
PANViews



***Newsletter of PA Nonbelievers, Inc., affiliated with American Atheists,
Atheist Alliance International and the Council for Secular Humanism.***

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President's Report

Josh CruverKibi

I am thankful for the election being over. And thank you to everyone who voted and helped with the election process. However, 2020 is not over yet and neither is the Corona virus. The number of cases has been going back up, just as the scientist's predicted for the fall and winter, so please be careful and follow social distancing protocols whenever possible. PAN is still meeting weekly online. You can check the CDC website for information and guidelines on COVID-19 at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus>.

There is also information and guidance's for COVID-19 on PAN's newly designed website. If you have not checked out our new website's look and design, please do: <http://www.panonbelievers.org/>. The redesign of the PAN website was completed by one of our own PAN members who recently graduated from college. She used her graphic and website design skills and donated a lot of her time to changing the look of the PAN website. I think she did a great job! Now that the website has been redesigned, we can continue to add to the website and we are looking for suggestions from members for what they would like to see and use the website for. We would like for the PAN Website to be a resource of information and social engagement in our community. We would like to potentially have links to other meetings and groups around Pennsylvania. We currently have links to our affiliate groups and potential information sources such as American Atheists, Freedom from Religion Foundation, Council for Secular Humanism, and Richard Dawkins Foundation. What other links and resources would you like to see on the website? How about a resource page for children's activities that can be printed out? We would also like to add some older pictures from PAN's history as well. If you have some pictures of PAN events or members that you would like to see on the website, please scan and send them to us so we can add the pictures to our gallery. You can now access and read past PAN Views on the website as well. You can also volunteer for the website committee if you would like to help with projects to add to the website. Please contact us through our website if you have any suggestions, ideas, or would like to volunteer. You can also get in contact with board members you have contact with.

You can also start and renew your membership on our website. We are in the middle of our 2021 PA Nonbelievers Membership Drive. PA Nonbelievers memberships run on the calendar year, so all current memberships expire on January 1, 2021. You can also use the printable form and send your membership in through the postal service, if you prefer.

Atheist News in Pennsylvania – The Nation – The World!

Prayer in the Jury Room

A York County judge denied a motion for a new trial on behalf of a man who had been convicted of killing two people, according to the York *Daily Record* (ydr.com). Most of the claims in the motion were routine, but a claim of jury misconduct caught PANViews' attention: after reaching their verdict, the jurors clasped hands and "thanked God for giving them the strength and opportunity to sentence this serpent to death."

The motion said that several members of the jury who convicted Paul Henry III of murder asked a court officer when they got to decide on the penalty, before they actually voted to convict him. The judge, Michael Bortner, said that this claim did not deserve consideration, because the question was not part of the record. As far as the jurors praying after voting for the death penalty, the judge didn't have a problem. He said, "It is not improper for citizens of a free country to appeal to God for whatever purpose after they have already done their duty under the law. This cannot amount to jury misconduct."



Religion Trumps Covid-19

Many religious leaders have been outraged by the government's attempt to limit the number of people who can attend their services. Perhaps they believe God will protect their members? Perhaps contributions are lower with smaller congregations? Whatever the reason, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn and Agudath Israel of America sued New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, and the case went before the Supreme Court.

The Court agreed with the religionists. In a 5-4 vote, it ruled that the restrictions violated the free expression of religion clause of the First Amendment.

CNN.com reports that this decision illustrates Justice Amy Coney Barrett's impact on the Court. Last spring and summer, before Ruth Bader Ginsburg's death, the Court had voted 5-4 to support similar restrictions.

The main opinion was unsigned, and there were several separate opinions. The majority stated that the New York regulations are "far more restrictive than any Covid-related regulations that have previously come before the court, much tighter than those adopted by many other jurisdictions hard hit by the pandemic, and far more severe than has been shown to be required to prevent the spread of the virus."

According to Rabbi Chaim Dovid Zweibel, Executive Vice President of Agudath Israel, "This landmark decision will ensure that religious practices and religious institutions will be protected from government edicts that do not treat religion with the respect demanded by the Constitution."

