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# 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*

*The Cognitive Application of The Scientific Method:*

*Cognitive wellness through the balanced use of Critical Thinking, Abduction, Deduction, and Induction*

Being an atheist or rationalist does not necessarily mean that one is more intelligent or a better critical thinker than theists or the general population. Asserting superior intellect and critical thinking skills based on a label would be a logical fallacy. We atheists and rationalists might say that we adhere to the principles of the scientific method, skeptical inquiry, and critical thinking, but does each of us actually apply these principles evenly with all of our perceptions and conclusions? The most likely answer would be no. The amount of time and energy it would take to apply the scientific method to all of one's perceptions would be excessive. We would also struggle with perpetual decision paralysis due to not being able to collect all data variables or be able to rule out all potential perceptual biases. All humans tend to develop shortcut thinking overtime as we perceive repeated successes, instead of primarily relying on complex thinking for every perception and experience. But do we try to prune back our incorrect shortcuts, assumptions, assertions, biases, or logical fallacies? Is there a cognitive balance that we atheists and rationalists can strike between decision paralysis, critical thinking, and biased reactions?

Many people, day to day, rely on emotional motivation, reaction to biological impulses and feelings, and abductive reasoning. Acting on emotions, feelings, or reactions are not forms of reasoning. Reacting to the environment may be acceptable for jumping out of the way of an oncoming car, going to sleep when you feel tired, or choosing whether to eat toast or waffles in the morning, but is not effective when there is a need to make more functional decisions on present or future rewards and consequences.

Most people tend to employ abductive reasoning throughout the day to make quick decisions with minimal mental effort, based on best guesses or assertions from incomplete information. A person will quickly take what they are aware of in the moment and use their biased experiences and feelings to make a quick decision. An example of abductive reasoning might be; someone turned on their turning signal in front of you, so you put your foot on the break assuming that they will be turning soon. Another example, you see someone get up from a table with a half-eaten sandwich and a full soda, but they take their coat with them, and so you guess or assume that they are done eating and you sit at the table waiting for the food items to be cleared from the table. Another example of abductive reasoning, you observe a person wearing a large cross around their neck, so you guess or assume that they are a christian.

Emotional reactions, fast shortcut thinking, and or abductive reasoning will not lead to satisfactory outcomes in all situations. Nor will they result in complex ideas or consistent solutions to problems more consequential than picking breakfast foods. The societal need for consistent results and measurements has evolved critical thinking techniques and the scientific method over time and has given humanity the opportunity to grow past emotional reactions and abductive reasoning. However, critical thinking and the scientific method are complex tools and frames of thinking and require the personal development of one's critical thinking skills, continuous practice to keep one's skills sharp, vigilant attention to detail, and high levels of rigor during scientific application. In fact, critical thinking and the scientific method are specific

disciplines of deductive and inductive reasoning to counteract the human cognitive tendency towards bias, emotional reaction, laziness, and or making flawed cognitive perceptions and conclusions. Deductive reasoning involves making an assertion based on a premise, general rule, replicated observation, or measurement and a second form of observation, and then making a conclusion or deduction from their association. An example of deductive reasoning would be measurement  $x = 2$  and measurement  $y = 2$ , therefor  $x$  and  $y$  are the same measurement. Another example, there is a gravitational force on all objects on Earth, this object in my hand is on Earth, therefor when I let go of the object in my hand the object will fall towards the Earth.

Unfortunately, conclusions or deductions are only as good as the persons deductive discipline, critical thinking skills, and or abilities to perceive and collect factual or accurate data. For example, a person who measures  $x = 2$  inches and mistakenly flips a tape measure to centimeters when measuring  $y$ , but records  $y = 2$  inches, would falsely deduce that  $x$  and  $y$  were the same measurement. Another example might be a flat earther deduces; the bible is inerrant, I did not read in the bible that the Earth is round, I cannot see that the Earth is round, therefor the Earth is flat.

Inductive reasoning is a process of making a conclusion or formulating a general principle about an idea or grouping that is likely or probable based on a sample of the idea or group. Inductive reasoning generates a probability for a conclusion, never an absolute determination. Put simply, inductive reasoning is using a sample to make a generalization about the whole. One of the most well-known examples of a conclusion from inductive reasoning was Newton's Law of Universal Gravitation. Another example of inductive reasoning, we might form a hypothesis (i.e. if people with high IQ's have higher critical thinking skills than the general population and atheists have high IQ's, then atheists have better critical thinking skills than the general population). Then we would collect sample data on two or more data points or variables in a population (i.e. atheists, general population, intelligence quotient (IQ), thinking quotient), and then test them to find if they are statistically significant or correlational. The result or conclusion of the statistical test would be a probability, not an absolute fact. Then to apply the scientific method, we would take the above variables, hypotheses, and statistical results and test them repeatedly and try to replicate the conclusions multiple times before a theoretical conclusion could be made based on atheists and IQ compared to the general population.

