

Rationalists of East Tennessee Newsletter

June 2015
Edited by Carl Ledendecker



In a New Spot

Want more?

Contribute to RET and tag money to be for Billboards

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

First Sunday Meeting

June 7 Saturday 10:30 - 12:30

Pellissippi State Community College, Goins Building, Cafeteria Annex

New Harmony & the "Boatload of Knowledge"

Presented by RET member Ted Lollis

In the winter of 1825-1826, scientist William Maclure and reformer Robert Owen led a boatload of scientists and artists down the Ohio River to colonize New Harmony, Indiana. Another Scot, Frances Wright, flirted an American super hero, the Marquis de Lafayette, repeatedly traveled to New Harmony, and founded Nashoba, a colony for freed slaves near Memphis, Tennessee.

Neither colony survived, but Maclure s scientists and five of Owen s adult children remained in New Harmony, and one of them joined Wright during a meteoric career in New York City. Collectively, they helped bring about vast improvements in education, in labor, in race relations, and in the role which rationalism & science have come to play in our modern society, including the foundations of the US Geological Survey and the Smithsonian Institution.

The RET Skeptic Book Club

June 14 Sunday 2:00 – 4:00 pm

Note: Remember new time AND LOCATION.

Location: Books-A-Million at 8513 Kingston Pike, Knoxville.

“Stuff Matters: Exploring the Marvelous Materials That Shape Our Man-Made World”

by Mark Miodownik.

Please join us on Sunday, June 14, at 2:00 pm at Books-A-Million, 8513 Kingston Pike, Knoxville. Why is glass see-through? What makes elastic stretchy? Why does any material look and behave the way it does? These are the sorts of questions that renowned materials scientist Mark Miodownik constantly asks himself. Miodownik studies objects as ordinary as an envelope and as unexpected as concrete cloth, uncovering the fascinating secrets that hold together our physical world. In *Stuff Matters*, Miodownik explores the materials he encounters in a typical morning, from the steel in his razor to the foam in his sneakers. Full of enthralling tales of the miracles of engineering that permeate our lives, *Stuff Matters* will make you see stuff in a whole new way.

[Amazon Description](#)

Book Club List

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

RET New Book Club List Voting

It is again time to select the next round of books for the Skeptics Book Club. We have a good variety of books to choose from which run the gambit: autobiography, science, politics, culture, psychology, and religion. Please choose 8 books from this list and order them in your preference. Send your list to rmorris126@comcast.net by June 20, 2015 so I can sort the replies and have the new list ready to go for August. As always, jot down any new and novel books you come across for next time!

List of new book choices:

Unholy Trinity: The Vatican, The Nazis, and The Swiss Banks by Mark Aarons

Unholy Trinity tells one of the darkest tales of World War II. After the war had ended, fearing a surge of Soviet growth, the Papacy entered into an espionage alliance with British and American intelligence agents. Subsuming justice to the nascent Cold War ideology, these three powers ferreted Nazi criminals out of Europe so that they could be used in the supposedly greater fight against Communism. The Vatican's Nazi smuggling network was penetrated by Prince Anton Turku, the great Soviet double agent who turned the operations into a sting for his masters in the Kremlin. Unholy Trinity exposes Turku's "Red Nazi" operation for the first time and shows how Kim Philby, the infamous British-Soviet double agent, and his network were nearly sacrificed to preserve Turku's Vatican operation.

The Family by Jeff Sharley

They insist they are just a group of friends, yet they funnel millions of dollars through tax-free corporations. They claim to disdain politics, but congressmen of both parties describe them as the most influential religious organization in Washington. They say they are not Christians, but simply believers. Behind the scenes at every National Prayer Breakfast since 1953 has been the Family, an elite network dedicated to a religion of power for the powerful. Their goal is "Jesus plus nothing." Their method is backroom diplomacy. The Family is the startling story of how their faith—part free-market fundamentalism, part imperial ambition—has come to be interwoven with the affairs of nations around the world.