New York argued that the restrictions were necessary given the public health emergency, and that religious institutions were not being treated differently than secular businesses. In any event, some of the restrictions had already been lifted. The Court was not impressed. "Not only is there no evidence that the applicants have contributed to the spread of COVID-19 but there are many other less restrictive rules that could be adopted to minimize the risk to those attending religious services," the majority opinion stated. It went on: "Members of this Court are not public health experts, and we should respect the judgment of those with special expertise and responsibility in this area. But even in a pandemic, the Constitution cannot be put away and forgotten."

Even though some of the restrictions had been lifted, the Court said that religious institutions "remain under a constant threat" because the restrictions could always be reinstated.

And in A Related Story

The New York *Post* (nypost.com) reported on the type of irresponsible religious service Gov. Cuomo was trying to stop.

A Hasidic synagogue in Brooklyn secretly held a huge wedding. The congregation and attendees were careful to make sure city officials didn't find out, and they apparently didn't, until they saw the pictures in the *Post*.

The *Post* also had a video showing guests crammed in the Yetev Lev Temple (capacity, 7,000) singing and dancing, all without masks. The event was kept secret, according to *Der Blatt*, the newspaper of this sect, to avoid "the ravenous press and government officials." The paper explains, "In recent weeks, organizers worked tirelessly to arrange everything in the best way possible. All notices about upcoming celebrations were passed along through word of mouth, with no notices in writing, no posters on the synagogue walls, no invitations sent through the mail, nor even a report in any publication, including this very newspaper."



The state had forced the cancellation another wedding in the same sect a few months ago. It had been expected to have 10,000 guests. The Hasidic community has been fierce in its defiance of the Covid-19 restrictions – despite the death of the president of Yetev Lev Temple from Covid-19 last month.

And since it's 2020, there is a bizarre twist. New York City has now fined the Temple \$15,000 for holding the ceremony. Hemant Mehta, The Friendly Atheist (friendlyatheist.pathos.com) reports that Rick Wiles, a pastor, right-wing commentator and the man who once said the "Antichrist will be Jewish," and that a "Jew coup" was responsible for impeaching Trump, is going to reimburse the

Temple for the fine. Why? Wiles explains, "It is time we unite and push back against the COVID tyrants." Strange bedfellows? Or maybe he secretly wants Jews to get sick?

Secular Democrats of America



Muslims and French Values

France has suffered three attacks believed to be the work of Muslims in about a month. In response President Emmanuel Macron has asked Muslim leaders to agree to a "charter of Republican values."

According to bbc.com, this request is part of an overall crackdown on radical Islam in France. He has asked the French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM) to work with the interior ministry. The CFCM will create a National Council of Imams, which is supposed to provide official accreditation to imams – which could be withdrawn.

The charter will confirm that Islam is a religion, and not a political movement, and will forbid what it calls foreign interference in Islamic groups.

In addition, Macron has announced new measures to control what he described as "Islamist separation." The measures include restrictions on home schooling, and stricter punishment for anyone who tries to intimidate of public figure on religious grounds; identification numbers for children to track whether they are attending school, with fines and possible jail time for their parents if they do not; and a ban on sharing personal information about other people in a way that would allow them to be found by people who want to harm them.

Protestors in France and in some Muslim-majority countries object to France's strong defense of secularism, and are boycotting French products. However, the French have traditionally considered secularism a central part of French identity, and limiting public expression to protect the feelings of followers of a particular religion, the BBC article says, is seen as undermining national unity.

The Satanic Temple Doesn't Give Up

A few years ago, The Satanic Temple (TST) sued the state of Missouri over its restrictive abortion laws. The Temple explained that bodily autonomy and the freedom to have an abortion is an important tenet in its religion, and was therefore protected under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

According to prnewswire.com (which notes its information was provided by The Satanic Temple), the Eighth Circuit Court dismissed its case, despite the law's restrictions being based in Catholic Doctrine. TST has appealed to the Supreme Court, and is waiting to hear if its appeal will be accepted.