Most logical fallacies, biases, and social 'isms' (racism, sexism, dogmatism, elitism, etc..) are essentially due to flawed abductive or inductive reasoning. Inductive and abductive reasoning skills and arguments are only as good as the user's formulation of arguments and or ability to separate their biased perceptions to make a good guess or find a statistically significant inductive conclusion. Some very common biases and logical fallacies that effect most perceptions and inductive reasoning daily are; confirmation bias, availability heuristics, in group bias, and anecdotal fallacy. An example of inductive reasoning effected by confirmation bias, availability heuristics, in group bias, and anecdotal fallacy might be; all the atheists I know are intelligent, therefor I have concluded that the general population of atheists are intelligent and theists are not intelligent. Another example of biased and dysfunctional abductive or inductive reasoning might be, I have heard my pastor and others say I cannot be moral without believing in and having a personal relationship with our god and we all appear to be moral people who believe in god, so all people who believe in god are moral and those who do not are not moral. One could safely argue that the above reasoning is not effective inductive reasoning; however, that is the point of the examples. Without the appropriate application of critical thinking, the scientific method, accurate statistical methods and samples, and most importantly, self-awareness (metacognition) that one is making or formulating dysfunctional cognitive abduction or induction; a person may conclude that their premise is strong, assume that they have sufficiently assessed the variables, or may even think that abductive or inductive logic leads to an absolute conclusion. They do not.

Critical Thinking and the application of the scientific method to one's life takes vigilant intentional practice, a focus on continuous process improvement, and requires metacognitive awareness of one's biases and logical fallacies. Despite one's potential desire to believe atheists or rationalists are good critical thinkers, one's own biases or fallacies may actually be preventing self-awareness. We also have to accept that a balance needs to be struck between finite time, unobtainable perfection for variable control, and the

consequences of undisciplined reaction to emotions and the environment. The time-consuming processes of deductive and inductive reasoning required to achieve effective critical thinking skills and the application of the scientific method vs. quick short cut reactions and abducted biased reasoning. For further exploration and practice with critical thinking techniques, might I suggest the website: <https://thethinkingshop.org/> They are a non-profit organization promoting critical thinking.

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PA Nonbelievers will be having our annual meeting at the Harrisburg Unitarian Universalist Church, located at 1280 Clover Lane, Harrisburg, PA 17113 on Saturday March 4<sup>th</sup>, from 12 to 2 PM. This will be a potluck as well as a gathering to vote for new board members. We will provide cups, plates, and plasticware. If you are interested in providing a dish for the potluck, let the group know what you are planning on bringing, so others can plan for the food items that will be available. We will be posting the annual meeting on Meetup.com, Facebook, and PAN Views as well.

If you renewed or started your 2023 membership by February 24, 2023, you will be able to run as a board member and or vote for board members. If you are interested in joining the board, you can make yourself available to be voted onto the board at the annual meeting. Some current board member terms will be ending this year. If you are planning to run for a board position, be prepared to say a little about yourself and how you may contribute to the PA Non-believer mission.

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***Atheist News in Pennsylvania– The Nation – The World!***

**Hail Satan!**

*Susannah Plumb, Church of Satan member and event organizer, published the following on her Facebook page:*

Remember our Back to School Night Event and Fundraiser we did in September at Northern York High School? Well the school refused our donation. They even went as far as suggesting we donate the money to a Christian organization 😞. Sorry to all the students and teachers who could have used that money for much needed school supplies we tried.

Well we are happy to announce that the York County SPCA was honored to accept our donation for our area furry friends. Thank you to all who contributed! ❤️❤️❤️ HAIL SATAN



BROUGHER COMPANION ANIMAL SHELTER  
3159 Susquehanna Trail North · York, PA 17406  
(717) 764-6109  
www.ycspca.org

December 1, 2022

The Satanic Temple and Reason Alliance  
Attn: Malcolm Jarry and June Everett  
64 Bridge St  
Salem, MA 01970

Dear Malcolm and June,

If our shelter pets could speak to you, they would thank you for giving them a safe place. They would thank you for ensuring that York County has a shelter where animals are treated with kindness and compassion. And, they would thank you for providing them with a caring staff dedicated to their well-being.

