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**Subject:** RET News March 2016  
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RET news March 2016 CE



Rationalists of East Tennessee Newsletter

March 2016

Is this Spring-like warmth climate change or just the heat of the Presidential Campaign?

### **First Sunday Meeting**

**March 6 Sunday 10:30 - 12:30**

**Pellissippi State Community College, Goins Building, Cafeteria Annex**

**Looking at technology from a different angle.**

We will watch and discuss several TED talk videos including presentations by Kevin Kelly and Susan Blackmore.

Technology is encroaching on or integrating with (take your pick) individuals and society at an ever increasing rate. What are the driving forces for this? Where might it takes us as individuals, as a society, and as a species?

[Get Directions](#)

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### **The RET Skeptic Book Club**

**March 13 Sunday 2:00 – 4:00 pm**

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

**“The Second Amendment: A Biography” by Michael Waldman.**

The Second 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 twentieth 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.

The present debate picked up in the 1970s—part of a backlash to the liberal 1960s and a resurgence of libertarianism. A newly radicalized NRA entered the campaign to oppose gun control and elevate the status of an obscure constitutional provision. In 2008, in a case that reached the Court after a focused drive by conservative lawyers, the US Supreme Court ruled for the first time that the Constitution protects an individual right to gun ownership. Famous for his theory of “originalism,” Justice Antonin Scalia twisted it in this instance to base his argument on contemporary conditions.

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### **RET Third Sunday Meeting**

**March 20 Sunday 10:30 a.m.**

**Pellissippi State Community College, Goins Auditorium**

**A DVD presentation from the Skeptics Society Distinguished Lecture Series titled "The Medea Hypothesis: Is Life on Earth Ultimately Self-Destructive?"**

Renowned paleontologist Dr. Peter Ward proposes a revolutionary and provocative vision of life's relationship with the Earth's biosphere, one that has frightening implications for our future — yet also offers hope. Using the latest discoveries from the geological record, he argues that life might be its own worst enemy. This stands in stark contrast to James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis — the idea that life sustains habitable conditions on earth. In answer to Gaia, which draws on the idea of the "good mother" who nurtures life, Ward invokes Medea, the mythical mother who killed her own children.

Could life by its very nature threaten its own existence? Ward demonstrates that all but one of the mass extinctions that have struck Earth were caused by life itself. He looks at our planet's history in a new way, revealing an Earth that is witnessing an alarming decline of diversity and biomass — a decline brought on by life's own "biocidal" tendencies. And the Medea hypothesis applies not just to our planet — its dire prognosis extends to all potential life in the universe. Breathtaking in scope, The Medea Hypothesis is certain to arouse fierce debate and radically transform our worldview.

[Get Directions](#)

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**RET Reflections Meeting**

**April 24 Sunday 1:00 p.m.**

**At Ted and Schera's 9219 George Williams Road, Knoxville 37922**

Topic to be announced later. NOTE: There is no Reflections this month, March.

Directions: 865 690-8742

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**RET Skeptics Book Club - New Books List**

**April 10, 2016 - 10 Decisions I Could Have Made Better Than God: And Other Audacious Atheist Articles by Jon Webster** - What if someone told you that they had come up with 10 alternatives to some of God's decisions that were more efficient, caused less harm, and in general, were more loving than the 10 decisions God had supposedly made? What if you were told that you could too? In this book, that topic is covered as the author provides entertaining analysis, satire, and criticism of a so-called perfect book while making fun of religion in a way that would make even the most fervent religious zealot laugh. As far as the content is concerned, this book has everything: atheist satire (one of which is entitled Joel Osteen Hospitalized After Smiling So Big He Broke His Face), atheist poetry (including a tribute to Christopher Hitchens entitled Tonight I Drink Johnnie Walker Black), critiques of Christian films such as God's Not Dead, Left Behind, Persecuted, and Kirk Cameron's Saving Christmas. Included in this work are four passages that each won first place in an atheist quote submission contest. There were around 60 competing entries total in each competition. In this book you will find interviews with prominent atheists such as Camels with Hammers' Philosopher Dr. Daniel Fincke and the founder of Global Secular Humanist Movement, Faisal Saeed Al Mutar as well as a song about the ineptitude of Ray Comfort entitled "Google that Shit!" What more could you ask for? (231pp)

