



WASHline

In This Issue:

President's Message	1
Editor's Corner	2
AI Opportunities and Risks	3
The Council for National Policy	4
Annual Picnic-Regional Secularists	6
The Bible sounds like Mythology	6
Virginia Call to Action	7
Maryland Call to Action	8
Understanding Religious Trauma	9
Note on Israel/Hamas War	11
Christian Nationalism	13
Climate Update	15
The Economy	16
Chapter Reports	18
Chapter Contact Information	21
WASH Contact Information	21

Gratitude

The entire WASH community conveys our gratitude to those who renewed their membership, signed up as a new member or just made a contribution because you appreciate the service our community is providing. Thank you.

Please go to <https://wash.org/donate/>
If you have not already joined.

The views expressed should in all cases be considered those of the author unless explicitly endorsed by the WASH Board of Directors.

President's Message

by Heatherly Hodges

1 Earlier this month, pagans and wiccans
2 celebrated the holiday of Lughnasadh. Lughnasadh
3 is a Celtic holiday that celebrates the beginning of
4 the harvest season. Years ago during my pagan
5 phase, I celebrated Lughnasadh and many other
6 pagan holidays. and even when I began to realize
7 that I was an atheist, I still enjoyed celebrating
8 those holidays. There are traditionally four major
9 and four minor celebrations in the Pagan calendar.
10 Major holidays celebrate the winter and summer
11 solstice, and the winter and summer equinox. I
12 particularly enjoyed celebrating these holidays,
13 because they gave me a sense of connection to the
14 changing seasons and a connection with nature that
15 I enjoyed.

16 I don't generally celebrate the pagan
17 holidays anymore, though I do remember them. As
18 an atheist I don't really have holidays to celebrate.
19 Darwin day, Pi Day, and other holidays have very
20 little emotional meaning, or connection to a larger
21 sense of purpose. Holidays are part of a way to
celebrate rituals. I'm using ritual in the sense of a
recurring event that celebrates a particular passage
of time, or life phase, or something that connects
to a greater community. Celebrating birthdays and
attending funerals are in a sense rituals. The
purpose of rituals is both to connect us to each
other, to our families or to a larger community, as
well as giving meaning to us as individuals and our
changing life phases. We celebrate our lives with
birthdays: turning 18, 21, 50, with academic
degrees and first jobs, marriages and first houses,
promotions and retirement. Those are all rituals
that connect us to an awareness of time passing in
our lives. We celebrate the birth of children and
honor the death of loved ones. Even those of us
who don't celebrate holidays such as Thanksgiving
or Christmas are aware of those holidays: one
cannot escape the coming of Christmas due to
Christmas music in every store!

Humans are social creatures, being social creatures, most of us crave connection both to our families and communities. So what rituals do atheists have? Some atheists celebrate Christmas, I am one of them. These days, I don't celebrate Christmas as the celebration of the birth of Jesus. I celebrate Christmas as a holiday to reconnect with family and friends. and an excuse to indulge my gift giving addiction. I don't celebrate Thanksgiving as a holiday celebrating the entirely false history of settlers and Native Americans coming together. I celebrate Thanksgiving simply as a reason to give thanks for the good things in our lives. As an atheist, as a humanist, I believe it is important for us to celebrate rituals.

Holidays and rituals are important for the religious, and non-religious alike. In a few days, we will celebrate Labor Day (and my birthday). In 2 months we will celebrate a holiday of frivolity, candy and costumes. In 3 months we will celebrate the ritual of electing a new president. I encourage each of you to discuss in your families and your chapters in your small community what rituals you celebrate. What observation of time passing connects you to a greater sense of the world? What do you celebrate that connects you to our planet? What do you celebrate that connects you to your family? Each of our chapters focus on creating community, creating a place for us to come together and connect with each other. What connections do you celebrate?

[ed. What should our secular humanist community celebrate? Please send your thoughts on this to washline@wash.org.]

Editor's Corner

by Don Wharton

I continue to be delighted with the quality of contributions to our newsletter. Our President, Heatherly Hodges gave us another one of her excellent views about how to find the personal connection and sense of community we want in our lives. Our celebrations are central. I have modest fondness for unibirthday celebrations. They have the advantage of having many more spaces on the calendar in which one can be celebrated. I would like to suggest that any group of us could find dates on a calendar for which no member of

the group has a birthday. Then schedule that date for an unibirthday celebration. That is just a thought from the mad mind of your editor.

Gary Berg-Cross has another of his contributions on artificial intelligence. As a researcher very connected to the field, we are so lucky to have his informed perspective on this radically transformative technology. The only question is how and where will the changes become part of our lives and culture. Thank you, Gary.

We have the second part of Jeff Bloom's article on the Council for National Policy. I recommended that for people who wanted more on this topic, that they watch the movie *Bad Faith*. Jeff watched it and commented to me on how much the movie centered on the Council for National Policy. My reply to him is that the movie confirmed that his article nailed down a very important part Christian nationalism in this country. I had no clue, but I do now. Thank you, Jeff.

Our sixth annual Summer picnic was a joy this August. Our gratitude to Rogier "Ro" Black and others who organized and contributed to this wonderful success. Ro suggested that he might get a DJ for next year. This is how to do a celebration. See the picture and note in this issue.

We have an excellent article on why the Bible sounds like mythology. Eym Lessah is a pseudonym for a treasured friend who has done a lot of research and writing on the history of religion. I am so happy that we got this essay from him for this issue.

Note that "atheism" can be a pejorative term with significant negative repercussions in some communities. We will use pseudonyms to protect the authors in those cases.

Our Community is extremely fortunate that we are walking the walk of monitoring and lobbying for rational state laws in our region. We have Aiden Barnes and his team working in Virginia. We have Mike Reid building a team to do the work for Maryland. Both have articles in this issue talking about what they do and asking for additional members to work with them. Mike confesses that his job is easier because Maryland is a more liberal state. However, Rosalind Kipping

was a longtime leader of the death with dignity effort in Maryland. She died without getting it added to Maryland law. She was a very loved member of my chapter. I miss her a lot, but her work must continue. Mike is now going to lead our efforts in Maryland on this. For our members in Virginia, you will have much more work to do. Please read what Aiden shares in this issue and consider joining his team.

We have another part from the extensive essay by Mr. Heffron on the psychological mechanisms of religious trauma. We are fortunate that many religious families provide loving, nurturing environments for children. However, far too many children (and adults) are damaged by the mechanisms described by Mr. Heffron. Understanding these details makes it much easier to recognize them and perhaps be helpful when we encounter them. Unfortunately, they enable much of the wider societal damage we are seeing unfold before our eyes.

The youth of our nation is on average especially upset and angry about the appalling slaughter we are seeing in the Israel-Hamas war. My Jewish friends are very cautious about sharing their opinions, for good reasons. The tribalism and dehumanization of perceived enemies is quite extreme. I think that there are facts on the ground that can be acknowledged by any objective observer. It is possible to discuss possible pathways forward. My article on this conflict is intended to start a possible discussion.

I have another of my articles documenting a small fraction of the tidal wave of Christian nationalism sweeping this country. The harm created is either immense or promises to become immense. And as usual there is an article on the climate.

I also have a small article helping us make sense of the rather pessimistic polling results on the economy. This is cited as the single most important issue in the upcoming election. A cogent analysis indicates that there is a huge bias created by tribalism that is highly related with our American religiosity. Hopefully this will clarify the wide confusion in this area.

Please review the social opportunities, charity work, and intellectual explorations provided by our many chapters in their chapter

reports. We have a very thriving organization, worthy of your social involvement and support.