We appreciate your donation to assist with operations and animal care. We promise to use your donation(s) in the best way possible for the animals.

Thank you for your in-kind donation of the following items (Fair Market Value assigned by the donor):

Description	Value
Paper towels	\$65.79
Feliway Cat Spray	\$24.99
Catnip toys	\$8.97
Assorted items: cat food, dog toys, cat toys, dog bones, dish soap, paper towels, Feliway cat spray, laundry detergent, dryer sheets	\$459.31

The York County SPCA is grateful for your support, and we know that we could not do our work without your generosity. We appreciate you!

Sincerely,

  
Tiffany Franck  
Development Director

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The York County SPCA is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, EIN #23-1399588. No goods or services were provided in exchange for this donation. Your contribution may be tax deductible to the extent allowable by law. Placing a value on gifts in kind is the privilege and responsibility of the donor. Please retain this letter as a record of your donation for tax purposes.



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### Dress Code for Teachers

Pennsylvania recently revised its dress code for teachers. No, it didn't involve the normal stuff: ties for men, no bare legs for women, etc. According to abc27.com, Senators Kristin Phillips-Hill (R-York) and Judy Schwank (D-Berks) sponsored a bill to eliminate the section that kept teachers from wearing anything that is a sign of their religious faith, or denomination.

While this obviously raises concerns about teachers proselytizing, the issue is a bit more complicated. The Allentown *Morning Call*, mcall.news, explains a federal judge recently ruled that the law violated the First Amendment, because of a case involving a teacher in Indiana County was forced to remove a necklace with a cross. A few years ago, Eugene De Pasquale, then the York area's state representative, spoke to a York PAN meeting about this issue. He told us that he had been approached by Sikh teachers, who wanted to be able to wear their turbans.

Phillips-Hill noted that these laws were generated by anti-Catholic sentiment in the late 1800s. Pennsylvania was the last state with this kind of law; the only other state, Nebraska, repealed it 5 years ago. She said, "This long overdue legislation needs to reach the governor's desk to make Pennsylvania the 50th state to eradicate this archaic law once and for all. With its broad, bipartisan support from

legislators and a diverse coalition of stakeholders, this bill will uphold William Penn’s founding principles that our Commonwealth stands for religious freedom and tolerance.”

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### **The Right to Bear Arms or Bare Arms?**

*Colleen Dzwonczyk*

We’ve all heard of the right to bear arms guaranteed by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment of the constitution. But what about the right to bare arms, or more precisely the lack of the right to bare arms?

Well, there will be no bare arms in the Missouri State House of Representatives where in January they voted to revise the dress code to require that women legislators and staff members must wear a jacket, defined as a blazer or cardigan. The updated dress code was adopted with a vote of 105 to 51. Some democratic lawmakers said the updating of the dress code was senseless and pointless, while supporters felt it would ensure professionalism.

State representative Ann Kelley, the main proponent of the amendment felt that it would mirror the dress requirements for the male members of the House. She felt that it “is essential to always maintain a formal and professional atmosphere” in the House. “You would think that all you would have to do is say, ‘Dress professionally,’ and women could handle it,” Ms. Kelley said. She also stated that female legislators had been told that a jacket was required, but some felt that if “you were wearing a skirt or a sweater, you did not have to wear a jacket.”

State Representative Ashley Aune, a Democrat, said on the floor on Wednesday that a “gentleman in this room” had once questioned what she was wearing. “You know what it feels like to have a bunch of men in this room looking at your top trying to decide whether it’s appropriate or not?” she said.

Ms. Aune then debated Ms. Kelley over the purpose of the revised rule. “I mean, this is ridiculous,” she said.

Ms. Kelley responded: “Why should we talk about something like this? It is absolutely ridiculous.”

“You brought this to the floor, lady,” Ms. Aune replied. “You tell me.”

Ms. Kelley originally did not include cardigans in her proposed rule, but the sweater was listed as acceptable in a final version of the resolution. “Proper attire for women shall be business attire, including jackets worn with dresses, skirts, or slacks, and dress shoes or boots,” the resolution states. “For the purposes of this rule, ‘jacket’ shall include blazers, cardigans, and knit blazers.”