**May 8, 2016 - Devil's Game: How the United States Helped Unleash Fundamentalist Islam by Robert Dreyfuss** - This book is the first comprehensive account of America's misguided efforts, stretching across decades, to dominate the strategically vital Middle East by courting and cultivating Islamic fundamentalism. Drawing on extensive archival research and interviews with dozens of policy makers and CIA, Pentagon, and foreign service officials, Robert Dreyfuss follows the trail of American collusion from support for the Muslim Brotherhood in 1950s Egypt, to links with Khomeini and Afghani jihadists, to longstanding ties between radical Islamists and the leading banks of the West. The result is as tragic as it is paradoxical: originally deployed as pawns to foil nationalism and communism, extremist mullahs and ayatollahs now dominate the landscape, thundering against freedom of thought, science, women's rights, secularism—and their former patron. Chronicling a history of double-dealing, cynical exploitation, and humiliating embarrassment that continues to this day, *Devil's Game* reveals a pattern that, far from furthering democracy or security, ensures a future of blunders and blowback. (400pp)

**June 13, 2016 - Unfinished Business: women, war, work, family by Anna Maria Slaughter** - When Anna Maria Slaughter

**June 12, 2016 - Unfinished Business: Women, Men, Work, Family by Anne-Marie Slaughter** - When Anne-Marie Slaughter accepted her dream job as the first female director of policy planning at the U.S. State Department in 2009, she was confident she could juggle the demands of her position in Washington, D.C., with the responsibilities of her family life in suburban New Jersey. Her husband and two young sons encouraged her to pursue the job; she had a tremendously supportive boss, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton; and she had been moving up on a high-profile career track since law school. But then life intervened. Parenting needs caused her to make a decision to leave the State Department and return to an academic career that gave her more time for her family. The reactions to her choice to leave Washington because of her kids led her to question the feminist narrative she grew up with. Her subsequent article for *The Atlantic*, "Why Women Still Can't Have It All," created a firestorm, sparked intense national debate, and became one of the most-read pieces in the magazine's history. Since that time, Anne-Marie Slaughter has pushed forward, breaking free of her long-standing assumptions about work, life, and family. Though many solutions have been proposed for how women can continue to break the glass ceiling or rise above the "motherhood penalty," women at the top and the bottom of the income scale are further and further apart. (352pp)

**July 10, 2016 - Sapiens: A brief history of humankind by Yuval Noah Harari** - One hundred thousand years ago, at least six different species of humans inhabited Earth. Yet today there is only one—*homo sapiens*. What happened to the others? And what may happen to us? This highly original book that begins about 70,000 years ago with the appearance of modern cognition. From examining the role evolving humans have played in the global ecosystem to charting the rise of empires, *Sapiens* integrates history and science to reconsider accepted narratives, connect past developments with contemporary concerns, and examine specific events within the context of larger ideas. Dr. Harari also compels us to look ahead, because over the last few decades humans have begun to bend laws of natural selection that have governed life for the past four billion years. We are acquiring the ability to design not only the world around us, but also ourselves. Where is this leading us, and what do we want to become? (464pp)

**August 14, 2016 - Galileo's Middle Finger by Alice Dreger** - This illuminating chronicle begins with Dreger's own research into the treatment of people born intersex (once called hermaphrodites). Realization of the shocking surgical and ethical abuses conducted in the name of "normalizing" intersex children's gender identities moved Dreger to become an internationally recognized patient rights' activist. But even as the intersex rights movement succeeded, Dreger began to realize how some fellow progressive activists were employing lies and personal attacks to silence scientists whose data revealed uncomfortable truths about humans. In researching one such case, Dreger suddenly became the target of just these kinds of attacks. Troubled, she decided to try to understand more—to travel the country to ferret out the truth behind various controversies, to obtain a global view of the nature and costs of these battles. *Galileo's Middle Finger* describes Dreger's long and harrowing journeys between the two camps for which she felt equal empathy: social justice activists determined to win and researchers determined to put hard truths before comfort. Ultimately what emerges is a lesson about the intertwining of justice and of truth—and a lesson of the importance of responsible scholars and journalists to our fragile democracy. (352pp)