AI Opportunities and Risks

by Gary Berg-Cross

Earlier articles have discussed the basics of modern machine learning (ML) systems and current generative informational “products”. The bottom line is that we all need to study and monitor them as they start to impact our lives. This gets technical quickly especially as the technology matures.

Good advice seems to suggest that we be very proactive in defining principles for their trustworthy use and see how hard these are to implement. Currently there's no explicit motivation to do this among the big companies launching Gen-AI applications. A proposed interim measure is to use the analogous concept of nutrition labels to help users to understand what are the system “ingredients” and what is this system certified to perform safely. Another suggestion to manage misinformation risk is to mitigate these by using a technique called retrieval augmentation generation (RAG) which doesn't just use things like Large Language Models' for a knowledge base and instead supplement the foundation knowledge with a core set of quality information to use for its decisions. By training a RAG on judgment quality itself we can even ask the system to judge its confidence in making a decision.

Gen-AI systems will grow from today's single-purpose "narrow" AIs but how quickly is not yet known. A longer term solution is that symbolic systems from Good Old Fashion AI might help by monitoring and/or acting as an executive and using meta-cognition to guide executive activities. Good old-fashioned AI or symbolic AI complements deep neural net learning approaches and together as what are called neuro-symbolic hybrids spark future developments with a balance of knowledge, logical reasoning and learning.

We can expect that particular impacts, both good and bad, will depend on the types of AI systems that will emerge.

No discussion of risk from advanced AI systems is complete without mentioning a grand

one we hear. This is the argument by different people that we may quickly face catastrophic risks of powerful, rogue AI systems, particularly if they are embodied in robots to directly act.

The counterargument is that there are many steps to such a powerful AI system. Famed MIT roboticist Rodney Brooks is skeptical about embodied AI advances this week. He doubts we'll see "a robot that seems as intelligent, as attentive, and as faithful as a dog" before 2048 since as he also says it is "much harder than most people imagine it to be... Many think we are already there; I say we are not at all there." I agree there is much yet to do. Dog-smart robots might develop a bit sooner but robust and trustworthy agents are not coming soon.

Preparing for that day we might take some opportunistic risks into account along the way. The idea is to understand current and near-term limitations to improve systems. Start learning how to fix smaller problems with Gen-AI and early hybrids in the next few years before very powerful, more autonomous AI systems come online.

One strategic idea here is that while some may be skeptical of such risks, we should think of future AI challenges like possible future pandemics and prepare for them. We want to take actions to minimize future risks of these things, even though we are uncertain about the timing and severity if it happens. For most of these arguments I align with a moderate AI risk skepticism that is grounded in humanist values and an informed, scientific perspective. This recognizes the potential for harm over time, but remains grounded in critical inquiry and a growing body of understanding based on empirical findings.

Gary Berg-Cross, a WASH Board Member, is a cognitive psychologist who worked for a number of decades in good old-fashioned AI. While retired from full time work he is still professionally active and co-chairs the ESIP Semantic harmonization work cluster and is one of the co-organizers of annual online conferences on topics related to knowledge and AI. The recently completed "Ontology Summit 2024" conference topic was "Hybrid Neuro-Symbolic Techniques for and with Ontologies and Knowledge Graphs."

[ed. Email any responses on this article to washline@wash.org.]

God is not an explanation. It is a placeholder for those lacking in the courage, or the intellectual honesty to say "I don't know."

The Council for National Policy

Part Two

By: Jeff Bloom

In Part One of "Get to Know: The Council For National Policy," we were introduced to the Council For National Policy ("CNP"): its goals, its organizational structure, and some of its recent leaders. Part Two will use a few illustrative recent examples to describe the way in which the CNP leverages the power of its better-funded and better-known allied organizations to exert an enormous influence on public policy and affect social change in areas of concern to its members.

One of the founders of the CNP in 1981, Paul Wayrich, was also a co-founder of The Heritage Foundation and the American Legislative Exchange Council ("ALEC") in 1973. These three organizations, the CNP, The Heritage Foundation, and ALEC, have worked together as the coordinating framework of far-right public policy advocacy in the United States for decades. The Heritage Foundation has been the leading think tank of the movement, ALEC has promoted public policy goals at the state and local levels, and the CNP has acted as the coordinating backbone of the entire effort. The CNP stays under the radar and is little-known to the public because its budget remains small, and its membership has been largely stable over the years with a few changes in the board as priorities change. The funding for the many issues on which the CNP exerts influence across the country comes from modest contributions in member fees and larger amounts from the organizations allied with the CNP, many of which share board members and contributing members with CNP. The contributors include the First Liberty Institute and the National Christian Charitable Foundation (sixth-largest charitable donor in the nation). The National Christian Charitable Foundation is a donor-advised fund whose donors include many connected to the CNP: the DeVos family, the Anschutz fossil fuels business, and the Foster Friess family.

There are numerous examples showing

how the CNP organizes and uses the resources of its partner organizations to address goals in a wide variety of policy areas. The GOP scored a major victory in placing Glenn Youngkin into the governorship of Virginia in 2021. The CNP and its allied partners had a crucial role in that election by promoting controversy in Virginia and elsewhere about the alleged teaching of Critical Race Theory in public schools. This controversy had a major influence over the white female suburban voters crucial to the GOP turnout in Virginia, and they showed up in huge numbers to vote for Youngkin, as well as to attend school board and city council meetings across the state. After the election, the CNP brought in Chris Wilson, a data expert who introduced Cambridge Analytica to Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, and Chad Connelly, CNP board member, to discuss how to apply the lessons learned in the Virginia victory of Youngkin to the rest of the country. CNP affiliates such as the Family Research Council and Turning Point, U.S.A., led by CNP board member Charlie Kirk, joined in the effort, with Turning Point placing several counties and the City of Alexandria on its "School Board Watchlist."

Similarly, the CNP has become a key organizer in the manipulation of elections across the nation. Ken Blackwell who is on the board of CNP Action, the CNP's lobbying agency along with Ginni Thomas (wife of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas), have a long history of influencing elections in Ohio. In 2000, as Ohio's Secretary of State, he oversaw the elections in the state while he served as chair of the Bush-Cheney campaign committee. The Brennan Center concluded that Blackwell "...issued a series of decisions that both restricted access to voting...and invited criticism for the appearance and substance of partisanship." Blackwell was recently promoted to Chairman of CNP Action.

Cleta Mitchell, a partner at Foley & Lardner, LLP and CNP attorney who was one of the architects of the Trump campaign's efforts to challenge and reverse the certified results of the 2020 election, is chair of the Public Interest Legal Foundation, of which John Eastman, who was recently indicted in the Arizona criminal prosecution related to the scheme, is a director. Mitchell is also a senior fellow at the Conservative Partnership Initiative ("CPI"). The CPI, which grew from having revenues of \$1.7 million in 2017 to \$45 million in 2021, the last year for which such information is available, has built a large

compound in Maryland from which its "Election Integrity Network" can coordinate national efforts to ensure that elections are won only by candidates approved by the CPI. One of its initiatives is establishing "Freedom Caucuses" in every state legislature mirroring the GOP Freedom Caucus in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Cleta Mitchell was one of the close advisors to President Trump who was intimately involved in the well-known telephone call by Trump to the Georgia Secretary of State in which the President informed the Secretary that he "needed" 11,780 votes in the aftermath of the Georgia election vote tally – a number of votes that would have provided a victory for Trump. The grand jury in the Georgia criminal case now in progress voted to indict Mitchell on several counts, including soliciting election fraud, witness interference, making false statements, and other crimes – although the prosecutor chose not to charge Mitchell for reasons not made public. Mitchell helped ex-president Trump and associates secretly send \$1,000,000 to fund the partisan election audit in Arizona. Mitchell recently worked with legislators in her home state of North Carolina to fashion a law that makes it more difficult to vote. Another one of her recent projects is training GOP activists to search for alleged voting irregularities using artificial intelligence technology. In late 2021, J. Christian Adams, who was a President Trump appointee to the Civil Rights Commission, nominated Mitchell to the Advisory Board of the Election Advisory Commission. Despite widespread protest in response to Mitchell's nomination, she won the appointment.