After the vote, Ms. Kelley said on Facebook that she received “lots of hateful calls, emails, and messages in regards to this amendment, which is funny because we already have a dress code.”

She added that she had not wasted time when introducing the amendment because she had spoken for less than five minutes. At her office this week, Ms. Kelley said, she frequently answered phone calls and got “cussed at.”

“How is encouraging professionalism wrong?” she said.

The dress code for men requires them to wear a jacket, shirt, and tie in the House of Representatives. These were not changed. In the State Senate there is no rule requiring women to wear a blazer. Many were angered that the state legislature was taking time from other legislative issues to dictate how women should dress. Jamie Tomek, the secretary of the Missouri chapter of the National Organization for Women, said that “she and other organization members were “outraged” that Republicans had wasted time by focusing on a futile, misogynistic issue. We have a Republican Legislature, so they think they have time to spend on those kinds of things, as opposed to real issues that citizens of Missouri need dealing with,” she said.


Raychel Proudie, a Democrat, felt that this could ultimately lead to the disenfranchisement of certain groups, such as pregnant women, who may find it difficult to find a suitable blazer or cardigan. Other democratic lawmakers felt that the ruling was misogynist and only served to highlight how women have historically been scrutinized and criticized for their fashion choices.

It seems that Missouri is not the only state legislature to scrutinize dress codes. Recently Wyoming actually loosened their dress code to “business attire.” However, in Montana women legislators are required to be cognizant of skirt lengths and necklines. In fact a 2021 report of the National Conference of State Legislatures indicated about half of the state legislatures have a dress code. In Pennsylvania the Rules of the State Senate state, “Proper attire.--Members and staff with privilege of the floor during Senate sessions shall not dress in a manner offensive to the decorum of the Senate but shall be dressed in professional attire, including a coat, tie and trousers or slacks for men, and appropriate dignified dress for women.” No dress requirements could be found for the Pennsylvania House of Representatives.

Sources: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/15/us/missouri-dress-code-women.html>

(Senate Resolution 3, adopted January 3, 2023) (2023-2024) RULES OF THE SENATE OF PENNSYLVANIA

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**FREETHOUGHT OF THE DAY**

“As my ancestors are free from slavery, I am free from the slavery of religion.”

**Butterfly McQueen**  
FFRF Lifetime Member  
Atlanta Journal and Constitution (1989)

**FFRF.ORG** FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

© 2018 Freedom From Religion Foundation

### Pope Francis is Confusing

The Associated Press, apnews.com, recently interviewed Pope Francis. Francis made news by saying that laws making homosexuality a crime are “unjust.” He said, as he has in the past, that God loves all his children as they are, and called on Catholic bishops to welcome LGBTQ people into the Catholic church. “Being homosexual isn’t a crime,” he noted.

The article noted that Francis views homosexuality as a sin. Cultural differences lead to it being regarded as a crime, he said, and he added that bishops need to make an effort to recognize the worth of everyone.

As has been the case before when Pope Francis tries to be nice about LGBTQ rights, he quickly amended his remarks. The next day he “clarified” that homosexuality is indeed a sin, since Catholic doctrine specifies that all sex outside of marriage is a sin.

Francis has had difficulty explaining his attitude about homosexuality before. While he has consistently said the church should welcome everyone, he has also said that gay men should not be admitted to the priesthood, apparently believing that the Church's sexual abuse crisis has been caused by gay priests. While LGBTQ advocates were quick to praise Francis' original statement, some expressed concern that he seems to think being gay, all by itself, is a sin.

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### Blast from the Past

Congress represents America, right? The current 118<sup>th</sup> Congress does – just not today's America.

The Associated Press, [apnews.com](http://apnews.com), compared the religious affiliation of Americans in general to that of Congress. It's not even close. Approximately 29% of Americans have no religious affiliation. But only 2 of the 534 members of Congress are willing to publicly acknowledge the same: Rep. Jared Huffman describes himself as a humanist, and Sen. Kyrsten Sinema says she is unaffiliated. 20 members either declined to answer the question, or gave (looking at you, George Santos) unclear responses.

The percentage of Americans who identify as Christian has dropped dramatically over the last few years. In 2007 Christians were 78% of the population, and unaffiliated were 16%. In 1990, almost 90% of Americans called themselves Christian, and the percentage unaffiliated was under 10%.

The article quotes a Pew Research report on the subject. 88% of members of Congress identify as Christian, as compared to 63% of Americans in general. 57% of congresspersons call themselves Protestant, and 28% Catholic, higher than the rest of the country. 6% of Congress members are Jewish, as opposed to 2% of the overall population.