In the meantime, TST has moved to have Justice Amy Coney Barrett disqualified from participating. It questions whether Justice Barrett could be impartial on a case involving abortion. Its motion to disqualify stated, "any objective observer would reasonably believe it is unlikely Justice

Barrett could set aside her deeply-held religious beliefs on the illegitimacy of abortion and barbarity of [Roe v. Wade] to render an impartial decision on the Petition."

Unfortunately, the Court did not agree, and dismissed TST's request. The Court has not decided whether to hear the underlying case.

Krista Hill – Still Here? Silly Christians

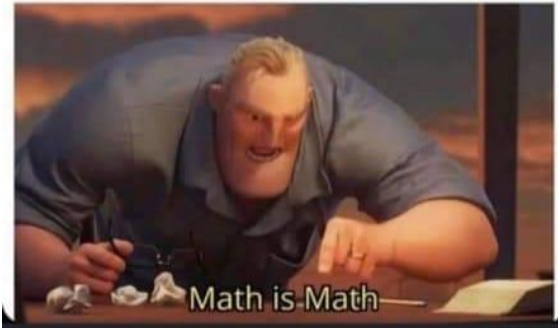
SAW SOMEONE WITH A SHIRT SAYING:

TRUTH + GOD = LIFE

I HOPE THEY REALIZED THAT IT ALSO FOLLOWS...

TRUTH = LIFE - GOD
GOD = LIFE - TRUTH

SERIOUSLY, DO THE MATH PEOPLE.



Oblivious

Two former students at Baltimore's Lutheran Concordia Preparatory School have filed Federal lawsuits against the school and the governing body of the Lutheran Church for ignoring their reports of sexual assault and harassment at the school.

The Baltimore *Sun*, baltimoresun.com, reports in appalling detail the extent to which the school refused to investigate the allegations. In fact, the school suspended one of the girls, and threatened to tell a school to which she wanted to transfer that she had been suspended, if she continued to complain. The harassment continued despite members of the faculty supporting the girl's allegations.

What is especially stunning is that this is not a sad story from 50 years ago. Most of the events occurred in 2019.

Concordia has officially declined to comment, except to offer the standard "the safety and well-being of our students, faculty, and staff are of utmost concern to us." A second girl claims in her suit that school ignored her when she reported harassment coming from a Chromebook registered to the school. In addition, she claims that the school did not contact law enforcement when she was assaulted during a math class in 2019. The student reported the assault to her math teacher that day, and a male student who witnessed the assault corroborated her account to school administrators. The headmaster reportedly told the girl and her mother that if she continued to complain, she might jeopardize college athletic scholarships for the boys who assaulted her.

In October 2019 the girl attended a bonfire and talent show on the school's campus. When her ride left without her, one of the boys who had harassed her offered her, and two other boys, a ride home. However, the driver let the two other boys out first, and then drove her to a secluded area, where he again assaulted her. She called a friend that night to tell her about the attack, and told her mother about a month later.

Her parents reported the attack to school. The headmaster told them that they would take no action unless the girl filed criminal charges. She did, and the boy was arrested for second-degree rape and assault, and fourth-degree sexual offense. The family notified the school that charges had been filed, but nothing happened.

Ignoring sexual assault is apparently a deliberate policy for this Lutheran school. The school psychologist left the school around 2017 after the headmaster refused to let her implement a

mandatory reporting policy for sexual assault cases. A group of teachers reported concerns about sexual assault and harassment to Concordia's board of directors, but, again, no action was taken. These teachers complained at a monthly all-faculty meeting. Lutheran church officials responded by sending a crisis management team to Concordia, who, according to the teachers, instituted "gag orders," although the story does not say what the gag order covered. The lawsuit claims that several teachers left Concordia over the school's lack of response.

