



THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

June, 2009

<http://www.sbhumanists.org>

Summer Solstice Party! Sunday, June 21st

Join us for our annual Summer Solstice Party on Sunday, June 21st. It will be at beautiful Stow Grove Park in Goleta. Cost is \$10 for members, \$15 for non-members and guests, and free for children under 12. Reservations prior to the event are highly encouraged! Please make reservations by June 11, by email (drrogers@cox.net) or call 962-6316.



Summer Solstice Party

Sunday, June 21st, starting at 1:30 p.m.

Stow Grove Park, 580 N. La Patera Lane, Goleta, Area #2.

Featuring chef-prepared chicken, tri-tip, beans, and salad.

Bring your own drinks, utensils, and appetizer, side dish, or dessert to share.

Games, prizes, good food, and great company!

Contact Information

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The word which decided the 2009 USA National Spelling bee was “laodicean” which means “a person who is lukewarm or indifferent, especially in religion.” Should we be the Laodicean Society of Santa Barbara?

HSSB Book Club By Marty Shapiro

Greetings, fellow Humanists! Our book club will be meeting next on June 10th. Our selection for June is a provocative one (aren't they all?), with an engaging title, which I give here in full: *Why Beautiful People Have More Daughters: From Dating, Shopping, and Praying to Going to War and Becoming a Billionaire-- Two Evolutionary Psychologists Explain Why We Do What We Do*, by Sastoshi Kanazawa and Alan S. Miller.

The focus of the book, written by two evolutionary psychologists, has to do with the extent that our evolutionary development plays a significant role in our modern lives.

When: Wednesday, June 10th, 1:30 p.m.

Where: Dick and Judy Cousineau's house, 505 Alegria Road (off of Las Positas); 687-2371

Here's a review from Amazon.com:

Why are most neurosurgeons male and most kindergarten teachers female? Why aren't there more women on death row? Why do so many male politicians ruin their careers with sex scandals? Why and how do we really fall in love? This engaging book uses the latest research from the field of evolutionary psychology to shed light on why we do the things we do—from life plans to everyday decisions. With a healthy disregard for political correctness, Miller and Kanazawa reexamine the fact that our brains and bodies are hardwired to carry out an evolutionary mission—an inescapable human nature that actually stopped evolving about 10,000 years ago.

News About Members

We are pleased to welcome the following new members to our Society:

Catherine Bos
1740 Olive Avenue
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
682-5143

Sally Koss
5394 Cliffside Circle
Ventura, CA 93003
676-1815

Edwin & Arlene Carlisle
11 Vedado Lane, Apt. 12
Santa Barbara, CA 93105
682-1606

Humanist Society member and former Treasurer Richard Martin was featured in the *Santa Barbara Daily Sound*, May 8th 2009, and also in *The Denver Post*. Richard and his wife Penny took refuge in a fireproof concrete bunker beneath their Mission Canyon home, while the Jesusita Fire raged around them. Inside were ample food and water, folding chairs, and their important documents and treasured mementos of life well-lived. Having cleared brush around the house and installed sprinklers on the roof, they were able to defend their home from the fire, something for which Richard had been prepared for 31 years. Full story here:

<http://www.thedailysound.com/News/050809MissionBunker>

On Wednesday afternoon, May 20th, Humanists Andrew Hankin, Marty and Marian Shapiro participated in a forum on healthcare reform organized by the League of Women Voters (men were welcome too!). Speakers came from the office of Rep. Lois Capps, from the LWV, and Peter Conn of Healthcare For All - California (who has previously spoken to HSSB). In

California, a proposed statewide universal single-payer healthcare plan, SB810, has already passed the Assembly and Senate twice, only to be vetoed twice by Gov. Schwarzenegger (in its previous incarnation as SB840). Latest developments will be posted on website <http://www.onecarenow.org/sb840.htm>

