



# DULUTHINK

NEWSLETTER OF THE LAKE SUPERIOR FREETHINKERS



# My Art

# My Voice



Join us Sunday April 4th at 10 am via Zoom to hear Kris Nelson discuss her social commentary art

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# My Art, My Voice

Join us Sunday April 4th at 10 am  
via Zoom to hear Kris Nelson discuss her  
social commentary art



**K**ris B. Nelson is a retired art educator. She is also the curator at the Encore Performing Art Center and Gallery in Cloquet and a board member for the Arrowhead Regional Arts Council in Duluth. After 35 years of teaching K-12 in the public schools, she started her business CHAIRSBYKRIS.COM. She is now a full time artist painting approximately 30 chairs a year in order to reach her goal of 1000 chairs before she is 100. Her work can be found in local galleries and businesses. Many of her pieces feature nature or still life, but the “guts” of her work lies in her Social Commentary Chairs. Join us as she shows 33 slides of her “soul” work and describes the impetus to each one. Her subjects range from the Ten Commandments to the Death Penalty to the Environment and many more.



# Join us for LSF's April Social Dinner

April 21st 5:30pm, via Zoom



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## Join us for virtual Happy Hour

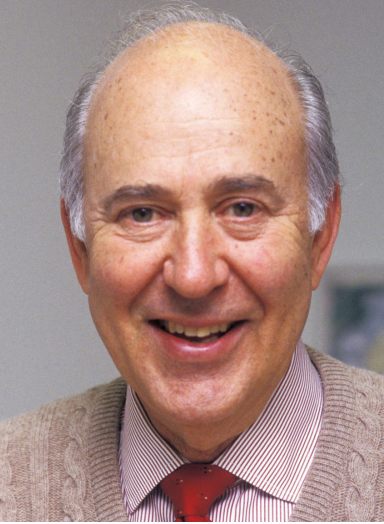
from 4:00-6:00 pm Thursday, April 1st via Zoom



**LSF needs volunteers to give brief "Reflections" prior to each monthly speaker presentation. Topics can be varied and wide ranging.**

Please contact Charles Gessert at [CGessert@yahoo.com](mailto:CGessert@yahoo.com) and leave your contact information





# Carl Reiner

In 1922, actor Carl Reiner was born in the Bronx, New York, to immigrant Jewish parents. The son of the son of a Romanian-born watchmaker and a Hungarian mother started his distinguished career in Broadway musicals after serving in the Pacific during World War II. Among his lifetime achievements in writing, directing, producing and acting for television and film, Reiner is perhaps most noted for creating, directing and frequently appearing on “The Dick Van Dyke Show” (1961-66).

He was cast in comedian Sid Caesar’s “Your Show of Shows” (1950-54), appearing in skits while also working alongside writers Mel Brooks and Neil Simon. He directed “Oh, God!” (1977), starring George Burns and directed and co-wrote four Steve Martin films: “The Jerk” (1979), “Dead Men Don’t Wear Plaid” (1982), “The Man With Two Brains” (1983) and “All of Me” (1984). In 2007, the Director’s Guild of America honored him with an Honorary Life Member award. Over his career he won nine prime-time Emmy Awards and a Grammy.

Reiner married Estelle Lebest in 1943 and they were married until her death at age 94 in 2008. Their children are Rob (b. 1947), Annie (b. 1949) and Lucas (b. 1960). Estelle delivered the line “I’ll have what she’s having” in the famous restaurant scene in Rob’s 1989 film “When Harry Met Sally.”

Reiner wrote 18 books, including five biography/memoirs (the last announced in 2017 when he was 95). At 97 he was still active on Twitter and still had his sense of humor, publishing an illustrated children’s book in 2017 titled You Say God Bless You for Sneezing and Farting! “First thing in the morning, before I have coffee, I read the obits,” he told CBS News in 2015. “If I’m not in it, I’ll have breakfast.”

Reiner called himself a Jewish atheist. “I have a very different take on who God is,” he said in a 2008 Los Angeles Times interview. “Man invented God because he needed him. God is us.”

He died of natural causes at age 98 at his home in Beverly Hills, Calif. D. 2020.

*I became an atheist after Hitler came. I said, what is this? If there was a God, would he not be hearing 18 million people, 16 million Jews, or 20 million other people, saying, “Please God, don’t do this, make him stop?” God was so busy doing what? Striping zebras or fixing the long necks of giraffes?*



# Ann Druyan

In 1949, multi-talented author, popular science promoter, writer/producer and activist Ann Druyan was born in Queens, N.Y. Druyan was the longtime collaborator and spouse of astronomer Carl Sagan (until his death in 1996). The two science enthusiasts had two children together and co-wrote the best-sellers Comet (1985) and Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors (1992).

Sagan credited her as a contributor to his books Contact (1997), Pale Blue Dot (1997), The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in

the Dark (1997) and Billions and Billions (posthumous, 1998), in which Druyan wrote the poignant epilogue addressing Sagan’s nonbelief and death.