Two more female students have subsequently filed suits alleging that the school ignored reports of sexual assault, especially when it involved male athletes. It is hard to believe that any educational institution could be so completely unaware of what the law requires – and so completely insensitive to its students.

Change in the Middle East

The United Arab Emirates is making dramatic changes to its Islamic-based laws. Among other things, unmarried couples will be allowed to live together, alcohol will be more readily available, and so-called honor killings will be illegal.

Aljazeera.com reports that these changes are not because of some rethinking of Islam, but for economic reasons. The UAE wants to attract more business, including tourist business. In the past its laws have resulted in legal trouble for visitors, and bad publicity for the UAE.

Its state-run news agency said that the changes were meant to "consolidate the UAE's principles of tolerance."

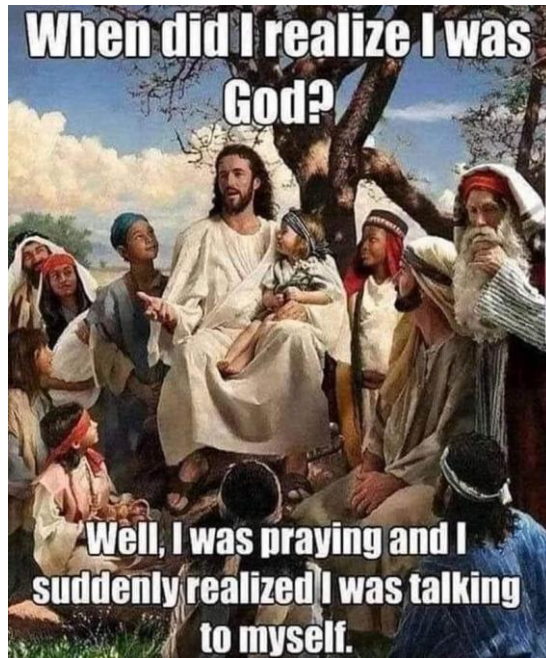
The UAE wants to be ready for an expected increase in tourists from Israel, because of the recent deal to normalize relations between Israel and the UAE. It will also be hosting a World Expo next year.

Expatriates outnumber natives in the UAE; the new changes will allow expats to avoid Islamic Shariah courts on issues like marriage, divorce and inheritance. Alcohol has been readily available in the UAE's coastal cities, but individuals needed a government-issued license to purchase, transport or have alcohol in their home. That's no longer required. While cohabitation was illegal, it was often ignored when it involved foreigners, and now that is official. "Honor crimes," where a man would evade prosecution for assaulting a woman thought to have dishonored her family through promiscuity or disobeying religious rules, will now be treated like any other assault.

Not everything has changed. Homosexuality, cross-dressing and public displays of affection can still get the perpetrator thrown in jail.

The York Emporium





How Far Can a Church Go?

How far can a church go in trying to ascertain if a sin has been committed? Can a church torture someone yet still be protected by the First Amendment?

That's the issue under consideration in a Utah case involving the Jehovah's Witnesses. To ascertain whether she was guilty of sin, a group of male JW leaders forced a 15-year-old girl to listen to a recording of a man raping her.

The girl sued the male leaders, the church, and the national organization, The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, for the intentional infliction of emotional distress.

According to ksl.com (a television station in Salt Lake City), Utah courts have ruled that the defendants are protected by the First Amendment. The girl's attorney argued that the courts are setting a dangerous precedent by permitting harmful conduct such as this. Could a church official release someone's medical records? Or slap a child?

The defendants claimed that the church group was trying to find out if the girl had committed a sin, and that the government cannot interfere with that. They played the recording intermittently over about four hours in 2008 as they tried to get her to confess that she voluntarily had sex. The girl claims that she shook visibly and begged them to stop.

She was 14 and her rapist was an 18-year-old fellow Jehovah's Witness who raped her several times. He recorded at least one of the incidents and provided the tape to the leaders of their congregation. (Note: There was no explanation as to why he recorded the assault, or gave it to the leaders.) She received counseling and medical treatment for anxiety, nightmares, and poor school performance.