On Wednesday evening, May 27th, Andrew Hankin and Roger Schlueter attended a presentation about "Our Moral Responsibility To Protect The Earth." The talk was about efforts by religious faith communities to prevent climate change and improve public policy for protecting our environment. Roger asked whether communities without religious faith had been contacted by the organizers (the SB Community Environmental Council) and was told "no," but Roger may have more information from discussions following the talk. Andrew's report of the event is on web page

<http://www.meetup.com/SantaBarbaraActivists/calendar/10476733>

HSSB Sunday Brunch

The last Sunday morning of every month is our Social Secular Brunch at Cody's Cafe, 4898 Hollister Ave. (in the Turnpike Center), Goleta. Reservations are **not required** and there's no cover charge, so this is a nice opportunity for singles, couples, families, friends and visitors to meet others who don't go to church. HSSB members will be in the room to the right as you enter the restaurant. This month, the brunch will be at 10 a.m. on Sunday, June 28th; Membership Chair Mary Wilk is a regular attendee; phone 805-967-3045.

A Letter to Janina Balabat, Author of *Conversations with an Atheist* By Roger Schlueter

Dear Ms. Balabat,

I have received your book, *Conversations with an Atheist*. Thank you for sending it to me.

Unfortunately, this book is not written for atheists as you claim nor does it resemble any conversation that an atheist would have with you. It is a book by, for and about Christians and uses the bible to fill more than half the book. If I wanted to read the bible, I would read the bible.

In your "Questions to the Atheist," you say you "...have a question, a simple one." Yet the next four pages are filled with questions so I am not sure exactly which question it is that you consider to be so compelling. Surely, it is not the first question you pose, namely, "Who maintains the balance between boys and girls?" Really, this is a question that any first year high school biology student can answer. Or, more precisely, they would know that it is an ill-posed question. There is no "who" that maintains the balance but rather the sex of a zygote is determined by the genetic make-up of the sperm that impregnates the egg.

Actually, a far more interesting question is how the imbalance between male and female zygote is maintained so that there is a nearly uniform balance in the sexes by the time humans reach reproductive ages.

Your "Answers from the Atheist" begins with a strawman, such a simplistic characterization of any adult atheist that no thoughtful person could consider it a picture of reality. It is at this point that I stopped reading because I knew you were not

writing for me, an atheist, but, actually, for yourself. Your faith must be very weak if you must resort to such banal thoughts to bolster it.

So, responding to your cover letter, "No," I will not let the world know about your book. I will put it in the recycle bin in the hopes that my copy will be made into a good, strong cardboard box so that some good can come of it and with the fervent desire that no more trees will be felled to print one more copy.

Sincerely,

Roger S. Schlueter, President
Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

Volunteer Opportunities for HSSB By Ray Stone

At their recent meeting, the HSSB Board agreed that our organization should look for opportunities where members can volunteer to work on worthwhile community projects, consistent with our goals and principles. To that end, we contacted the RSVP organization to find out how we might go about finding such opportunities. RSVP provides volunteer services to about 100 local non-profits in the area from a large volunteer pool of (mostly) seniors. An opportunity recently arose at the Food Bank, which needs food sorting assistance on the second Saturday of each month, from 9 a.m. to noon. The Food Bank is located at the Page Youth Center at 4540 Hollister. If you are interested in volunteering for this project, please contact Roger Hand at RSVP, at 963-0474. Mention you are from the Humanist Society.

Upcoming Events

By Dick Cousineau

For our July 18th meeting, we will be meeting at the Patio Room of Vista del Monte. There has been a change of plans: instead of the forensic scientist speaker who was scheduled, we are now pleased to welcome **Kathleen and Matthew Stewart**. The Stewarts are actively behind the exposé of how the Child Evangelism Ministry, in the form of the Good News Club, has begun to infiltrate our public elementary schools here in Santa Barbara and Goleta. The story was printed in *The Santa Barbara Independent* (April 7, 2009) and has caused a firestorm of indignation in those of us who believe in the separation of Church and State. Come to be informed and help minimize this intrusion into our schools by the extreme religious right.

On August 15th, likewise at the Patio Room, we will have as our speaker Kate McCurdy, the Director of the Sedgwick Preserve in the Santa Ynez Valley, Kate will be accompanied and introduced by our own member Nick Di Croce, a docent at the preserve.