The CNP is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization, which legally prohibits the organization from either directly or indirectly participating in or intervening in any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for elective office. However, records obtained by the Center for Media and Democracy show that the CNP has engaged repeatedly in activities that favor Republican candidates over Democrats. In May, 2019, for example, Ginni Thomas led a CNP session discussing media and electoral options for "protecting" president Trump.

In 2022, the CNP also geared up to expand its efforts in messaging, state legislation, and other strategies in the wake of the impending decision in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization,

with the expectation that the Court would overturn the ruling in Roe v. Wade, as it did. The CNP has a deep pool of experience in opposing reproductive freedom for women. Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America and CNP Gold Circle member, is joined in this effort by Alan Sears, the founder of Alliance Defending Freedom, and Kelly Shackelford, who was until recently the chair of CNP Action and is now the director of the First Liberty Institute, which focuses on litigation on behalf of Christian fundamentalists attempting to expand the reach of religion into government.

During the SARS-Covid-2 pandemic, the CNP added a number of medical experts to its ranks. The organization, with the help of the 2020 Trump campaign, created “America’s Frontline Doctors” to use the imprimatur of professional knowledge and experience to spread doubt about the severity of the pandemic, discourage people from getting vaccinated, and promote the use of unsubstantiated treatments for Covid-19, such as hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin. Two of the CNP physicians, Simone Gold and James Todaro, participated in these activities.

As you can see, the CNP has a reach and influence far beyond what its membership count and budget would suggest. While there are obvious reasons why the organization attempts to keep a low profile and avoid scrutiny, the depth and breadth of the CNP’s involvement in the formulation, promotion, and enactment of public policy relating to a great many issues of importance to citizens should recommend being aware of the CNP and how it operates by anyone intent on understanding how public policy is developed and becomes law in the United States.

[ed. For people who would like more information on this very important topic, the full length movie, **Bad Faith**, can be watched for free [here](#).

Email your responses on this issue to washline@wash.org.]

Annual Picnic - Regional Secularists

The 6th Annual Picnic was held on August 18. It was organized by the Black Secular Collective of D.C. (BSC) and including the American Atheists, American Humanist

Association, Capital Area Satanists, and the Washington Area Secular Humanists!



The Bible sounds like Mythology

By Eym Lessah

Throughout the centuries, Theologians and Believers have reliably referred to the Bible as the “inspired, inerrant word of God,” however, such incredible claims require incredible evidence. While the masses believe, others view the Bible as myths, allegories, and quasi-historical narratives. Unlike fundamentalists and apologists, biblical scholars have good reason to think there is nothing supernatural about the Bible. The Book of Genesis could very well have begun, “Once upon a time,” and it would have no more merit. One striking reason to think this way is that there are only two genres of literature that consist of verbatim dialogue - books of fiction, and books of mythology. This article will outline why many subject matter experts assert the Bible is a wholly human work, no different than the ancient Indian Vedas, the Muslim Koran, or the very modern Book of Mormon.

Regardless of what clergy may feed the faithful, during biblical times literacy rates arguably ranged between 3% - 15%. During these periods being literate meant being able to write your name and read a few simple sentences, not the higher-level reading and writing we utilize today. This was the Iron Age predominantly made up of agrarian, pastoral, and semi-nomadic tribes. During that era, there was little need for the basics of education. Only the wealthy and scribes could truly read and write by today’s standards.

The modern Bible is made up of 66 books cobbled together over many centuries. According to apologists', the Pentateuch - the first 5 books of the bible were written by Moses. This idea is deeply flawed for many reasons. Primarily, Moses was a mythical patriarchal figure who supposedly lived for 120 years. This was much too short a period to document these historical narratives. Simply put, there were no scribes ensuring the words of the primordial Adam and Eve were recorded for posterity. Apologists have no answer for such mythical authorship. The scholarly view of the origin of the Pentateuch is - it is a compilation of at least (4) separate source documents identified as (JEDP) or Jahwist (J), Elohist (E), Deuteronomist (D), and Priestly (P). This hypothesis is taught in seminary schools as the Documentary Hypothesis (DH). As with most ancient tomes, these scriptures were compiled, edited, doctored, and redacted over the centuries so they could flow more coherently.

To best evaluate the biblical text we must first define verbatim dialogue. Verbatim means - precise, exactly word for word, and dialogue means - a back-and-forth conversation between two or more people. Verbatim does not mean paraphrasing. To reinforce the authority of the biblical text, the book of Revelations reveals a curse to anyone who alters the sacred text. Rev. 22:19 reads, "And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." The question should be asked if priests and scribes were fearful their sacred text could be altered, how could it be considered the word of God? Secondly, it should be asked, how did uneducated apostles convey specific, verbatim dialogue over centuries? Surely, people in ancient times did not have digital recorders as we have today. So, the ability to get these biblical texts correct needs severe investigation.

The Gospel of Mark (the first written gospel) was written sometime during the war between Rome and the Jews (66-74 CE). Most early dates fall around 65 CE and most late dates fall around 75 CE. Biblical Scholars surmise the Gospel of Mark was written approximately 40 years after the death of Christ. Even Christian Apologists concede with authorship dates between 55 CE to 70 CE. Additionally, biblical historians agree that all of the Gospels were initially

anonymous and none were written by eyewitnesses (Mitchell, 2011). Simply put, the Gospels were named centuries after the fact.

Here is the primary and overwhelming problem with the Gospels - how do you produce verbatim dialogue narratives recorded over 40 years after the death of the main character? Nowhere in the Gospels is it even implied that mysterious superhuman scribes sat around copying every word that the Apostles spoke. The idea that these works were preserved via oral tradition is even more problematic. Bear in mind, Jesus and his crew did not deem their words worthy enough to even mention having a scribe. Question, when Jesus clearly left the Apostles in the garden of Gethsemane to go and pray, where was the scribe that recorded his prayer (Mark 14:35-37)? More importantly, who was Jesus praying to, himself, God?

Many religious scholars readily admit that the Gospels were an ancient form of mythology. E.P. Sanders, an American New Testament Scholar states, "these Gospels were written with the intention of glorifying Jesus and are not strictly biographical in nature." Charles H. Talbert, a distinguished Professor of Religion at Baylor University in Waco, Texas agrees "...the Gospels should be grouped with the Graeco-Roman biographies, but adds that such biographies included an element of mythology and that the synoptic Gospels also included elements of mythology..." These professors like many trained theologians walk the tightrope of promoting the faith while admitting amongst themselves, it's all mythology and ancient propaganda.

In summation, the young are exposed to the Bible at a very young age, when tales of talking serpents and demons require no logic or proof. As they mature, adult believers twist themselves into contortions to justify this other-worldly language and antiquated concepts. The Bible is cloaked in flowery pronouncements, yet it delivers empty promises. It communicates in an esoteric language of corporate spirituality, a language that does not exist in the natural world. It is a language that lives and thrives solely within the mind of the Believer.

[ed. Email your responses on this issue to washline@wash.org.]

Virginia Call to Action

by Aiden Barnes

American Atheists' VA State Director's call to action: Join the VA Secular Advocacy Team and/or volunteer as an Assistant State Director for American Atheists in VA!