Before the 2nd District Court in Utah ruled against her, it noted that if the leaders who had forced her to listen to the tape had been secular, it would have allowed the case to continue.

Supreme Court Judge Paige Petersen noted that just being called before a church tribunal to be interrogated about a potential sin would be stressful to a church member. Church leaders would think that they had the responsibility to do whatever was necessary to uncover a sin. "How do we draw lines there?"

Last year the Utah Court of Appeals ruled that allowing the case to go forward would result in the government having "an excessive entanglement with religion," which is the US Supreme Court's standard for whether an action violates the First Amendment.

The defendants argued that the girl – who was apparently there with her parents – could have walked out at any time.

In an interesting side note, one of the justices pointed that, this being Utah, the jury would almost certainly consist primarily of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

"Don't you think that there's a serious concern that that body and that group is going to be making a judgement based on their beliefs of what religious orthodoxy and reasonableness is?" the judge asked. Given that the LDS church believes in magic underwear and an afterlife when everyone gets his own planet, using them as a standard of reasonableness might indeed be concerning. Although it's a surprise to hear a Utah judge admit it.

More Trouble with Religion and the Courts

Religion and the law seems to be a popular issue. For example, Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito recently gave a speech to the Federalist Society where he complained about how religious views are being ignored by the courts.

The *Washington Post*, [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com), reports that Alito complained freedom of speech, religion and gun rights are becoming "second-tier" constitutional rights. He implied that he's not happy with Chief Justice John Roberts' willingness to defer to public officials who in light of Covid-19 want to limit religious services.



Same-sex marriage is a problem, too. Alito whined, "you can't say that marriage is a union between one man and one woman" without fear of reprisal from schools, government and employers. He continued, "Until very recently, that's what the vast majority of Americans thought. Now it's considered bigotry," he said, adding: "One of the great challenges for the Supreme Court going forward will be to protect freedom of speech."

Alito emphasized that he considers Covid-19 a serious threat. However, he expressed concern about the severity of restrictions on churches because of it. "Whatever one may think about the covid restrictions, we surely don't want them to become a recurring feature after the pandemic has passed," he said.

Alito told the group that he did not think the court had paid enough attention to the constitutional rights of churches when it upheld local restrictions in California and Nevada. Roberts stated that the restrictions did not undermine the free exercise of religion. But Alito pointed out that Nevada limited church attendance to 50 people, while its large casinos were allowed to open to 50% occupancy.

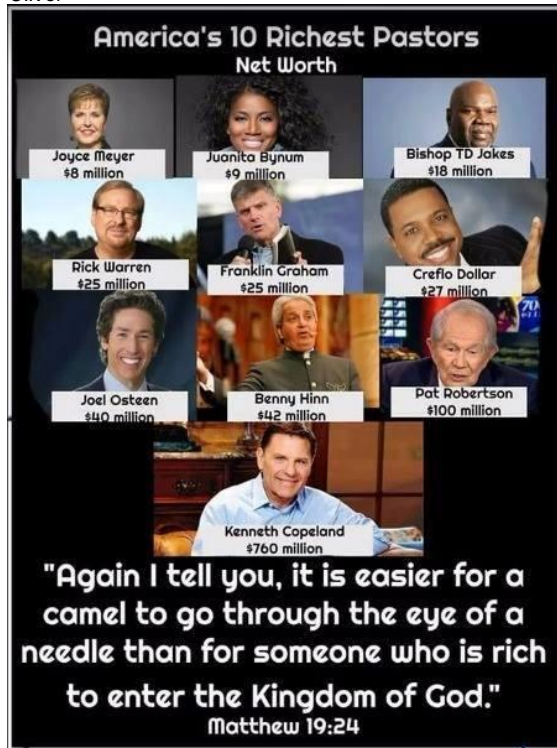
"Head for the slot machines or maybe a Cirque du Soleil show," Alito concluded. "It pains me to say this but in certain quarters, religious liberty is fast becoming a disfavored right."