Sons of Wichita: How the Koch Brothers Became America's Most Powerful and Private Dynasty by Daniel Schulman

This book traces the complicated lives and legacies of these four quite different tycoons, as well as their business, social, and political ambitions. No matter where you fall on the ideological spectrum, the Kochs are one of the most influential dynasties of our era, but so little is publicly known about this family, their origins, how they make their money, and how they live their lives. Based on hundreds of interviews with friends, relatives, business associates, and many others, SONS OF WICHITA is the first major biography about this wealthy and powerful family-warts and all.

Lawrence in Arabia: War, Deceit, Imperial Folly and the Making of the Modern Middle East by Scott Anderson

A thrilling and revelatory narrative of one of the most epic and consequential periods in 20th century history – the Arab Revolt and the secret “great game” to control the Middle East. Amidst the slaughter in European trenches, the Western combatants paid scant attention to the Middle Eastern theater. As a result, the conflict was shaped to a remarkable degree by a small handful of adventurers and low-level officers far removed from the corridors of power. Based on years of intensive primary document research, LAWRENCE IN ARABIA definitively overturns received wisdom on how the modern Middle East was formed. Sweeping in its action, keen in its portraiture, acid in its condemnation of the destruction wrought by European colonial plots, this is a book that brilliantly captures the way in which the folly of the past creates the anguish of the present.

Culture Wars: The Threat To Your Family And Your Freedom by Marie Alena Castle

The book makes the claim that many laws based on religious beliefs, specifically theology promoted in the Middle Ages, are misattributed as long-standing social values and that changing the theology itself threatens the religious institution supporting it—igniting a cultural war engulfed in fear and resulting in political dysfunction. It reveals that from sexuality to family planning and the tax system, religious doctrines permeate and direct American life without accounting for the differing views of individuals, and in response, the author provides strategies for overcoming the imposition of external religious views and demonstrates the value in standing up for a secular nation where morality is not tied to one particular religious group.

Periodic Tales: A Cultural History of the Elements, from Arsenic to Zinc by Hugh Aldersey-Williams

Award-winning science writer Hugh Aldersey-Williams offers readers a captivating look at the elements—and the amazing, little-known stories behind their discoveries. *Periodic Tales* is an energetic and wide-ranging book of innovations and innovators, of superstition and science and the myriad ways the chemical elements are woven into our culture, history, and language.

One Nation Under God: How Corporate American Invented Christian America by Kevin Kruse

The assumption that America was, is, and always will be a Christian nation dates back no further than the 1930s, when a coalition of businessmen and religious leaders united in opposition to the FDR's New Deal. With the full support of Dwight Eisenhower in the 1950s, these activists—the forerunners of the Religious Right—propelled religion into the public sphere. Church membership skyrocketed; Congress added the phrase “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance and made “In God We Trust” the country's official motto. For the first time, America became a thoroughly religious nation. Provocative and authoritative, *One Nation Under God* reveals how the comingling of money, religion, and politics created a false origin story that continues to define and divide American politics today.

Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence by Karen Armstrong

While many historians have looked at violence in connection with particular religious manifestations (jihad in Islam or Christianity's Crusades), Armstrong looks at each faith—not only Christianity and Islam, but also Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Daoism, and Judaism—in its totality over time. And so it was that agrarian aggression, and the warrior ethos it begot, became bound up with observances of the sacred. In each tradition, however, a counterbalance to the warrior code also developed. Around sages, prophets, and mystics there grew up communities protesting the injustice and bloodshed endemic to agrarian society, the violence to which religion had become heir. Industrialization and modernity have ushered in an epoch of spectacular and unexampled violence, although, as Armstrong explains, relatively little of it can be ascribed directly to religion.