Politicians have long felt that a religious identity is necessary for election success. That is probably correct. A 2019 Gallup survey found only 60% of respondents would vote for an atheist. That was smaller than the number who said they would vote for gays or lesbians, or non-Christian religious groups.

Republican members of congress are 99% Christian, breaking down as 69% Protestant, 25% Catholic, and 5% other Christian (i.e., Mormon or Orthodox.) Democrats are more diverse, although they are still overwhelmingly Christian at 76%. 44% are Protestant, 31% Catholic, 1.5% Orthodox, and 12% Jewish. They have about 1% each of Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Unitarian Universalist representation. Religiously unaffiliated voters chose Democrats by a 2-to-1 margin in the 2022 House races.

How long will it take Congress to really look like America?

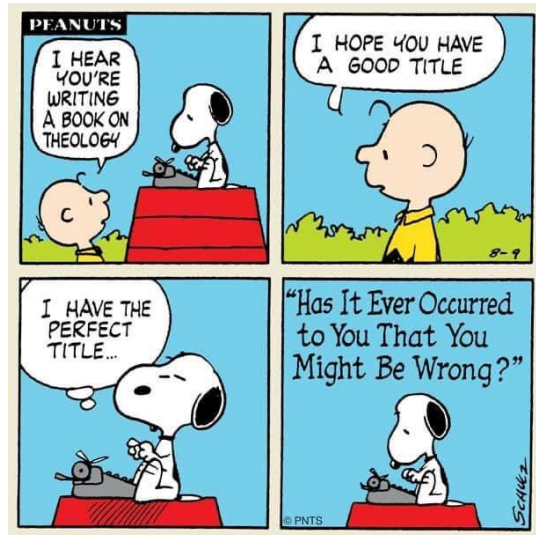


### Art History and Muhammad

An adjunct professor at Hamline University in St. Paul, MN, wanted to be careful. Erika Lopez Prater planned to show a 14<sup>th</sup> century painting of Muhammad in her art history class.

According to the New York *Times*, nyt.com, she knew many Muslims object to depictions of the Prophet. So she noted in the syllabus that the course would include the picture, and told students to talk to her with any concerns. The day she showed the picture, she warned the students, and told them they were free to leave.

It wasn't enough. After students complained, Lopez Prater lost her job.



One student in the class complained to the administration, and other Muslim students, who were not in the class, supported the student. School officials decried the display as Islamophobic. The university's president, Fayneese S. Miller, co-signed an email saying respect for Muslim students "should have superseded academic freedom."

People came to Lopez Prater's defense. An Islamic art historian wrote an essay defending her and started a petition demanding an investigation; the petition received more than 2,800 signatures. Free speech groups complained, and PEN America described it as "one of the most egregious violations of academic freedom in recent memory."

The student who complained said she had been "blindsided" by the painting. She told a town hall, "As a Muslim and a Black person, I don't feel like I belong, and I don't think I'll ever belong in a community where they don't value me as a member, and they don't show the same respect that I show them."

The painting in question is described as being part of one of the earliest Islamic illustrated histories of the world, "A Compendium of Chronicles," written during the 14th century by Rashid-al-Din (1247-1318). It depicts the Angel Gabriel giving Muhammad the first revelation for the Quran. The article states that it is regularly shown in art history classes. The article also notes that Quran does not prohibit displaying images of Muhammad. The practice started because Muslims were concerned that looking at visual representations would lead to worshipping Muhammad instead of Allah. Not all Muslims agree with the ban, and some reserve it for caricatures, not for respectful pictures.

Dr. Lopez Prater has announced she is suing Hamline.

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God Is Still Laughing

## WHERE IS ALL MY MONEY MR.OSTEEN



### He Doesn't Get Us

The “He Gets Us” campaign, designed to make Jesus more relatable, has exploded over TV and social media. *PANViews* has previously reported on the \$100 million dollar project. The commercials and clips, modeled on ad campaigns for Old Navy and Mercedes-Benz are well-made, striking in black-and-white.

*Christianity Today*, christianitytoday.com, reports that the campaign has been wildly successful. Launched in 2022, it has included commercials, including a Super Bowl commercial and a 13-stop college football tailgate tour.

Even more impressive, though, is its social media reach. For example, in one year the videos have been watched more than half a billion times on YouTube, and are currently getting 1.3 million viewers each day. It has branched into Facebook, Snapchat, Reddit and Instagram. It expects to expand the campaign into TikTok during 2023.