What a Surprise – a Christian Hypocrite

PANViews readers will no doubt be shocked to learn that politicians who parade their religious morality can turn out to be less than moral themselves. For a good example of the breed, there's Ken Paxton, Attorney General of Texas.

Hemant Mehta, *The Friendly Atheist*, friendlyatheist.patheos.com, helpfully provides a list of

Susan Sobolewski/EVERYTHING Bill Maher and John Oliver



Paxton's greatest hits: He's stated that Christian government workers should be allowed to discriminate against gay people. He's defended "In God We Trust" stickers on police cars and ambulances, and stood up for a sheriff who put a cross on his government car, and defended courthouses that put Christian crosses in their windows. His assistant/chief of staff used to work for a group that fought against church/state separation. Paxton wanted the Supreme Court to take up a case that would have allowed Ten Commandments monuments on government property (they declined) and argued that students can't refuse to say the Pledge of Allegiance in school.

His problem now is that Nate Paul, an Austin real estate developer who donated \$25,000 to Paxton's last campaign, is in trouble. The Texas *Tribune* (texastribune.org) says that the "trouble" is still unclear, but that a letter alleging that Paxton was gearing up to investigate "adversaries" of Paul's was sent to

Texas' director of human resources, and signed by Paxton's first assistant attorney general, Jeff Mateer; Ryan Bangert, Mateer's deputy; and five other top officials, including the deputy attorneys general overseeing criminal justice, legal counsel, civil litigation, administration and general policy divisions.

That's apparently standard corruption, but there's more. Hemant Mehta quotes the Associated Press on the next twist: "Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton had an extramarital affair with a woman whom he later recommended for a job with the wealthy donor now at the center of criminal allegations against him, according to two people who said Paxton told them about the relationship. Austin developer Nate Paul said in a deposition this week that Paxton recommended the woman for her job with Paul's real estate company, according to a transcript of his deposition obtained by the AP."

Paxton is married, to a woman who is a Republican state senator. She'll probably help him make a wonderful asking-for-forgiveness appearance. That's the problem with guys like him; he can always play the sinner-turning-to-God card.

Member Submissions

Meaning of Life?

Jeannie Hess

I don't think my life has meaning or purpose. I don't think anything that happens to anyone has meaning. This sentence sounds like something a nonbeliever would say:

It may be that your sole purpose in life is simply to serve as a warning to others.

December 2020

Occam's Razor, Cognition Hobbled by Religion

Josh CruverKibi

Can I use Occam's Razor to try to determine the causes of aberrant behaviors? I have found that society has demonstrated a significant psychological disregard for the degree of cognitive hobbling or cognitive advantage that develops in a toddler's mind and throughout one's life depending on the social, religious, or functional problem-solving tools, cognitions, and coping skills that are taught to the person throughout their life.

Imagine you are about to engage in a footrace competition that will last your entire life. And for this endurance footrace you are given a sack to stand in and expected to stay within throughout the race. You are taught to feel shame, so you stay within that sack, expecting that there will be some reward for having competed with your life while hobbled by your cognitive sack. But as you start the race for your life, you notice that there are other competitors not wearing sacks and even using logical equipment for a footrace, such as shoes and carrying water. Due to the hobbling teachings you are familiar with, you have never witnessed anyone wearing shoes or even considered the possibility that people did not actually have to hop around in sacks for their entire lives. Now in that moment and throughout their life, the competitor, hobbled by a religious sack, has to come to terms with repeated cognitive loses, mysteriously as they perceive.

If the sacked competitor throws a tantrum or threatens the judges to let them start first or else, do I look to see if they meet diagnostic criteria for Oppositional Defiant Disorder or Antisocial Personality Disorder? If they turn to drinking alcohol heavily, lose motivation, refuse to do previously fun activities, or start to have suicidal ideations after losing repeatedly at competitions in reality, do I look for diagnostic criteria for alcoholism or depression respectively? If they fall into a rage at the perceived unfairness to them and they perceive a strong sense of entitlement to hit or shoot the winning competitor, do I look for diagnostic criteria for Intermittent Explosive Disorder, megalomania, or Schizophrenia?