The Second Amendment: A Biography by Michael Waldman

By the president of the prestigious Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law, the life story of the most controversial, volatile, misunderstood provision of the Bill of Rights. At a time of renewed debate over guns in America, what does the Second Amendment mean? This book looks at history to provide some surprising, illuminating answers. The Amendment was written to calm public fear that the new national government would crush the state militias made up of all (white) adult men—who were required to own a gun to serve. Waldman recounts the raucous public debate that has surrounded the amendment from its inception to the present. As the country spread to the Western frontier, violence spread too. But through it all, gun control was abundant. In the 20th century, with Prohibition and gangsterism, the first

federal control laws were passed. In all four separate times the Supreme Court ruled against a constitutional right to own a gun.

Consciousness Explained by Daniel Dennett

Consciousness is notoriously difficult to explain. On one hand, there are facts about conscious experience--the way clarinets sound, the way lemonade tastes--that we know subjectively, from the inside. On the other hand, such facts are not readily accommodated in the objective world described by science. How, after all, could the reediness of clarinets or the tartness of lemonade be predicted in advance? Central to Daniel C. Dennett's attempt to resolve this dilemma is the "heterophenomenological" method, which treats reports of introspection nontraditionally--not as evidence to be used in explaining consciousness, but as data to be explained. Using this method, Dennett argues against the myth of the Cartesian theater--the idea that consciousness can be precisely located in space or in time. To replace the Cartesian theater, he introduces his own multiple drafts model of consciousness, in which the mind is a bubbling congeries of unsupervised parallel processing.

It's a Long Story: My Life by Willie Nelson

It's a story of restlessness and the purity of the moment and living right. Of my childhood in Abbott, Texas, to the Pacific Northwest, from Nashville to Hawaii and all the way back again. Of selling vacuum cleaners and encyclopedias while hosting radio shows and writing song after song, hoping to strike gold. It's a story of true love, wild times, best friends, and barrooms, with a musical sound track ripping right through it. My life gets lived on the road, at home, and on the road again, tried and true, and I've written it all down from my heart to yours.

Hardwiring Happiness: The New Brain Science of Contentment, Calm, and Confidence by Rick Hanson

Why is it easier to ruminate over hurt feelings than it is to bask in the warmth of being appreciated? Because your brain evolved to learn quickly from bad experiences but slowly from the good ones. You can change this. Hardwiring Happiness lays out a simple method that uses the hidden power of everyday experiences to build new neural structures full of happiness, love, confidence, and peace. Dr. Hanson's four steps build strengths into your brain—balancing its ancient negativity bias—making contentment and a powerful sense of resilience the new normal. In mere minutes each day, we can transform our brains into refuges and power centers of calm and happiness.

Solstice Party Pot Luck

June 20 Saturday 5:00 PM until dark

The annual RET Solstice Party will be held at the home of Carl & Aleta Ledendecker,
2123 Stonybrook Road, Louisville, TN 37777

Come and enjoy good company, games (Bocci, Badminton, Swimming)

Kid Friendly

Contact Aleta Ledendecker, aletaledendecker@att.net

RET Third Sunday Meeting

June 21 Sunday 10:30 a.m.

Pellissippi State Community College, Goins Auditorium

A DVD presentation from the Skeptic Society Distinguished Lecture Series

Professor Michio Kaku will give his views on "The Physics of the Future: How Science Will Shape Human Destiny and Our Daily Lives by the Year 2100".

Dr. Kaku takes us on a journey into the future to reveal the revolutionary developments in medicine, computers, quantum physics, and space travel that will forever change our way of life and alter the course of civilization. For example: the Internet will be in your contact lens, you will control computers and appliances via tiny sensors that pick up your brain scans, sensors in your clothing, bathroom, and appliances will monitor your vitals, and nanobots will scan your DNA and cells for signs of danger, allowing life expectancy to increase dramatically. Also, radically new spaceships using laser propulsion may replace the expensive chemical rockets of today, and you may be able to take an elevator hundreds of miles into space by simply pushing the up button.

RET Reflections Meeting

June 28 Sunday 1:00 a.m. No meeting this month

Reflections will be every other month.
July 26th Sept. 27th Nov. 22nd

If anyone wants to have a Reflections meeting at their home, on the "off month" please contact Schera Chadwick at 865.690.8742 and Carl Ledendecker at 982-8687.