Comrades! For years now, we've been sounding the alarm about the Shadow Network of Christian Nationalists and their billionaire buddies trying to take over the U.S. Supreme Court and set up an ultra-conservative cabal hostile to church-state separation. It's probably no shock to a lot of you that the court is no longer a reliable defender of our constitutional rights. The attacks on church-state separation and our democracy have picked up pace since the court went ultra-conservative with a 6-3 majority, but honestly, this mess started way before that. Studies show that Christian Nationalists have thrown down over half a billion bucks in the last ten years to stack the court in their favor.

Looking back even further, we haven't seen a solid win for keeping church and state separate at the Supreme Court since Chief Justice Roberts and Justice Alito were appointed nearly twenty years ago. Actually, we've been losing a lot of ground.

As Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote in a recent dissent, "Today, the Court leads us to a place where separation of church and state becomes a constitutional violation."

So, do we just give up? Hell no! But we definitely need to change up our game plan. We still need to fight against church-state violations in court, but we also really need to raise awareness about how serious this situation is. The only way we can really make a difference is by getting people fired up and rallying them to support church-state separation. That way, we can make sure there are judges in state and federal courts who get that church-state separation is enshrined in our Constitution.

We have to keep pushing in the courts, but we can't stop there. We need to make our voices heard on Capitol Hill, in our state capitol, and at our local City Councils and School Boards. Getting the word out to the public about the risks to church-state separation and the rights and freedoms that matter to them is of the utmost importance. Plus, we should be reaching out to

new folks and getting activists fired up to stand up for our democracy.

We have to win over the general public just as much as we need to win within the legal system. The civil rights and marriage equality movements showed us that just going to court isn't enough to really make a difference in this country.

Along with our community building efforts, we're part of a national movement for a recommitment to the separation of church and state. A movement that includes all of the tools in our toolbox – litigation, grassroots organizing, storytelling, influencing public policy, shaping public opinion, marketing and so much more. Part of that is our VA Secular Advocacy Team, organized via American Atheists, chaired by Matthew DeGrave. If you're interested in joining our VA SAT, please email matthew.degrave@atheists.org for more info. We also need more volunteers for American Atheists' State Director program. Here in VA, we currently have Assistant State Directors assigned to (or soon to be onboarded for) Chesapeake, Manassas, Newport News, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Reston, Richmond, Virginia Beach, and York County. If you're interested in joining our team of Assistant State Directors to represent a city/county not already covered in that list, please email me at abarnes@atheists.org for more info.

With your support, we'll keep pushing for a nation that offers freedom and equality for all!

[Ed.: If you live in Maryland see article below]

Maryland Call to Action

By Mike Reid

American Atheists' MD State Director's call to action: Join the Maryland Secular Advocacy Team (MD SAT) or volunteer as an Assistant State Director for American Atheists in Maryland

Fellow Secularists: Christian Nationalism is on the rise in this country. It presents an existential threat not just to our cherished post-Enlightenment secularism and reason, but to democracy and individual freedom as well. Christian Nationalist organizations are well-organized, professionally staffed,

well-funded, and politically connected. American Atheists (atheists.org) is one of the national organizations pushing back against them. American Atheists' staff level and funding are tiny in comparison, but they do have dedicated volunteers. One of the ways they push back is by organizing state-level Secular Advocacy Teams (SATs). The SATs are teams of volunteers who work with the professional staff at American Atheists to monitor the activities of Christian Nationalists at the state and local level and when appropriate, write letters to their state or local representatives, testify before their state legislatures and local government councils and school boards, and inform the public.

Although Christian Nationalists are less of a force in Maryland than in some other states, they are active here and we must remain vigilant. A bill was introduced in the Maryland State Legislature last session that would have allowed Christian chaplains to operate as "mentors" in public schools essentially acting as untrained and unaccountable school counselors. Happily, this terrible bill did not advance out of committee. They also want to ban some books from our public school libraries under the pretext of protecting students from "pornographic" material. Their extremely broad concept of "pornography" is highly subjective and encompasses far more material than what most of us would consider befitting of that label. Their real agenda is to chip away at the separation of church and state, impose their religion-based morality on the rest of us, and quash any notion that LGBTQ+ persons should have rights or even acknowledge that they exist.

WASH is a regional affiliate of American Atheists. American Atheists and the MD SAT are nonpartisan and do not endorse, support, or oppose any political candidates or political parties, but we do advocate for the separation of church and state and related issues. If you are a Maryland resident and are interested in getting involved in the MD SAT or becoming an assistant state director, please contact Mike Reid at mike.reid@atheists.org.

Understanding Religious Trauma

Part 4

by P. Michael Heffron

Last time, we discussed how religion so

often substitutes attachment for love. Real love is unconditional, and says "I want you to be whoever makes you happy," but attachment is love's near-enemy and sugar equivalent, and says "I want you to be whoever makes me happy." The altruism of one allows our self-worth to rise in tandem with our freedom to be authentic; while the narcissism of the other leads us to measure our self-worth by the approval of others (who are often also narcissists). One invites us to find our true selves, and the other promises to "save" us from being rejected, but only if we "believe" in the "truth" brand of the tribe we wish to join. One fosters independence that allows for genuine connection with others and the self-confidence to develop healthy boundaries against those who judge us, the other impairs the development of the self-confidence necessary for developing healthy boundaries by fostering dependence on conditional connections to (and even an emotional preference for) those who judge us.

Of these two, real love nourishes our creativity to blossom into a diversity of perspectives, while attachment is constrictive. It uses our fear of rejection to herd our creativity toward group-think, rewarding us with the feeling of belonging through conformity. One recognizes how our perspectives can be uniquely different, while the other sees those differences – or more specifically "feels" those differences - as a threat to group cohesion that needs to be "corrected."

Here's the problem. We live in an information age in which we are exposed to more information in a single day than people in the fifteenth century encountered over their entire life. In such an environment, the same creative capacity that is our greatest asset for scientific understanding inevitably leads to a plurality of perspectives, like the many different colored leaves of a single tree in autumn. Such a capacity is also our biggest liability, however, when the glue being relied on to hold society together are binary black-and-white religious perspectives that even religious people themselves have never been able to agree on.

Like a victim of the Spanish Inquisitions strapped to that medieval torture device called "the rack," the new perspectives offered by science pull society in the opposite direction from the old perspectives offered by religion. With the growth and awareness of scientific knowledge comes greater uncertainty. That uncertainty creates a

longing for the security blanket of simplicity found in old ideas and perspective, and hope the latter will save us from the former. In such a milieu, religious trauma can butterfly-effect from attachment to fascism. And it all starts with how our brains begin to process and store information.

To illustrate, notice how these different perspectives can lead to opposite interpretations of essentially the same story. That story can be looked at through one of two different lenses: science or religion. Both lenses offer an understanding about human nature, but one is a more factual lens and the other more metaphorical. One is consistent in what it defines as wrong, the other consistent only in why something is wrong. Here's how.

Have you ever seen "The Shining" by Stanley Kubrick? It's a story about a man named Jack Torrance who takes his family into the mountains and tries to kill them. For most, it is a simple story about an alcoholic father driven to murder either by forces of supernatural evil or insanity or both. Metaphorically, however, our limitless creativity allows us to interpret the film to be about anything we are creative enough to read into it. Interpretations range from fake moon landings and allusions to Native American genocide, to the retelling of ancient myths like Theseus and the Minotaur, to being about hell, the devil, or Jesus Christ. The trick is having the courage to use our creativity with the reckless abandon of a child.