Druyan co-wrote the Emmy and Peabody Award-winning television series “Cosmos,” viewed by half a billion in over 60 countries. She also wrote and produced the two updated “Cosmos” series: “A Spacetime Odyssey” hosted by Neil DeGrasse Tyson that aired on Fox and ran on The National Geographic Channel in 2014 and won multiple awards, including a Peabody; and “Cosmos: Possible Worlds,” also hosted by Tyson that debuted in 2019 on the same channels.

She served as creative director of the NASA Voyager Interstellar Record Project affixed to the Voyager I and II spacecrafts. Her articles have appeared in numerous publications, including The New York Times Sunday Magazine, Reader’s Digest, Parade, Discover and The Washington Post. She co-produced and co-created the hit film “Contact,” which starred an atheist-scientist heroine played by freethinker Jodie Foster.

Druyan has always made time to advocate for science and speak out against the illusion of religion. “By disobeying god, we escape from his totalitarian prison where you cannot ask any questions, where you must never question authority. We become our human selves,” Druyan wrote in The Skeptical Inquirer (November/December 2003).

She received FFRF’s 1997 Freethought Heroine Award. She told Freethought Radio in October 2006: “The Universe revealed by science is one of far more awesome grandeur than any religion has ever posited.”

*“I don’t have any faith, but I have a lot of hope, and I have a lot of dreams of what we could do with our intelligence if we had the will and the leadership and the understanding of how we could take all of our intelligence and our resources and create a world for our kids that is hopeful.”*

# For believers, fear of atheists is fueled by fear of death

**Skepticism about the existence of God is on the rise, and this might, quite literally, pose an existential threat for religious believers.**

Article from THE CONVERSATION | theconversation.com

It's no secret that believers generally harbor extraordinarily negative attitudes toward atheists. Indeed, recent polling data show that most Americans view atheists as "threatening," unfit to hold public office and unsuitable to marry into their families.

But what are the psychological roots of antipathy toward atheists?

Historically, evolutionary psychologists argue that atheists have been denigrated because God serves as the ultimate source of social power and influence: God rewards appropriate behaviors and punishes inappropriate ones.

The thinking has gone, then, that believers deem atheists fundamentally untrustworthy because they do not accept, affirm and adhere to divinely ordained moral imperatives (ie, "God's word"). Research has backed up the deep distrust believers feel toward atheists. For example, in one study, Canadian undergraduates, who are typically less religious than their US counterparts, rated atheists as more untrustworthy than Muslims – and just as untrustworthy as rapists!

Still, it hasn't been clear why the leeriness of atheists is so profound. We decided to find out, and through two separate studies, discovered that believers' overwhelming scorn of atheists may come from a surprising source: fear of death.

According to the terror management theory (TMT), human beings are unique in that we are self-aware and can anticipate the future. For the most part, these are highly beneficial cognitive



adaptations. They allow us to formulate plans and foresee the consequences of our actions. But they also make us realize that death is inevitable and unpredictable.

These unwelcome thoughts give rise to a potentially paralyzing terror: the fear of death. This fear, then, is "managed" by embracing cultural worldviews – beliefs about reality that we share with others – that provide us with a sense of comfort. It could mean becoming involved in religions that espouse spiritual immortality,

or by strongly valuing one's national identity.

This process works the other way around, too: when confronted with threats to our cherished worldview beliefs, our protective "terror management" shield drops and our apprehension about death resurfaces.

We then cling to those beliefs more tightly, and respond more negatively to those who threaten us. For example, research shows that in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks, Islamic symbols increased thoughts of death in non-Muslim Americans. Likewise, concern for death increased hostility toward Islam.

So how do existential concerns about death relate to atheism?

Past research has shown that hostility toward atheists is partly driven by the fact that many perceive atheists as a threat to morals and values.

So we reasoned that if atheists threaten values, then they also likely threaten worldview beliefs.

We then hypothesized that atheists, simply by existing, would likely elicit intimations of mortality – which, in turn, would promote increased negativity

toward atheists.

We tested this idea in two different experiments. In the first, we recruited 236 students from the College of Staten Island CUNY. We excluded the few participants who reported as atheist or agnostic, and we asked half of the remaining participants to answer two questions: "What do you think will happen to you as

*continued on page 6*

## Fear of Atheists continued from page 5

you physically die?” and “What are the emotions that the thought of death causes for you?” The other half responded to similar questions about being in extreme pain.

After thinking about either death or pain, half of the 236 participants were asked to provide their attitudes toward atheists, while the other half responded with their attitudes toward Quakers – a nonthreatening religious group. Participants reported their overall warmth, their levels of trust, and behavioral avoidance by indicating how they felt about these people “marrying into their family” or “working in their office.”

As expected, participants were more negative toward atheists overall than toward Quakers. More importantly, however, we found that thinking about death increased negativity toward atheists – but not toward Quakers.

Those who had pondered their own death showed less warmth, greater behavioral prejudice (also known as social distancing) and greater distrust toward atheists, while thoughts of death did not affect reactions toward Quakers, a fellow theistic group.

In the second experiment, we directly measured whether simply thinking about atheism would increase unconscious thoughts of death. We asked 174 Staten Island students (excluding atheists and agnostics) to describe their emotions toward one of three topics: pain, death or atheism. We then presented them with a word completion task designed to capture thoughts of death. For example, the word “SK - - L” could be completed as either “skill” or “skull” and “COFF - -” could be “coffee” or “coffin.”