In Memoriam: Ralph Fontana

By Roger Schlueter

One of our founding members, Ralph Fontana, has passed away. Ralph died quietly on May 10, 2009, a week shy of his 87th birthday, following a period of failing health. The following information is just a small snippet of Ralph's life journey provided by his daughter, Judy.

Ralph was born and raised in northern California. He served in the military for three years during World War II as a lieutenant in the Army Corps of Engineers

in the Pacific theater. After the war, he graduated from College of the Pacific in Stockton, California where he met and married his wife of fifty-four years, Jacquelyn Geyer. Following graduation he moved to Ontario, California, where he taught English for ten years. Switching careers, he then became a dentist, practicing again in northern California.

After retiring, Ralph and his wife Jacquelyn moved to Goleta but traveled extensively both by boat and RV. Before his death, Ralph - the consummate humanist - wrote:

Alive is alive, dead is dead. There is no in-between, and the idea of a deity is almost laughable. Gods were invented by human beings as a means of explaining nature, and now that humans are controlling nature itself, gods are no longer necessary.

The Humanist Society owes a debt of gratitude to Ralph for putting his principles into practice by being a part of our founding.

Our friends, the Ventura Atheists, invite all HSSB members to their Summer Family BBQ and Potluck, at 11a.m. on Saturday, June 20th in Camino Real Park, Varsity Street, Ventura. Humanists, atheists, freethinkers, agnostics, secular singles, couples and families will all be welcome - for questions or to register your interest, please e-mail organizer Brian Parra at VenturaAtheists@yahoo.com.

Information web page is:

<http://www.meetup.com/venturaatheists/calendar/10446881>

When I told the people of Northern Ireland that I was an atheist, a woman in the audience stood up and said, "Yes, but is it the God of the Catholics or the God of the Protestants in whom you don't believe?"

---Quentin Crisp, English writer

Bad to the Bone: Horrors! – Can Our Genes Make Us Act Badly? Our May Meeting with Barbara Oakley By Jim Balter

Barbara Oakley wrote *Evil Genes*, a book about the biology of “bad people,” but she’s not a biologist, she’s an Associate Professor of Engineering who has worked as a Russian translator on Soviet trawlers, a radio operator at the South Pole, an Army Captain ... bringing a wealth of experience and a fresh perspective to her subject. She has encountered a lot of bad people, including her own unthinkingly cruel sister, but it was Slobodan Milosevic, who had been feted as a peacemaker and all around great guy, saying “I can’t hear you” when asked to explain the horrific war crimes he commissioned, that motivated her to do the research that led to her book.

Dr. Oakley described two sorts of personality disorders:

Psychopaths look normal but lack remorse or empathy--they can easily rationalize hurting others. They fail to conform to social norms and are frequently arrested. They lie to and con others, sometimes just for fun. They can be irritable and aggressive, frequently getting into physical fights. And they are consistently irresponsible.

There has recently been a revolution in neuroscience with brain imaging. We now can see that there are brain areas where criminal psychopaths show much less activity than normals, and other areas where they show greater activity than normals.

The other disorder is Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). People with BPD are narcissistic, confident, and engage in

projection and blame shifting. They may do “gaslighting” (from the movie *Gaslight*) -- lying about events so as to make others doubt their own perception. They tend to see people as either all good or all bad. They often display situational competence, so they can achieve high positions despite their disorder. They often regret their troubled, hurtful behavior. Brain imaging of people with BPD shows that they have a different emotional toolkit from others.

Unfortunately, deeply dysfunctional people are often not studied because they may not meet all of the criteria of a clinical diagnosis.

Some people display both psychopathy and BPD; Dr. Oakley calls them “Borderpaths.” Borderpaths exist in small percentages in all social structures and populations. If they exhibit good looks, great charm, and excellent memories, then they become leaders of organizations. The borderpath without these traits tends to end up in prison. Some examples of borderpaths are Hitler, Clinton, Reagan, Mussolini, and Stalin.