Like the telephone game, to see how creativity can become flesh, imagine traveling 4000 years into the future. There, you discover that 2.37 billion people around the world all claim the story of Jack Torrance [The main character in *The Shining*] is as an act of pure love for the voice Jack hears, even though there are over 40,000 different interpretative "brands" of that "love story" (and growing). Of those different interpretations, each brand claims it alone offers the one "true" meaning behind the story. In fact, the story is even the cornerstone of the world's largest religions, even as its followers persecute anyone (including each other) who deviates from the "true" meaning each brand of that religion proclaims, with all of them holding up Jack Torrance as a moral saint to be emulated (even as they deny they are doing just that by persecuting each other for their different interpretations).

Does this sound familiar? Or like pure sci-fi that could never happen in a million years?

If so, travel back in time 4000 years, and there you'll find a similar story to that of Jack Torrance. And for 2.365 billion people around the world today, that story not only lays the cornerstone of their morality, meaning, and religious belief, it explains why the universe, and everything in it, exists at all! The difference is that, in the older version, the role of Jack Torrance is played by a man named Abraham, and the son he is told to kill "by a voice more powerful than his own" is named Isaac. While the newer version is seen as an act of insanity or demonic possession, the older version is seen as an act of love for God – a God who eventually enacts a plan to kill his own son; and all to forgive us for how freely we choose to use our "free will;" especially when it comes to sex.

All of this raises a crucial question about what it means to be human: How is it possible that the same act of attempted murder, of a son by a father, can be seen in such completely different ways?

If a war of ideas exists between science and religion, understanding this difference is ground zero. While the former answers with the pen offering new insights and understandings about human nature, the latter uses the written word to justify answering with the sword, again and again, to defend one lone interpretation of the story as sacred, and all others as therefore blasphemous. One illustrates our infinite capacity for different perspectives, while the other condemns those capacities as "evil" whenever they're used to redefine the most abstract word imaginable: God. And although the names for this word have always changed, the violence we engage in for the "gods" we define in any infinite number of ways, remains as sacred as it ever was.

So why are there such different perspectives of this story, and why do we "believe" one like a "sacred" fact, and doubt the other as insane? Answer: because of how often facts give birth to metaphors like soil sprouts vegetation, and what both tell us about human nature.

As mentioned, the two versions of the story can be viewed through the lens of science or religion. With the former, both Abraham and Jack Torrance look equally insane. With the latter,

Abraham looks like a saint while Jack looks like a sinner. And both are said to have “free will,” even though both operate like hand puppets for the “voice” they hear. And we are all expected to know the difference. How? By using the same creative spark children rely on to believe in Santa Claus and the boogeyman. Why? For the same reason we believe in Bigfoot, or aliens, or ghosts: because it replaces the dullness of life with something more magical.

And this is why it is important to distinguish factual from metaphorical meaning. In the Bible, for example, there are countless tales of “God’s chosen people” committing genocide at God’s behest. For Christians, such mass human sacrifice is as morally justified as Abraham obeying God’s command to sacrifice his son Isaac. By transforming facts into metaphors, such acts of mass murder are transformed from evil to sacred, like turning water into wine. If we see ourselves as lowly foot soldiers in a cosmic war between forces of good and evil, being righteous means never disobeying a command from our heavenly father, and never questioning those commands. Even if a command requires us to engage in evil, we can always rest assured it is for the greater good, for as the saying goes, “everything serves the will of God.” To non-Christians, such acts are evil regardless of whether Jack is engaging in it for the devil or Abraham is engaging in it for Yahweh, or even if both are simply insane. Nor can it ever be justified as part of a larger plan, no matter how “divinely” mysterious the plan may be.

That plan, after all, provided the same justification for the burning witches and heretics, and even the genocide of Native Americans, by European Christians. While the latter acted like Jack Torrance by treating the former like his son Danny, they justified it by telling themselves they were the descendants of Abraham simply doing what God had commanded him to do to Isaac, and to disobey such a command was the greatest “evil” of all.

Why does simply noticing this difference fail to change the beliefs that lead to such actions? In part, because of how two different parts of our brain interpret information, and how each stores experiences in two different memory systems: one conscious and the other unconscious. If the Abrahamic version of the story is stored in our conscious mind as a sacred narrative-recall, the horrors of the other version are written into our

unconscious mind, which includes our nervous system, in the form of trauma. And next time, we begin to explore how the seeds of such stories constitute the religious trauma that serves to rewire our nervous systems by turning our dual memory systems into the Hatfields and McCoys.

[ed. Email any responses that are fit to print on this issue to washline@wash.org.]

Note on Israel/Hamas War

by Don Wharton

We see many cases where religion destroys the ability to think. We cannot lose track of the fact that our religious dividing lines can create profoundly stupid, murderous insanities. The cognitive malfunctions on both sides of this war are quite astonishing. Please, understand that I am solidly on the side of Israel. That country retains much of their democratic institutions, despite a powerful attempt to gut their Supreme Court and acquire all power through a momentary ownership of legislative and executive power. Democracy endures. It is also more highly educated and secular than any other country in the region. Israel is an economic engine that adds enormously to much of that region and the rest of the world. One, cannot join Hamas without having a thoroughly vetted commitment to Islam and the total destruction of Israel. Thus, we have every reason to hope that Israel achieves an enduring and very safe peace.

That said, I see a diminishing chance for that to be achieved. Netanyahu is determined to totally defeat Hamas. There is no chance to do that without actually killing, disabling or removing most of the population of Gaza. That would be genocide. Over 40,000 have been directly killed by the Israeli IDF forces to date. That does not count the thousands left under the rubble, uncounted because there are no crews to remove the rubble. Most in Gaza have immune systems that function very poorly because of malnutrition. Many thousands of them die from diseases and the inability to recover from relatively minor wounds and exposure. The health and sanitation systems are mostly destroyed. This creates rampant disease and little ability to treat them. Polio has become a problem. A one year old child has become paralyzed from it. There are likely to be thousands

who already have polio but have not yet seen the symptoms. We can expect many other cases of catastrophic disease transmission. There seems to be some agreement to have ceasefire conditions to allow vaccinations for polio. The total population is diminishing only modestly because there is a high birth rate. The result is trauma, misery and despair almost beyond understanding.

Polls of people in Gaza show that the support for Hamas has increased from [20% before the war to 38%](#). The self delusional kill stats provided by Israel have no merit. Roughly one third of the killed and injured are women, one third children and one third adult men. The vast majority of Gaza men are not members of the Hamas military. The probability of the civilian adult male population being kill or injured has to be similar or greater than those for women and children. After all, many roles such as ambulance driver, will put such people out in the open with greater chance to be killed. That analysis suggests that most of the adult males killed are civilians. However, Israel wants us to think that most of them are part of the Hamas military. Both cannot be true.

Many of the Gaza tunnels and much of the Hamas military equipment has been expended or destroyed. The power to inflict damage on Israel is much reduced. However, despite the many claims that Hamas is nearing defeat, there is little evidence that the numbers led by Hamas leadership is reduced. Whenever the IDF army leaves an area Hamas just moves back in. They steal much of the food and resources that humanitarian groups bring to Gaza. They use it to maintain their resource base and geographic power. I see no limit to the numbers willing to join and be trained in the Hamas religious views and military tactics. Hamas does not care how many civilians are killed. Well, they do care, but just not enough to cease their war. They sell their increasingly militant story and continue to increase the extent to which Gaza residents are accepting that story. This is not a picture of Hamas losing the war. It is a picture of hardened intent to inflict as much pain on Israel as possible, until they are free of what they deem to be occupation.

It does not help that Israel killed Ismail Haniyeh, the prior political leader of Hamas. He was killed in Tehran during the installation of the new President of Iran. He was a relatively pragmatic leader, willing to negotiate to get what

he desired. The new leader chosen is Yahya Ibrahim Hassan Sinwar. He was the prior military leader who designed and led the attack on Israel on October 7. He is much more militant. Militant Islamicists regard him as a rock star. This is hardly an exchange in leadership that is likely to lead to peace.