What is the goal of all this? According to its website, HeGetsUs.com, “We simply want everyone to understand the authentic Jesus as he’s depicted in the Bible — the Jesus of radical forgiveness, compassion, and love.” The website notes that it is not associated with any denomination, or political party.

Not all Christians are thrilled by this campaign. Writing in *United Methodist Insight*, un-insight.net, Wes Magruder says about it “...Jesus is commodified in a TV commercial. He becomes a product a consumer can purchase. He becomes an object of desire which can be found, bought, consumed and discarded.” Natasha Crain, a Christian writer and blogger, natashacrain.com, points out that the ads, in emphasizing Jesus’ humanity, de-emphasizes his role as God and savior.

The people, or organization, behind the ads are hard to pin down. The Catholic News Agency, catholicnewsagency.com, says that the sponsoring group Signatry, which says it funds “discipleship and outreach efforts, Bible translations, cultural care, church plants, anti-human-trafficking missions, student ministries, poverty alleviation, clean water initiatives, and so much more.” Exactly who is donating money to Signatry isn’t clear. It is a bit hard to believe that it is spending \$100 million without a firm goal in mind.

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### Culture Change

The city council of Hamtramck, MI, has been the site of an angry debate. Muslim residents want to be able to slaughter animals during the holiday of Eid al-Adha. According to the *Detroit Free Press*, freep.com, Hamtramck has one of the largest percentage of Muslims residents in the US, and those residents have been pressuring the council for months. The city council, completely comprised of Muslims, voted 3-2 to allow the slaughter.



Animal rights activists and some residents opposed the change, claiming that it could lead to animal cruelty and sanitation issues, in Hamtramck, a densely populated city. People do not want to see goats,

lambs and cows having their throats slit, blood and entrails pouring out, they said. Supporters of the law point out that a Supreme Court decision 30 years ago prohibited bans on animal sacrifice performed by members of Santeria. Supporters also noted Orthodox Jews travel to Hamtramck every Yom Kippur to slaughter chickens at a halal butcher shop run by Muslims. The city attorney agreed that continuing to ban animal sacrifice for religious services could lead to lawsuits.

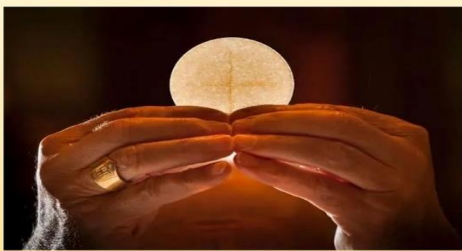
The article noted that this change shows the growing power of the city’s Muslim population, most of whom have roots in Yemen or Bangladesh. At the city council meeting, some attendees accused the city of undermining Islam by allowing gay pride flags while it banned animal sacrifice.

Last year Hamtramck became the first US city with an entirely Muslim city council. The mayor is also Muslim. Previously, Hamtramck’s mayors had always been of Polish descent.

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*Theists Say the Craziest Things*

**Having imaginary friends is rather awkward,**



**but thinking about eating them is definitely insane.**

### **Hockey and the Orthodox Church**

The Philadelphia Flyers hockey team recently held a LGBTQ+ Pride Night. As part of the celebration, players were given rainbow-themed warm up jackets.

According to cbsnews.com, one player, Ivan Provorov, refused to wear the jacket. Why? Because of his religious beliefs.

Provorov is Russian Orthodox. He explained, "I respect everybody's choices. My choice is to stay true to myself and my religion." Both his coach and the National Hockey League supported the player. Coach John Tortorella said, "This has to do with his belief and his religion. It's one thing I respect about Provy: He's always true to himself. That's where we're at with that." The NHL agreed, saying, in part, "Players are free to decide which initiatives to support, and we continue to encourage their voices and perspectives on social and cultural issues."

Provorov is right; the Russian Orthodox Church does oppose gay rights. In fact, CNN, at edition.cnn.com, reports that Patriarch Kirill, the leader of the church says gay pride parades were part of the reason for the war in the Ukraine. He goes on to say that the conflict is about "a fundamental rejection of the so-called values that are offered today by those who claim world power." How do gay pride parades enter into this? Kirill explains it is how countries become allies: "In order to enter the club of those countries, it is necessary to hold a gay pride parade. Not to make a political statement, 'we are with you,' not to sign any agreements, but to hold a gay parade. And we know how people resist these demands and how this resistance is suppressed by force."