**September 11, 2016 - The Devil's Chessboard: Allen Dulles, the CIA, and the Rise of America's Secret Government by David Talbot** - America's greatest untold story: the United States' rise to world dominance under the guile of Allen Welsh Dulles, the longest-serving director of the CIA. Drawing on revelatory new materials—including newly discovered U.S. government documents, U.S. and European intelligence sources, the personal correspondence and journals of Allen Dulles's wife and mistress, and exclusive interviews with the children of prominent CIA officials—Talbot reveals the underside of one of America's most powerful and influential figures. Dulles's decade as the director of the CIA—which he used to further his public and private agendas—were dark times in American politics. Calling himself "the secretary of state of unfriendly countries," Dulles saw himself as above the elected law, manipulating and subverting American presidents in the pursuit of his personal interests and those of the wealthy elite he counted as his friends and clients—colluding with Nazi-controlled cartels, German war criminals, and Mafiosi in the process. Targeting foreign leaders for assassination and overthrowing nationalist governments not in line with his political aims, Dulles employed those same tactics to further his goals at home, Talbot charges, offering shocking new evidence in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. (704pp)

**October 9, 2016 - The Right Way to Lose a War: America in an Age of Unwinnable Conflicts by Dominic Tierney** - For nearly a century, up until the end of World War II in 1945, America enjoyed a Golden Age of decisive military triumphs. And then suddenly, we stopped winning wars. The decades since have been a Dark Age of failures and stalemates—in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan—exposing our inability to change course after battlefield setbacks. In this provocative book, award-winning scholar Dominic Tierney reveals how the United States has struggled to adapt to the new era of intractable guerrilla conflicts. As a result, most major American wars have turned into military fiascos. And when battlefield disaster strikes, Washington is unable to disengage from the quagmire, with grave consequences for thousands of U.S. troops and our allies. Drawing on interviews with dozens of top generals and policymakers, Tierney shows how we can use three key steps—surge, talk, and leave—to stem the tide of losses and withdraw from unsuccessful campaigns without compromising our core values and interests. Weaving together compelling stories of military catastrophe and heroism, this is an unprecedented, timely, and essential guidebook for our new era of unwinnable conflicts. *The Right Way to Lose a War* illuminates not only how Washington can handle the toughest crisis of all—battlefield failure—but also how America can once again return to the path of victory. (400pp)

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## Other Activities in the area

### RET/ASK Freethought Forum TV

**Tuesdays 5:00 – 6:00 pm**

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

Knoxville: Comcast Channel 12 Charter Channel 6 Free streaming on [ctvknox.org](http://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](mailto:larryr@usit.net) or Lee Erickson at [forresterickson@comcast.net](mailto:forresterickson@comcast.net).

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### Sunday Assembly Knoxville Live Better, Help Often, Wonder More

**March - Secular Parenting with a speaker from Camp Quest, Amy Monsky**

Location: The International at 940 Blackstock Ave., Knoxville, TN

Time: 10:30 AM

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

Email: [saknoxville@gmail.com](mailto: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/>

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### Future Activities

**RET Day of Reason Picnic**

**May 5, 2016 at Tyson Park Pavilion 1: Opens at 4:00 PM with Pot Luck and grilling beginning later.**

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**American Humanist 75th Anniversary Conference**

**May 26-29, 2016 Chicago [conference.americanhumanist.org](http://conference.americanhumanist.org)**

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**Reason Rally 2 Washington DC June 4, 2016**

**Anyone interested in riding a chartered bus to the Reason Rally? If so contact ([carl\\_ledendecker@yahoo.com](mailto:carl_ledendecker@yahoo.com))**

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**Please add your name to the RET Directory so friends can contact you.**

### RET's New Web Site and Wild Apricot

How to set up your new password and log in. Don't forget to enter your information into the RET Directory (viewable by members only and customizable by you so people see only what you want them to).