Israel also killed Fuad Shukur, the senior military leader of Hezbollah. He was killed in the capital of Lebanon. Hezbollah had repeatedly declared such an attack to be a red line that would demand a major response from them. There has been a nearly daily exchange of rockets and bombs since then. Hezbollah has 150,000 rockets, many with precision guidance. If they unleashed this firepower, Israel's iron dome system could be overwhelmed. Conversely, Israel has air superiority and could bomb Lebanon into oblivion.

The Palestinian regions of the West Bank are routinely attacked by Israeli settlers. There is little restraint provided by Israeli police. There seems to be much appropriation of Palestinian property by force. The 100,000 Palestinian workers that had been working in Israeli enterprises have lost their jobs and income. These people are not as bad off as those in Gaza, but there is increasing desperation. Recent raids in the West Bank have included wide destruction of roads, infrastructure, the unfortunate of homes that just happen to be near the terrorist targets of the raids. There is a chance that conflict in the West Bank might spiral toward the extremes seen in Gaza. The heavy handed nature of the settler attacks and IDF raids are almost designed to create that spiral of destruction.

The Human Rights Report released [a disturbing report](#) on the treatment of prisoners in Israel. It documents Gaza Medical staff and ambulance drivers who were arrested for no legal reason. They and others, are reporting torture and killing of prisoners without constraints by the Israeli legal system. The policy is to give prisoners only enough food to prevent death. The horrors reported are much worse than anything done by America in Guantanamo or Iraq. Unfortunately, there seems to be too much redundancy with the evidence that is coming out. It is hard to ignore the evidence inflicted on the bodies of released prisoners.

The International Court of Justice, in a July 19 ruling, determined that Israel was violating

international law. Israel was ordered to cease this occupation, dismantle settlements and pay reparations. The Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court is [requesting arrest warrants](#) for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and others. The horrors of this war may or may not get cogent hearings in front of these and/or other international forums. US law does not allow our country to sell weapons to those who violate international law.

There are many demonstrations about this war. There is much global anger against Israel. Antisemitic acts have increased egregiously. For me, this is profoundly preposterous. American Jews are, in my opinion, likely to be at least as thoughtful and constructive as the average non-Jewish American. The anti-Muslim and anti-Arab attacks are also destructive and absurd.

I present the above facts as a cautionary tale. No one can be happy with this state of affairs. Once people go down the road of hating and controlling others for religious reasons, the results can be horrendous and very difficult to resolve. Without religion, it would be possible to have an economic ecology within which people would just ask, how can I contribute to the thriving of the whole and get my needs met in the process. The following article will talk about religiously inspired absurdities in our country.

The facts cited above are nearly certain to be offensive to partisans committed to either side of this conflict. Reality is that which is in common to all observers. This article is intended in part to initiate a discussion across this deeply felt divide. Email any responses that are fit to print to washline@wash.org.

Christian Nationalism

by Don Wharton

We fought a Revolutionary War to free the 13 territories ruled by a British monarchy so that we could come together to form a democratic nation. The current super majority of religious extremists on the Supreme Court was created in good part by the Federalist Society. The American Bar Association had been seen as the primary

arbiter of good legal practice until the Federalist Society was formed to create a much more religious and fundamentalist view of the law. The implications can now be seen as a realistic threat to unravel democracy itself.

There is a growing base of the electorate that has been subjected to fear and hate mongering to an extent that they now see the possible emergence of an autocratic ruler as preferable to a system with the peaceful transfer of power based on elections. A Supreme Court ruling that the President was immune from criminal prosecution for “official acts” can potentially enable that desired autocracy. There was a prior indictment designed to prosecute a possible insurrection. It cited Justice Department actions designed to abort the peaceful transfer of power. A revised indictment could not cite those actions. A plain reading of the new Supreme Court position is likely to allow egregious use of the Justice Department, Homeland Security and the Defense Department to maintain something like a new monarchy, Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson said in her dissent, “To the extent that the majority’s new accountability paradigm allows Presidents to evade punishment for their criminal acts while in office, the seeds of absolute power for Presidents have been planted. And, without a doubt, absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Justice Jackson is concerned that this decision is designed to protect one particular person. As such, the Supreme Court is abandoning any claim to serve the general common good based on law. Do they seriously want to create an autocracy or are they really ignorant about how power works without constraints?

The implicit racism of the Supreme Court can be seen in decisions gutting the Voting Rights Act of 1965, allowing unlimited use of money in the political process, and the decisions allowing unlimited state gerrymandering for political parties. We are now seeing the results of their decision to abolish affirmative action. MIT has announced that [only 5% of its incoming student body will be black](#). That is down from 13%. Affirmative action has been a powerful mechanism to grow the black middle class. States vigorously “cleaned” their registered voting roles, added requirements to have proof of citizenship to vote, made it more likely that voters would be given provisional ballots that are unlikely to be counted, and many other mechanisms to suppress “undesired” voters.

In keeping with the anti-democratic actions of Christian nationalists, there have been furious attempts to abort, confuse and disrupt actions to restore reproductive medical care for women. Anti-choice forces created teams to target, dox and harass workers accumulating signatures to get Constitutional amendments on the ballot. State Attorney Generals in many states have lied about the costs to implement the provision, demanded profoundly absurd summaries be used on the ballots, asserted that the use of “viability” is ambiguous and thus disqualifying for any vote, refused to recognize signatures because people did not vote in the last election (but were still on the rolls), and misused legal procedure to disqualify the signature collection process.

In Arkansas they turned in enough signatures for their ballot initiative along with all required documentation. The office accepting the signatures told them that everything was adequate. The state Attorney General then declared the documentation inadequate and their Supreme Court supported his decision. So in this state the voters will be stymied.

In Nebraska there is a fraudulent alternative amendment that claims to defend women’s rights but will instead lock in the present ban. The two amendments may get in front of the voters and they will have to figure out which one is real.

In Missouri there is a court case to throw the amendment off the ballot because it is not limited to the one issue of abortion. The other issue cited was language guaranteeing the “fundamental right to reproductive freedom.” How is this another issue? We will see if this court allows the amendment to actually get on the ballot. There is a Nebraska group arguing that this legal problem can be applied to the valid initiative now expected on the ballot in their state.

Florida has included a financial impact statement with the abortion amendment on the ballot in their state. It is designed to frighten voters with a wide range of suggested negative impacts to the state budget. Among those was a presumed lack of taxpayers in the future. There were numerous battles over “viability” and the wording to be used on the ballot. Florida requires a 60% or more affirmative vote for Constitutional amendments to pass. Polls suggest that support exceeds that percentage, but Christian conservatives will continue to ferociously cloud

the issues surrounding it.

Montana just had their amendment approved for the ballot on Tuesday, August 20. There were many legal battles in this state to make this possible, including forcing the acceptance of valid voter signatures from those who had not voted in the prior election.

There is a war on the use of “ban” by the far right. By their attempt to evolve the use of words, a ban after six weeks is not a “ban” because some abortions are actually allowed. They actually object to the use of the word ban even when rape and incest provisions are the only options, and those provisions are almost never used because of the requirements required to use them. They want to use terms such as “consensus” or “standard” to describe their bans. They want us to use terms such as “a national standard” to describe a Federal ban after perhaps 15 weeks. These are just attempts to obfuscate what they are doing.