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### **Blasphemy Laws Expanded**

In Pakistan, people can be put to death for insulting Islam, or Muhammad. Now, according to the New York Times, nytimes.com, the law has been expanded to punish anyone who insults people who were connected to Muhammad.

The article notes that Pakistan’s blasphemy laws are sometimes used to retaliate in personal disputes, or to persecute minorities. Rights activists are concerned that Christians and other religious minorities will feel the brunt of this expansion. Anyone insulting Muhammad’s wives, companions or relatives can face

10 years in prison – which can be extended to life – and be fined 1 million rupees (+/- \$4,500.) In addition, no bail will be granted. The deputy speaker of Parliament congratulated the body on passing the “historic” legislation, which many of them saw as a religious duty.

The problem isn’t just the legal repercussions. Angry mobs have tortured and killed those accused of blasphemy, even before the court system gets involved.

Former Prime Minister Imran Khan survived an assassination attempt last year, which the attacker said was religiously motivated. Members of Khan’s political party claimed that the current prime minister ran for office claiming that Khan had blasphemed, which Khan and his party deny. Khan has stated that the assassination attempt was political, and his opponents are using religion as a pretext. A party spokesman stated that using blasphemy accusations against political opponents is dangerous, and the new legislation just provides more opportunities for such attacks.

In 2011, two politicians were assassinated over this issue. Salmaan Taseer, governor of Punjab Province, was murdered by one of his bodyguards because Taseer was an outspoken opponent of the blasphemy laws. He had worked for the release of a Christian, Asia Bibi, who had been convicted of insulting Muhammad. Shahbas Bhatti, a Christian government minister who had also opposed the death penalty for Bibi, was shot to death as well. (Bibi was finally released in 2019, due to insufficient evidence, and emigrated to Canada.)

Pew Research, [pewresearch.org](http://pewresearch.org), notes that at least 79 countries still have blasphemy laws, although many of them are holdovers from previous periods, and haven’t been enforced in years. For example, New Zealand’s law was repealed in 2019, but it had not been enforced since 1922. Pakistan is not the only country that has the death penalty for blasphemy; Afghanistan, Brunei, Iran, Mauritania, Nigeria and Saudi Arabia do as well. Pew further notes that Pakistan sentenced “at least 17” to death in 2019, but that the country has never actually executed anyone for blasphemy.

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*The New Yorker*



*“O.K., first things first—did everyone sign the card?”*

### **Valentine’s Day is So Romantic!**

*Ally Consoli*

Once upon no time, Apollo, the god of reason (and I guess irony deficient?), music, and poetry, was celebrating after slaying a monster. In one of the first cases of males comparing sizes, Apollo went to Cupid and insisted that his bow was larger. Cupid, feeling dejected and emasculated, shot him with a magical golden arrow. It was so powerful that it would make him fall in love with Daphne, the mountain nymph that he was already attracted to.

But, because no one can get away with being bigger than Cupid, he shot Daphne with another magical arrow made of lead that made her not interested in Apollo. And because a man’s lust is no match for a woman’s lack of interest, Apollo chased Daphne through the woods even though she told him to go away. Apollo’s pursuit drove Daphne towards her father, Peneus, the river god.

Hearing his daughter's cries for help as she was being hunted, the best plan that he could come up with was to transform her into a stationary laurel tree. Apollo, seeing that she was now a tree, started mourning by ripping off her leaves and making himself a laurel wreath crown. Cupid, seeing the mess that he caused with his little bow, wrapped himself up in her robes to hide.

So, thanks to stories like this one, we have this winged baby in a diaper and drape from the robes that fell off of a nymph that he inadvertently turned into a tree because of a prank that he played with love arrows because he was angry that someone's "bow" was bigger slapped on a bunch of Hallmark cards and chocolate boxes in a couple of weeks.

Happy Valentine's Day.

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# FUN!

Make Your Own Valentine!





**Member Submissions**

**Church Hypocrisy**

*John Arnold*

Note: I (Calvinist to Atheist) uncover a case of hypocrisy of the church in telling their parishioners that the Bible teaches that Jesus was morally perfect. This just is not true.

A case in point, is their treatment on the Gospel of John chapter 7 verse 8. Jesus tells his disciples that he was not going to a festival, but he did so in secret. Most churches teach that it was not a lie; I think it was.

In 2011 I wrote a little book entitled "The Day That Christ Lied" to prove this case and expose a good number of other short comings. I examined twenty-four different Bibles of many denominations to see how they treated the subject.