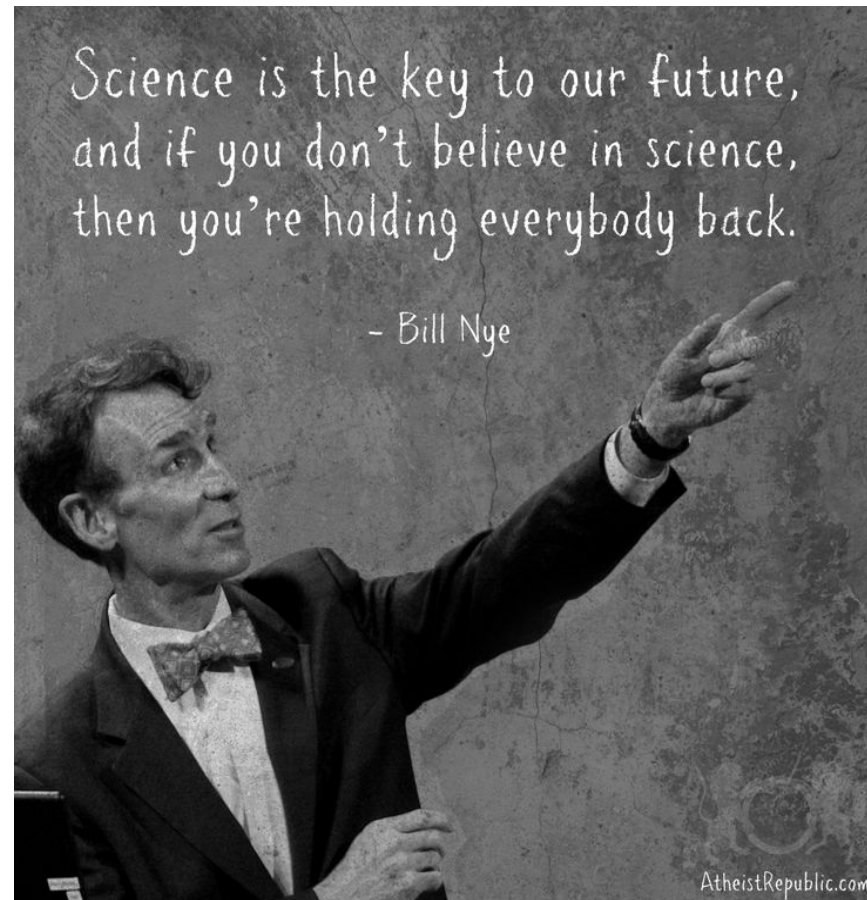
Not surprisingly, those who pondered their own mortality indicated greater thoughts of death than those who thought about being in pain. However, thinking about atheism also increased thoughts of death – to the same extent as thinking about death itself.

These findings suggest that there is something deeper to the overwhelming negativity people hold toward atheists. Yes, on

the conscious level, they’re deemed untrustworthy because in the eyes of believers, they have no God or values.

But at an unconscious level, it seems that atheists threaten our beliefs about the nature of existence itself. They serve as a constant reminder of death by denying the presence of a supernatural power who regulates human affairs and monitors the gateway to immortality.

Of course, atheists are no less moral or trustworthy than their theistic counterparts. In light of these findings, we hope that perhaps believers might temper their contempt for atheists.



## FFRF condemns evangelical role in voter suppression

**T**ony Perkins, a leading evangelical and president of the Family Research Council, brags: “We’ve got 106 election-related bills that are in 28 states now. So here’s good news: There is action taking place to go back and correct what was uncovered in this last election.” This is perpetuating the Big Lie that Donald Trump won the presidential election. Michael P. Farris, president of the Christian nationalist Alliance Defending Freedom, responded to Perkins’ remarks with a hearty “Amen.” These groups mean business — and have the resources to inflict real damage. ADF, a frequent nemesis of FFRF, brought in \$51.5 million in 2015-16.

The New York Times reports that another big player on the Christian nationalist scene, the Heritage Foundation, has pledged to spend millions of dollars to restrict voter access, including laws requiring identification for voters and limiting absentee ballots.

The hugely wealthy Susan B. Anthony List and the American Principles Project are other ultraright groups expanding their activities to include voter suppression.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has called for passage of the For the People Act, H.R. 1, already noting that its enemies include many enemies of secularism. The Times’ exposé on these machinations by deep-pocketed theocratic groups makes crystal clear why H.R. 1 is indeed a secular issue.

Adding to the threats to absentee voting (also a secular issue), is the grim announcement by the United States postmaster of a proposed huge rollback on consumer mail services. Louis DeJoy, one of “foxes in chicken coops” appointed by President Trump still remaining in D.C., brings no joy with his 10-year plan to slow down and cripple mail delivery and, thereby, also cripple the right to vote by mail.

It should be possible for the Biden administration to end DeJoy’s reign of terror at the U.S. Postal Service. But the threats to voter rights are even more daunting — and with many more players on the attack.