There is a stunning lack of documentation of the deaths of women stemming from the overthrow of *Row v. Wade*. However from Jessica Valenti’s abortion newsletter describing a House Energy and Commerce Committee report appropriately titled, “It Will Only Get Worse,” the report describes an OBGYN residency program in a “Southern restrictive state” that is seeing an increase in complicated and dangerous cases—women who have been “bounced around” different hospitals and doctors who are too afraid of the state’s abortion ban to provide proactive care. Quoting from the report, “[A] program director described one harrowing case where a pregnant patient was transferred to their emergency room with an infection and with no fetal heartbeat. Because an abortion could not be provided earlier due to restrictive state laws, the patient became increasingly sick and ultimately died in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) from sepsis.”

One of the most insane changes in states with abortion bans is the use of c-sections. The water can break for a pregnant woman well before the fetus is viable. This means that the required fluid in the uterus drains out and the fetus cannot continue to mature. If a doctor uses a c-section there is no chance of being criminally prosecuted. However, if the dead or nonviable fetus cannot live this is deeply damaging to the woman. An [NPR article](#) talks about absurd and distressing this can be to the doctors. They want to provide the

medically dictated standard of care but they do not want to go to prison for 15 years.

New Louisiana law SB 276 classifies mifepristone and misoprostol as controlled dangerous substances. Over 60% of all abortions are done using these drugs. Louisiana is pioneering a new way to go after the major way abortions happen in states with anti-abortion laws. It is fully legal for telemedicine providers to prescribe and mail these medications from other states. However, the receipt and use of these medications is now a felony in Louisiana. We can expect this mechanism will quickly be adopted by other states. Unfortunately there are numerous applications other than abortion for these drugs. Those uses will now become far more difficult.

We now have [26 states with bans](#) or severe restrictions on medical care for transsexuals. I was quite surprised to see New Hampshire being added to that list in July. I did not see that state as a hotbed of religious extremism. They also added that state to the list preventing trans-girls in grades 5 to 12 from participating in sports. Most of these laws are directed at minors. However, [South Carolina has a law](#) that includes many adults in its ban.

This is hardly a complete list of theocratically inspired absurdities that could be included for this issue of *WASHline*. But it is the limit on what I can stomach to write up for this issue.

[ed. Email any responses that are fit to print on this issue to washline@wash.org.]

“Lies are often much more plausible, more appealing to reason, than reality, since the liar has the great advantage of knowing beforehand what the audience wishes or expects to hear.”
quote by Hannah Arendt

Climate Update

by Don Wharton

The Copernicus Climate service, the European climate agency, scored three days of world wide temperatures that exceeded all prior daily values in their records on July 21, 22 and 23.

The values were 17.09°C, 17.16°C and 17.15°C. The prior record was 17.08°C on July 6, 2023. July as a whole was the second hottest July of all time. All prior months this year were record highs for that month. We are not guaranteed that 2024 will be the hottest year of all time. The last months of 2023 were all the hottest of all time because of the El Nino effect. That is expected to slowly cease through the end of the year. The Copernicus climate science data service no longer provides data for those without an account’ so I will not be producing a graph with their data as I did for a number of prior months.

[Iowa](#), [Ohio](#), and [New York](#) have already set state records for the number of tornadoes in one year. According to an [Accuweather report](#), the nation as a whole had more tornadoes so far this year than the annual average total for a whole year.

The California Park fire was started on July 24. It is still burning a month later. An [official California report](#) of August 24 had 429,460 acres burned and 71% containment. This is the fourth largest fire destruction area in California history.

NASA has released an AI [“Wildfire Digital Twin”](#) tool to predict the spread of wildfires. They claim a resolution of two orders of magnitude greater accuracy than prior models. Prior models had resolution of 10 kilometers per pixel. The new model will have a resolution of 10 to 30 meters per pixel. The model also predicts the path and magnitude of unhealthy smoke particulates so downwind areas can be warned. The model can be up and running in minutes instead of hours. This is critical when dealing with a potentially deadly and rapidly moving phenomenon.

The JAMA journal has published an article documenting an 117% increase in heat deaths over the period from 1999 to 2023. However, all of that greater than doubling occurred from 2016 to 2023. The article is behind a paywall but CNN reported on the findings [here](#). This is only reported deaths from heat on death certificates. There are many other causes of death that can increase from higher heat. Homicides increase with heat as do heart attacks, strokes, and asthma. The authors admit that their statistics are likely to be an undercount. These deaths were concentrated in California, Arizona, Nevada, and Texas. The increasing heat death effect will widen geographically as more areas endure triple digit heat episodes.

Locally DC just had the sixth day hitting 100°F or more after six years without any such days. There were many more days during which people just stayed inside because the outside was just too miserable. Covid 19 is likely having its summer peak because staying inside increases the ease of virus transmission.

There is a lot of news about West Nile virus and a EEE (Eastern Equine Encephalitis) virus. Denge is a major problem throughout the rest of the world and we are now getting some cases in Florida. Major extensions northward of tropical diseases has long been a prediction from climate scientists. The greater heat is extending the mosquito season as it extends the fire season. So we can expect this type of news to increase.

[ed. Email any responses on this issue to washline@wash.org.]

The Economy

by Don Wharton

I have been astonished at the fact that polls seem to indicate that people feel negative about the economy. Yes, there has been inflation. But when Covid radically changes the structure of what people can do, it changes the nature of what is demanded by consumers. That creates a supply chain problem that increases demand for things that can be enjoyed or perhaps required for remote work or education. After Covid the opposite change in demand occurs. That creates different inflation for those areas of the economy that experience revived demand after the supply has been reduced. Many people are especially unhappy with food price inflation. They do not realize that restaurants and grocery stores have very different supply chains. So this jerking around of the packaging, transportation and delivery processes for food experience both ends of the economic inflationary processes. My feeling had been that people should just get over it. This inflation is exactly what any reasonable person could expect as our economy is jerked around with these dramatic changes in demand and supply.

We have the best economy of any OECD country by far. All of them went through the same inflationary shocks that we endured. Most of them have not recovered as well as we have. And we have grown our job supply significantly better than

the rest. We have 15 million more jobs and average pay has increased in line with or better than inflation. I grant that some fraction of wage earners will not keep up with the averages, and they would have reason to be unhappy.

The GDP growth in the 2nd quarter of this year was just revised upward to 3%. Unemployment claims remain very low, even with a great many people choosing to rejoin the workforce because jobs are available. What are people complaining about?

The answer is quite simple. There is a partisan bias in how people feel about the economy. Democrats feel better about the economy when Democrats are in power and Republicans feel better when Republicans are in power. However there is a very strong asymmetry to this effect. Republicans are literally two and a half times as extreme in their opinions. Quoting from a [Briefing Book article](#), “This roughly +/- 15 point swing for Republicans versus the +/- 6 point swing for Democrats is what we term asymmetric amplification.” Independents are halfway in between but that means that they just more modestly contribute to a biased economic sentiment reporting system. The national economic sentiment is bad because Republicans passionately dislike Biden. The evidence shows that they would think this economy is fabulous if a Republican were in power.

Why am I talking about the economy in a secular humanist newsletter? The problem is tribalism. Religiosity can be primarily a tribal process. In my opinion, it is obvious that the hard fundamental variety of theism largely aligns with a political philosophy lacking in empathy. In saying this I should emphasize that there are many religious people who are very deeply caring and empathic for others. I regard it as highly likely that the non-religious among Republicans would not have the radical asymmetry the evidence now shows on this issue. Even where my claim is true, we should not be cruel to those who are religious in this very tribalistic way. They know not what they do. But we need to take their views into account if we are to understand the meaning of polls concerning the economy.

[ed. Email any responses on this issue to washline@wash.org.]