I also read books of seventy-two theologians. And I read 158 passages of Scripture that relate to Jesus' morality. I think I got it right.

Finally, I wanted my readers to know that I had the academic background to understand what I was reading. I studied religion at Susquehanna University, I enrolled in Princeton Theological Seminary, and then got a PhD, ABD.

If anyone would like a copy of the book, I will gladly send you one for free.

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**Who Decides?**

*Richard Slade*

Human society is beset by any number of pressing questions: climate crisis, the impact of artificial intelligence, wealth distribution, needs for living, just to name a few; these in no particular order or particular significance. Who should decide how the society ought to address them? Who should be charged with finding solutions or even mitigation?

For millennia past this was traditionally the province of clergy, a role for which they were often ill-equipped but nonetheless accepted by society. The nobility, of course, claimed the power not only to make such decisions but also to implement consequences, with clerics as their hand maidens. Circumstances could thrust the military into the role, often concurrent with the other two centers of power. Alas, with the onset of a more civilized age the influence of these old traditions has waned, though not completely disappeared, and left something of a void in the source of profound ethics. Thus who decides?

Politicians have eagerly leapt to the charge, again only rarely better equipped to render a path than those whom they seek to replace. With corporations declared to have the rights of personhood, business has claimed politicians as allies as the arbiters of the proper path for society in almost everything. In the face of monumental conflict of interest, business and politicians only occasionally produce results more beneficial to society than to themselves.

An organization which purports to extoll the virtues of reason and rationality might call upon the wisdom of academics and philosophers to render decisions on profound questions. They are well trained and abundantly experienced in the thought processes, but they lack the mechanisms of power to implement

solutions. There are artists and journalists who struggle mightily to shape the course of society, sometimes with impressive results. This audience, which claims to hold science in high regard, might say the obvious choice would be scientists. They have the requisite bonafides in reason and rationality but may lack the communication skills to adequately spread the message.

There are doubtless some libertarians out there who by now are crying out, "Let the people decide!" This is surely a noble sentiment, which has been the cry of democracy for at least two millennia. The United States was founded upon the principle, more or less, as a representative democracy, and it has been tried with direct referenda. The results in both cases have been decidedly mixed with some successes and some ignominious failures. Recall that many of these issues are profound, fraught with nuance, and producing far-reaching consequences. How many people, when faced with the pressing question, recoil from reason and throw up their hands or go with their gut? Today we have the on-going experiment called social media to evaluate the value of unbridled opinion.

At some point, given the current progress of artificial intelligence, it will become the dominant influence in human affairs, and this question will be moot. We could decide to ignore the hard questions and allow the inexorable march of evolution to resolve them. Letting nature take its course may return the answer of extinction.

Pondering the problems is just part of the task. Who devises and implements solutions? The question remains who decides? Society awaits the answer.

## ***PAN News & Update***

**Meetings** – PAN holds in-person and online meetings. Locations, times, and dates below.

Online meeting: Fourth Thursday of the month at 6PM. We hope to split the meeting into an hour of chat and an hour of presentation or more structured discussion. Anyone with a book/movie review, discussion topic, or potential guest speaker should contact Dietrich Dellinger @ [guyinnagorillasuit@gmail.com](mailto:guyinnagorillasuit@gmail.com)  
Chambersburg – Second Thursday of the month, 6:30 pm, Sakura Japanese Restaurant, 1071 Wayne Ave

Cumberland/Mechanicsburg - Third Wednesday of the month, 6:00 pm. Lovedraft Brewing, 165 Gateway Drive, Mechanicsburg (no children under 18)

Harrisburg– First Wednesday of the month, 6:30 pm, Zeroday Brewing Company Taproom, 923 North 3rd Street

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

Lebanon - Second Wednesday of the month, 6:00 pm, Hoss's - 1235 E Main St., Annville

Reading – Third Thursdays at 7:15pm, 3rd & Spruce Draffthaus, 238 S 3rd Ave, Reading, PA 19611

York Meeting – First Sunday at noon. Prince St. Café is still closed, so we will meet at Mexitaly Brick Oven Brewhouse, 2440 East Market St.

Annual Meeting: Harrisburg Unitarian Universalist Church, located at 1280 Clover Lane, Harrisburg, PA 17113 on Saturday March 4<sup>th</sup>, from 12 to 2 PM

### ***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 lets 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](http://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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**Solution to Cryptogram:**

Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.