winning *This American Life* essay, is a deeply felt, closely researched, and intensely personal book. It asks every reader to confront the essential questions of our age: In our geographically and chemically fluid world, what makes me who I am? And how much can be stripped away before I become someone else entirely?

11) “The Divide: American Injustice in the Age of the Wealth Gap” by Matt Taibbi

Over the last two decades, America has been falling deeper and deeper into a statistical mystery: Poverty goes up. Crime goes down. The prison population doubles. Fraud by the rich wipes out 40 percent of the world’s wealth. The rich get massively richer. No one goes to jail. In search of a solution, journalist Matt Taibbi discovered the Divide, the seam in American life where our two most troubling trends—growing wealth inequality and mass incarceration—come together, driven by a dramatic shift in American citizenship: Our basic rights are now determined by our wealth or poverty. The Divide is what allows massively destructive fraud by the hyperwealthy to go unpunished, while turning poverty itself into a crime—but it’s impossible to see until you look at these two alarming trends side by side. In *The Divide*, Matt Taibbi takes readers on a galvanizing journey through both sides of our new system of justice—the fun-house-mirror worlds of the untouchably wealthy and the criminalized poor. He uncovers the startling looting that preceded the financial collapse; a wild conspiracy of billionaire hedge fund managers to destroy a company through dirty tricks; and the story of a whistleblower who gets in the way of the largest banks in America, only to find herself in the crosshairs. On the other side of the Divide, Taibbi takes us to the front lines of the immigrant dragnet; into the newly punitive welfare system which treats its beneficiaries as thieves; and deep inside the stop-and-frisk world, where standing in front of your own home has become an arrestable offense. As he narrates these incredible stories, he draws out and analyzes their common source: a perverse new standard of justice, based on a radical, disturbing new vision of civil rights. Through astonishing—and enraging—accounts of the high-stakes capers of the wealthy and nightmare stories of regular people caught in the Divide’s punishing logic, Taibbi lays bare one of the greatest challenges we face in contemporary American life: surviving a system that devours the lives of the poor, turns a blind eye to the destructive crimes of the wealthy, and implicates us all.

12) “Without Conscience: The Disturbing World of the Psychopaths Among Us” by Robert D Hare

Most people are both repelled and intrigued by the images of cold-blooded, conscienceless murderers that increasingly populate our movies, television programs, and newspaper headlines. With their flagrant criminal violation of society's rules, serial killers like Ted Bundy and John Wayne Gacy are among the most dramatic examples of the psychopath. Individuals with this personality disorder are fully aware of the consequences of their actions and know the difference between right and wrong, yet they are terrifyingly self-centered, remorseless, and unable to care about the feelings of others. Perhaps most frightening, they often seem completely normal to unsuspecting targets—and they do not always ply their trade by killing. Presenting a compelling portrait of these dangerous men and

women based on 25 years of distinguished scientific research, Dr. Robert D. Hare vividly describes a world of con artists, hustlers, rapists, and other predators who charm, lie, and manipulate their way through life. Are psychopaths mad, or simply bad? How can they be recognized? And how can we protect ourselves? This book provides solid information and surprising insights for anyone seeking to understand this devastating condition.

13) “Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead” by Sheryl Sandberg

Thirty years after women became 50 percent of the college graduates in the United States, men still hold the vast majority of leadership positions in government and industry. This means that women’s voices are still not heard equally in the decisions that most affect our lives. In *Lean In*, Sheryl Sandberg examines why women’s progress in achieving leadership roles has stalled, explains the root causes, and offers compelling, commonsense solutions that can empower women to achieve their full potential. Sandberg is the chief operating officer of Facebook and is ranked on *Fortune*’s list of the 50 Most Powerful Women in Business and as one of *Time*’s 100 Most Influential People in the World. In 2010, she gave an electrifying TEDTalk in which she described how women unintentionally hold themselves back in their careers. Her talk, which became a phenomenon and has been viewed more than two million times, encouraged women to “sit at the table,” seek challenges, take risks, and pursue their goals with gusto. In *Lean In*, Sandberg digs deeper into these issues, combining personal anecdotes, hard data, and compelling research to cut through the layers of ambiguity and bias surrounding the lives and choices of working women. She recounts her own decisions, mistakes, and daily struggles to make the right choices for herself, her career, and her family. She provides practical advice on negotiation techniques, mentorship, and building a satisfying career, urging women to set boundaries and to abandon the myth of “having it all.” She describes specific steps women can take to combine professional achievement with personal fulfillment and demonstrates how men can benefit by supporting women in the workplace and at home. Written with both humor and wisdom, Sandberg’s book is an inspiring call to action and a blueprint for individual growth. *Lean In* is destined to change the conversation from what women can’t do to what they can.