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## TO LOG IN

Go to Rationalists.org. There, just above The Thinkers head, you will see a "Login" button. That's right, click on it. Use the email address that is already associated with RET contacts and mailings and click on "Forgot Password". There you will enter the email address and Captcha code. From there follow the directions.

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## An interesting look at the Presidential Primary

Excerpts from:

<http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/02/politics/religion-super-tuesday/index.html>

### (CNN) Was it a coming-out party for atheists or a funeral dirge for the religious right?

"Exit polls can't answer every question about Tuesday. They didn't plumb the depth of religious commitment among Trump's evangelical flock, or measure the size of the "God gap" between supporters of Bernie Sanders and Clinton."

"But in broad strokes, the exit polls paint a picture of a radically shifting religious landscape.

With that in mind, here are four big takeaways from Super Tuesday."

#### Religious right

"In the days before Super Tuesday, conservative Christian leaders [cautioned](#), cajoled and [pleaded](#) with evangelicals to reject Trump, saying the New York businessman epitomized [the opposite of their values](#)."

"Tuesday was supposed to be the religious right's last stand, a day when the Bible Belt would enter the voting booth and christen the most God-fearing candidate. Christian conservatives were the last best hope to halt Trump's momentum."

According to exit polls, Trump won a plurality of evangelical and born-again Christians in Alabama, Georgia, Massachusetts, Tennessee, Vermont and Virginia.

"In several states, even evangelicals who said that it's important for a candidate to share their religious values voted for Trump. That's a direct repudiation of the message Christian leaders have been shouting from the rooftops: The thrice-married mogul more at home in casinos than churches is not one of us!"

"Religious right R.I.P," Mark Silk, a professor of religion and public life at Trinity College, [wrote on Wednesday morning](#).

**"The religious right is reaping what they have sown: By drawing religious people into politics, people began to put their political preferences ahead of their religious values."** (Emphasis by editor)

#### Clinton

"In Alabama, 92% of people who said they attend religious services more than once a week voted for Clinton. In Georgia, more than 80% of frequent worshippers broke for her. Those numbers also held in Arkansas, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia. Clinton won all of those states."

#### Democrats' 'God gap'

"In 2016, though, a sizable "God gap" has appeared within the Democratic Party itself."

"Bernie Sanders, meanwhile, appears to be drawing deep support from people who rarely step foot inside a house of prayer. The Vermont senator, who is Jewish, has described himself as 'not particularly religious.'"

"Sanders attracted a majority of voters who don't regularly attend worship services in Arkansas and Texas, and came close (46%) in Virginia, helping him win delegates even where he lost states."

"The four states that Sanders did win -- Colorado, Minnesota, Oklahoma and his home state of Vermont -- all [have large numbers of religiously unaffiliated voters](#), or 'nones'"

"We don't have exit poll data on voters' religion in those states, but other polls suggest religious skeptics are [breaking for Sanders](#)."

## Cruz

"Super Tuesday was supposed to be Ted Cruz's "Southern firewall," when evangelicals in the Bible Belt would come out in droves to support one of their own. That plan seemed successful in Texas, Cruz's home state, and neighboring Oklahoma."

"But Cruz was badly beaten by Trump among evangelicals in Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee and Virginia. (Exit polls show a virtual tie in Arkansas.) In those states, Trump bested Cruz among voters who said it's important that a candidate shares their Christian values, evidence that the Texas senator has failed to forge an [emotional connection with evangelicals](#)."

"Perhaps the main problem is that, from the first days of his campaign, the most dramatic religious conversion story Cruz has told Christians isn't about himself; [it's about his father, Rafael](#)."

"In other words, Cruz may have a ['testimony problem'](#)."

"Finally, Super Tuesday may have spelled the end of a candidate with a contrary issue: a conversion story that is perhaps [too incredible](#)."

"On Wednesday, Ben Carson announced that he doesn't see a path forward to the presidency... ."

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