Or, if I apply Occam's Razor, do I have an explanation and cause for all of the potential manifest aberrant and dysfunctional perceptions, conclusions, reactions, and behaviors? Has the human in the sack been cognitively hobbled by their religion? Are the cognitions and problem-solving skills that they have learned within the sack and keeps them dysfunctionally within the sack, the primary source and cause for the aberrant behaviors? Has the socialized religious sack hobbled what they are able to perceive, limited their experiential knowledge, reduced their ability and options to problem solve, stunted their emotional awareness and maturity to react appropriately to adversity or reality, and resulted in dysfunctional behaviors that then may or may not meet the criteria for a psychological diagnosis?

Religious belief is like tying a dog's front right foot up to his chest and throwing a ball. We as a society have become so used to watching everyone fall and tumble over ourselves and each other, that we have created labels and diagnoses, within this unnatural socialized state of being cognitively hobbled. We think that it is normal and relative for the dog to trip a couple times on the way to fetch the ball and that a dog is high functioning and successful if it has learned how to hop on the front left foot. But we are in an ironic and corrupted state when we label the frustrated reactions some dog's may have to being hobbled, such as biting its leg, barking at the owner, or laying down and giving up, as being the problem behaviors; instead of what caused the behaviors in the first place being the actual problem. The Occam's Razor, and in essence the reduction of entities and variables with the easiest solution appears to be to unhobble the dog's leg and unhobble the mind by not learning or teaching hobbling cognitions in the first place

FUN!



All about the Big Bang

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EXPLOSION
OBSERVATIONS
ASTRONAUT
PROTONS
UNIVERSE
BIG BANG
GALAXIES
SCIENCE
STARS
ROCKS
ASTROID
ASTRONOMY
LEPTON
ORBIT
START
FORMED
THEORY
NUETRON
HYDROGEN

Play this puzzle online at : <https://thewordsearch.com/puzzle/2261/>

PAN News & Update

Meetings – Chambersburg and Lancaster are having in-person meetings. PAN is also holding virtual at 6:00 pm on Wednesdays for the time being. Get more information on Facebook at www.facebook.com/groups/panonbelievers.

Here's where they are held, when we are able to have them in person:

Carlisle – Fourth Friday of the month, 5:30 pm, Hops and Barley, 398 North York Street, Mechanicsburg

Chambersburg – Second Thursday of the month, 7:00 pm.

The December meeting will be held at Cafe Del Sol, 438 Geteway Avenue, Chambersburg.

Harrisburg– First Wednesday of the month, 6:30 pm, Midtown Scholar, 1302 N. Third St.

Lancaster – Fourth Wednesday of the month, 6:00 pm, Centerville Diner, 100 S. Centerville Rd.

Lebanon - Second Wednesday of the month, 7:00 pm, Batdorf Restaurant, 245 W. Main St., Annville

December 2020

Reading – Third Wednesday of the month, 6:00 pm, Oakbrook Brewing Company, 628 Park Avenue
York – First Sunday of the month, noon, I-ron-ic Coffee Shop and Art Boutique, 256 W. Philadelphia St.

How to Contribute to PAN

Giant Cards - We will have Giant grocery store cards available for purchase at PAN meetings. You pay face value for the card and use the face value at the store, but Giant let's PAN have 5% of that face value. If you shop at Giant, anyway, use the cards in lieu of cash and help PAN. What could be easier?



Pennies for PAN - Finally, we are happy to take money the old-fashioned way. You can give your tax-deductible contribution to a Board Member at one of our meetings or events, you can donate via PayPal on our website, www.panonbelievers.org, or you can mail a check to us at PA Nonbelievers, Inc. PO Box 702, York, PA 17405. Remember when you donate you can indicate what fund you want your donation to go to, you can find the list of our funds on the PAN website in the Donate section.

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