Speaker and author, Barbara Oakley, with Roger Schlueter, HSSB President. Photo by Robert Bernstein.

(See **Balter**, page 7)

(Balter, continued from page 6)

In regard to the question of nature vs. nurture: Thousands of genes influence our bodies and our personalities, and almost any personality trait studied is 50% inherited. The brain's "wiring" profoundly affects every aspect of our personality, but so does our environment. As an example, Dr. Oakley talked about her sister, who had polio, which damages the reticular formation of the brain, affecting focus and attention. But it affects different people differently, and susceptibility to polio is itself genetically determined.

Dr. Oakley next plans to address the flip side with a book called *Too Nice*, about pathological altruism. It should be interesting!

Letter to the Editor By Dick Cousineau

Where is the morality of the evangelical Good News Club in this community in proselytizing children 6 to 9 years of age? To target elementary school children in their quest for members in a Christian Prayer Club, children who have not yet developed any skills of critical thinking, is egregious and disingenuous. How can these kids distinguish between a myth and reality when two adults, in a school setting, who ostensibly have all the correct answers to religion, salvation, prayer, hell fire and damnation, preach to them? If parents want their children to learn this nonsense they should teach them at home or send them to religious school, not under the seemingly auspices of public school exposure and education.

The idea that religion should depend only on its own intrinsic persuasiveness is laughingly rejected by these Christian fundamentalists who need to brain wash impressionable youngsters who have not

even reached the age of reason. How does this differ from the Taliban? It appears that these Christians have lost faith in their creed's ability to persuade adults from the pulpit but rather have to direct their irrelevant dogma towards those least likely to understand what is happening to them. What a commentary on the stealth message of evangelism; The ends justifies the means, especially if one believes in mind-numbing dogma.

Letter to the Editor By John Coppejans

(Note: On May 5th of this year, The Santa Barbara News Press published an article about a high school teacher who had made remarks in his class that were considered derogatory towards religion.

Subsequently he was charged with violating the 1st Amendment. The following is a letter I sent to the News-Press, which so far has not been published.)

Kudos to Mr. Corbett for having the nerve to tell the truth in his classroom. Many children are being brainwashed from an early age to accept as facts the myths of religion. It is about time that schools stop kowtowing to dogmatic beliefs. He was right by saying that the different religions are superstitious nonsense. If this shocked some people maybe next time he can make it worse by stating that there is no Santa Claus.

+++++

The mixing of government and religion can be a threat to free government, even if no one is forced to participate.... When the government puts its imprimatur on a particular religion, it conveys a message of exclusion to all those who do not adhere to the favored beliefs. A government cannot be premised on the belief that all persons are created equal when it asserts that God prefers some.

-----Harry Blackmun, US Supreme Court Justice

Blog of the Month By Neal Rosenthal

Canadian author and entrepreneur, Dave Pollard, writes a web log (blog) called “How to Save the World,” in which he discusses topics such as his environmental philosophy, his creative works, business papers and essays. His point of reference is from the search for a better way to live and make a living, and a better understanding of how the world really works.

In the essay linked below, Dave discusses ideas he has gleaned from prominent thinkers, as he deftly distills the ills of western societies and ecological disruptions, the apparent natural and historical causes from which they originated and, in his companion essays, he further describes an evolving list of actions humans can take to make a positive contribution toward sustainability.

Although his proposed solutions are not new discoveries, his explanations (with flow charts!) of the planetary and societal problems are clearly encapsulated for general consumption.

Here are some concepts he elucidates in his essay:

- The Truth About Nature: What We Have Forgotten
- The Truth About Civilization: The Problem and Its Root Cause
- Forward Not Back: The Solution Process
- Reframing History: Understanding How Man Lived in Harmony With Nature for Three Million Years
- Why Civilization Doesn't Work, and Why We Invented It
- Some Answers: How to Save the World

<http://blogs.salon.com/0002007/stories/2004/09/15/theTruthAboutNatureHowToSaveTheWorld.html>



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