RET/ASK Freethought Forum

Tuesdays 5:00 – 6:00 pm

In Knoxville: Comcast Channel 12 Charter Channel 6
Surrounding areas: free streaming on ctvknox.org.

Show topics are subject to change.

Right after the show a co-host of the program holds The Atheist Society of Knoxville meet up at Barley’s in Knoxville’s Old Town. Volunteer hosts and suggestions for topics would be welcome for all of these programs. Contact Larry Rhodes at larryr@usit.net.

“Satanists” to use Hobby Lobby Decision to block “pro-life” propaganda

<http://www.dailykos.com/story/2014/07/28/1317272/-Well-well-Satanists-to-use-Hobby-Lobby-to-block-pro-life-propaganda?>

“Informed consent or ‘right to know’ laws state that women seeking elective abortions be provided with information about alternatives to the procedure, often couched in language that attempts to personify the fetus.”

According to the article 35 states have such laws but the Satanic Temple of New York City is trying to use the “Hobby Lobby” decision against itself.

“Because the Satanic Temple bases its belief “regarding personal health...on the best scientific understanding of the world, regardless of the religious or political beliefs of others,” it claims that **state-mandated information with no basis in scientific fact violates its “religious” beliefs.**”

It is attempting to make this “exemption” available to all women as well.

What is this Satanic Temple? (From Wikipedia - Satanism)

“The Satanic Temple, based in New York, represents a variety of Satanism that uses the literary Satan as a mythological foundation for a non-supernatural religion, which it believes can be used to construct a cultural narrative that can usefully contextualize life experiences and promote pragmatic skepticism, rational reciprocity, personal autonomy, and curiosity.

As it lacks the creed of elitism and Social Darwinism that define the Church of Satan in favor of other characteristics of the literary Satan, it contrasts itself by its desire to actively participate in public affairs and provide outreach to the wider public. This has manifested in several public political actions and efforts at lobbying, with a focus on the separation of Church and State and using satire against religious organizations that it believes interfere with freedom and the pursuit of happiness.[50]

The only requirements to be a member are to support the tenets and beliefs of the organization, and to name yourself a member.”

The Freewill Excuse for Evil

“At one time he (God) tells us that evil came into the world and exists there by God's will. At another he tells us that moral evil exists in opposition to God's will. Thus in all religious systems, Christian and non-Christian alike, God is an Omnipotent Being who does not get his own way. Believers when hard pushed are not ashamed to resort to the verbal juggle of saying that an All-powerful Being, as such, must be capable of making Free Agents, whose will he does not control. That is to say, an All-Powerful Being is capable, among other things, of being not All-Powerful. Godism when argued out, always ends thus in nonsense. Why do men stand to such absurd positions?”

John Mackinnon: (1856-1933) Godism from Anthology of Atheism and Rationalism edited by Gordon Stein

Dues and donations can be sent to “RET, P.O. Box 51634, Knoxville, TN 37950”, or via Pay Pal through the link at www.rationalists.org. Direct payment can also be made to RET treasurer, Eliot Specht

Reimbursement

Remember that you can ask for reimbursement for food, supplies, etc. that you provide for RET.

FEEL FREE to Send me information or articles by you.

Anyone who has something to submit for publication in the RET Newsletter please e-mail it to ledendecker@earthlink.net. The decision to include the submission is at the discretion of the current editor (me) but I am not all that picky.