RET/ASK Freethought Forum

Tuesdays 5:00 – 6:00 pm

Freethought Forum is looking for people to be on the show. Contact Joe Barnhart or Lee Erickson if you are interested.

In Knoxville: Comcast Channel 12 Charter Channel 6 Free streaming on ctvknox.org.

Right after the show a co-host of the program holds The Atheist Society of Knoxville Meet-up at Barley's on Jackson Avenue in Knoxville's Old City. Volunteer hosts and suggestions for topics would be welcome for all of these programs. Contact Larry Rhodes at larryr@usit.net or Joe Barnhart at tempolark@hotmail.com

Smoky Mountain Freethought Advance! (not "Retreat")

Good news! The Rationalists of East Tennessee is holding a Freethought event in the foothills of the Smoky Mountains, in Townsend, TN, July 3 and 4th. The cost is \$120/person (children under 18 are free). Meals are a la carte at an additional fee. Lodging and Advance are at Tremont Lodge and Resort, 7726 E Lamar Alexander Parkway, Townsend, TN 37882-4039 (865) 448-3200 or (844) 448-3200 with a 10% discount if RET is mentioned as the Group.

There is a stunning list of speakers already confirmed with more to come, plus there will be the traditional "Freethought Jeopardy" and even fireworks. For details and mail-in registration form, [click here](#).

For more information contact Aleta Ledendecker at aledendecker@me.com.

Other Events of Note

Atheist Society of Knoxville

meetup.com Then Click “Find a Meetup group” and type in ASK or Atheist Society of Knoxville

Regular activity: Brews at Barley’s every Tuesday around 5:30 PM

Sunday Assembly Knoxville Live Better, Help Often, Wonder More

June 24 - This month’s theme is “Laughter.” Charles Towne Landing HOA Club House 11:00 am.

For other SA activities go top <http://knoxville-tn.sundayassembly.com> and click on “Calendar.”

Email: saknoxville@gmail.com

Website: <http://knoxville-tn.sundayassembly.com/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Sunday-Assembly-Knoxville/595906073848559>

Meetup: <http://www.meetup.com/Sunday-Assembly-Knoxville/>

Center for Inquiry Conference, Amherst, NY, June11-15, at the Marriott Hotel Buffalo Niagara

Lake Hypatia Advance July 4 - See Smoky Mountain Advance above

Atheist Alliance of America conference in Atlanta on October 15 -18

SCIENTISTS: EARTH ENDANGERED BY NEW STRAIN OF FACT-RESISTANT HUMANS

Andy Borowitz (Excerpted from *The New Yorker*. com, 5/12/2015)

Scientists have discovered a powerful new strain of fact-resistant humans who are threatening the ability of Earth to sustain life, a virulent strain who are virtually immune to any form of verifiable knowledge, leaving scientists at a loss as to how to combat them.

"These humans appear to have all the faculties necessary to receive and process information," Davis Logsdon, one of the scientists who contributed to the study, said. "And yet, somehow, they have developed defenses that, for all intents and purposes, have rendered those faculties totally inactive."

More worryingly, Logsdon said, "As facts have multiplied, their defenses against those facts have only grown more powerful." While reaffirming the gloomy assessments of the study, Logsdon held out hope that the threat of fact-resistant humans could be mitigated in the future. "Our research is very preliminary, but it's possible that they will become more receptive to facts once they are in an environment without food, water, or oxygen," he said.

"God does not play dice with the universe; He plays an ineffable game of His own devising, which might be compared, from the perspective of any of the other players [i.e. everybody], to being involved in an obscure and complex variant of poker in a pitch-dark room, with blank cards, for infinite stakes, with a Dealer who won't tell you the rules, and who *smiles all the time*."

— Terry Pratchett, *Good Omens: The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter, Witch*

"Give a man a fire and he's warm for a day, but set fire to him and he's warm for the rest of his life."

— Terry Pratchett, *Jingo*