Chapter Reports

DC Region Atheists (DCRA)

Baltimore Secular Humanists (BSH)

We have meetings at various times and places around Baltimore, Baltimore County, and Harford County. Watch the meetup site for the latest events:

<https://www.meetup.com/bsh-wash/>

There are also several other meetup groups in the area, including Human Values Network Meetup and Baltimore Atheists, that hold monthly discussion groups. BSH also schedules university lectures that are held in person or on Zoom.

DC American Humanists (DC-AHA)

DC-Atheists, Humanists, and Agnostics group (DC-AHA) currently meets for monthly happy hour the first Wednesday (6-8pm) of the month at Across the Pond in Dupont Circle. Our Zoom programs are hosted by the American Humanist Association.

American Humanist Association's 83rd Annual Conference theme is The Future is Humanist: Shaping Tomorrow Together, being held virtually September 14-15. As our global community navigates through significant transitions (good and bad), there's never been a more critical time to stand together, tackle pressing issues, and carve out a brighter tomorrow. Visit <https://conference.americanhumanist.org> for registration for individuals and watch parties, sponsorships, and programming. Includes State of Humanism updates and a Center for Freethought Equality member meeting.

We host a Secular Zoom Community meeting now on the second Thursday of each month at 7pm. We nourish our connections with like-minded secular people and discuss a broad range of topics on religion, science and secularism. Please RSVP for a monthly meeting at:

<https://www.meetup.com/dc-atheists>

Our chapter is active in supporting Atheists Helping the Homeless, DC. They distribute the second Saturday of every month in Silver Spring at Progress Place (8106 Georgia Ave. Silver Spring MD). Typically they serve about 80 clients each month.



Frederick Secular Humanists (FRESH)

The Frederick Secular Humanists (FRESH) meets twice monthly in Frederick.

Our regular meetings are held on either the third or fourth Sunday of each month (based upon library availability) at the C. Burr Artz Public Library at 110 E. Patrick St., Frederick, MD 21701. Occasionally, if that venue is not available, we will meet at the Urbana Regional Library at 9020 Amelung St., Frederick, MD 21704.

Additionally, we meet for an informal social hour at the Brewer's Alley restaurant at 124 N. Market St., Frederick, MD 21701. Our events are announced on our Meetup Page.



In the month of September, we will hold our annual potluck picnic on Sunday, September 22, 2024 at Pine Cliff Park. Pine Cliff Park is at 8350 Pinecliff Park Rd., Frederick, MD 21704. This will replace our regular library meeting for this month.

For more information, please visit our webpage at <http://wash.org/fresh>

For event details please visit our Meetup Page: <https://www.meetup.com/fresh-wash/>

All are welcome to attend our events, but an RSVP on Meetup is appreciated.

Maryland-DC (MDC)

MDC hosted an in-person Summer Book Club meeting on the topic: From Bacteria to Bach and Back - Part 2 on August 13. Events will be posted at: <https://www.meetup.com/wash-202>

All are welcomed. We appreciate secular and scout-minded people who like to discuss a broad range of topics including science, religion, democracy, psychology and secular philosophy.

Shenandoah Area Secular Humanists (SASH)

SASH is continuing our monthly meetings on various topics. Our September topic will be on "Teleology". We're also planning future topics such as Addressing the Different Stages of Life and How to Pick Our Battles. We will continue to hold our meeting on Zoom, since we always have several attendees from far-flung places.

Our SASH book club also meets monthly. In August, we read and discussed Rachel Maddow's "Prequel: An American Fight Against Fascism." In September, we'll read and discuss Neil DeGrasse Tyson's "Starry Messenger." If any WASH members want to join our discussions, they are certainly welcome. Contact me, and I'll put you on our distribution list: sash@wash.org.

Southeast Virginia Atheists, Skeptics & Humanists (SEVASH)

Earlier this year, SEVASH applied for and was awarded with a \$1,000 grant from the American Humanist Association to be spent building, stocking, and maintaining 2 Free Little Humanist Libraries to be deployed in the Hampton Roads area. We have the library structures ready, but still need to build supports for them, work on which has been paused until we can secure locations where these libraries will be deployed so we know exactly what sort of supports will be required. We're still collecting book contributions from our local members.

Over the summer, SEVASH volunteers have ramped up efforts to stock and maintain our Free Food Pantries in Norfolk and Newport News, supported by a grant received from American Atheists.



Alex Tran, daughter of SEVASH member Sam Tran, helping with Norfolk free food pantry.



Annie Armstrong stocking Newport News pantry.

Alex Tran just celebrated her 10th birthday and asked her birthday party guests for no gifts, but to instead bring donations for our Free Food Pantry in Norfolk. Contributions included, but were not limited to, deodorant, toothbrushes and toothpaste, baby wipes, kid friendly pineapple cups, ramen noodles, coffee and sugar, and a whole lot of canned soups and pop top soups.

SEVASH has continued working with our Tidewater DSA comrades to stand up for the rights of trans students, pushing back against anti-trans policies at our local school board meetings.

We're still keeping a very active social calendar with a bi-weekly book club, weekly team trivia events, regularly scheduled lunch and dinner socials. We're currently planning a sort of Death Over Drafts event featuring Betsy DeVille (author of "Grief for Atheists") and our comrades at Compassion & Choices VA to discuss and destigmatize topics surrounding end-of-life, including but not limited to Medical Aid In Dying, how we grieve as non-believers, and advanced planning directives.

<https://www.meetup.com/sevash/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/sevash/>

Chapter Contact Information

1. **Humanist Chaplaincy at American University**
Washington, DC
hcau@wash.org
wash.org/hcau
2. **Baltimore Secular Humanists (BSH)**
Baltimore, MD
bsh@wash.org
wash.org/bsh
3. **Charlottesville Atheists and Secular Humanists (CASH)**
Charlottesville, VA
inquire@wash.org
wash.org/cash
4. **DC American Humanists (DC-AHA)**
Washington, DC
dcaha@wash.org
wash.org/dcaha
5. **DC Region Atheists (DCRA)**
Washington, DC and Montgomery County, MD
don@wash.org
wash.org/dca
6. **Frederick Secular Humanists (FRESH)**
Frederick, MD
fresh@wash.org
wash.org/fresh
7. **Fredericksburg Secular Humanists (FSH)**
Fredericksburg, VA
fs@wash.org
wash.org/fs
8. **Greater Richmond Humanists (GRH)**
Richmond, VA
grh@wash.org
wash.org/grh
9. **Lynchburg Area Secular Humanists (LASH)**
Lynchburg, VA
inquire@wash.org
10. **Maryland-DC (MDC)**
Montgomery County, MD
mdc@wash.org
wash.org/mdc

11. **Shenandoah Area Secular Humanists (SASH)**
Front Royal, VA
sash@wash.org
wash.org/sash
12. **Southeastern Virginia Atheists, Skeptics & Humanists (SEVASH)**
Virginia Beach, VA
sevash@wash.org
wash.org/sevash
13. **Secular Humanists of Roanoke (SHOR)**
Roanoke, VA
shor@wash.org
wash.org/shor
14. **Southern Maryland Secular Humanists (SMASH)**
St. Mary's County, Maryland
smash@wash.org
wash.org/smash

WASH Contact Information

Web: www.wash.org

US Mail:

Washington Area Secular Humanists
P.O. Box 352
Frederick, MD 21705

email address: inquire@wash.org

All opinions expressed in *WASHline* are solely those of the authors of the articles in which they appear and not endorsed or supported in whole by the Washington Area Secular Humanists, Inc.

We welcome articles and letters to the editor for *WASHline*. Please submit them to:
washline@wash.org

Please consider making a donation to WASH at:
<https://wash.org/donate/>