



THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

www.SBHumanists.org

DECEMBER 2011

HSSB 2011 Winter Solstice Party!

When: Sunday, December 18, 4:00 pm

Where: Valle Verde Retirement Community auditorium, 900 Calle de los Amigos. Santa Barbara, 93105

What: Food. Drink, (wine included). Entertainment!

Entertainment: Using fitness as their trampoline, identical twins **Alexandra and Kymberly** do their very best to entertain their audiences. They remind us that laughing burns calories. Known for their "Fun and Fit" website and radio show, as well as their Noozhawk column, the sisters have been grabbing the microphone (mostly from each other) for over 25 years.



Who: HSSB Members and guests only

Cost: \$25 per person. **Reservations are required!** We must have an accurate count for the caterer no later than **December 12** so make your reservations now by emailing Patricia Hiles: activities@santabarbarahumanists.org. Please include the number in your party.

As soon as you make your reservation mail a check for the full amount payable to: HSSB, PO Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130. (Payment may also be made at the door.)

Welcome, New Members!

Ann Case, Santa Barbara

Monica Berry, Goleta

HSSB Book Club

The next meeting of the HSSB book club will be Wednesday, January 18th, 2012 at **Dick Cousineau's** home at 505 Alegria Road, at 1:30 PM. A club revitalization and rejuvenation will be undertaken. All those interested in joining the club are welcome. Thanks.

Humanists' Support Group

Claudia Solé

Thanksgiving is just past and Winter Solstice not far on it's heels. For most of us cheery times, but not for everybody. Remember, we at the Care Committee are here for you. Cheers to all, Claudia Sole: solemio@verizon.net

From the President

by Ron Kronenberg

Another great meeting last month! I'm proud to be a member of our Society. Our program chair, **Dick Cousineau** has done a stellar job again. For those who missed the meeting I know the write-up of the talk by **Robert Bernstein** will be done well and will be part of an excellent newsletter put out by **Ray Stone**. These tasks and many others are done by a dedicated volunteer staff. Our webmaster **Wayne Beckman**, board secretary **Diane Krohn**, treasurer **Richard Martin** and membership chair **Mary Wilk** are all fantastic. The AV setup teams and our greeters all do a great job. I didn't include everyone who keeps our Society functioning, it takes quite a crew. The point of all this is that most of the folks who do these jobs have been doing them for a long time. As an example, in the last 12 years, either **Roger Schlueter**, Dick Cousineau or myself has been president of our Society for 10½ of those years; Roger was president for five.

For the health of our Society we must bring in new people to leadership positions. Many organizations fail when they are led by the same person or people for a long time. The vitality and longevity of any

CLARENCE (BUDGE) GEORGE (1924-2011)

I first got to know Budge when we were beginning to build Live Oak Unitarian Society in Goleta in the early 1990s. I remember he was a non-stop worker with an independent mind and the knowledge of a professional contractor. He could do almost any kind of construction from carpentry to masonry to plumbing and he did it quietly and his own way, which was invariably the correct way. Often Budge would have an idea to improve a feature at the Live Oak site, and then he would go do it. Build a shade cover that was desperately needed, whether he was asked to or not, he just did it! And beautifully! He spent hundreds of hours "piddling" around at Live Oak with projects that improved the entire project from walkways to addressing the mail. What a loyal member!

He would regale us with his stories of when he and Jane were primary grade teachers in Barrow, Alaska. I believe he said they wanted to make a big difference in an out-of-the-way area. They sure did. During the winters they had to trek, not through the snow, but below the snow through tunnels built in the ice to get to the school house. Those were the days! After raising their children they lived on the Mesa in a most unusual home that was partially built and greatly modified by Budge to provide those amenities that were important to them.

He joined the Humanist Society in 2001 and he very seldom ever missed a meeting. A man of deep reading, we would have discussions about the differences and similarities between the "Humanism of the renaissance and the "Secular Humanism" of today, and other topics that we both would run across. A fine, honest, and good man was Budge, he will be missed by all that knew him. Goodbye, ole friend.

Dick Cousineau

group require a continual infusion of new ideas and new energy. I am concerned about the long haul.

We need you! We know that a new volunteer can't be expected to be up to speed instantaneously. Support is readily available. You will get help from the volunteer you are replacing for as long as you need it. We especially need some folks to work on our Social Justice Committee and one more volunteer for Audio Visual setup.

In July we shall need new board members. The board is what keeps our Society functioning. Please let me know that you are willing to serve, especially if you have not done so before. Service to the community is an important component of Humanism.

The Humanist Manifesto says "Humanists long for and strive toward a world of mutual care and concern.... The joining of individuality with interdependence enriches our lives, encourages us to enrich the lives of others, and inspires hope of attaining peace, justice, and opportunity for all." This is an opportunity for you to put your values into practice!

The Hidden World of Mormon Polygamy: Sanjiv Bhattacharya, Speaker Robert Bernstein

Sanjiv Bhattacharya began his talk on his book *Secrets & Wives: The Hidden World of Mormon Polygamy* with two conclusions. First, that polygamy is not just one thing. "It is not just women in prairie dresses scowling at CNN. Lots of polygamists don't wear prairie dresses. The men don't. Not all are in desert compounds. Some are in the city and blend in. Some are ragged and poor. Some have business empires and live in mansions. Some have one extra wife. Some with as many as fill this room. Some are in cults and communes. The second conclusion is what holds them all together. To use a technical term: They are all a bit bananas. A bit of the Wild West. Utah

looks very tidy, organized and decent. Behind that façade there's a lot of "crazy" going on."

He starts with Paul Kingston; an ordinary name. He is leader/prophet of a cult called "The Order" with 1500 members. According to former members of the Order, Kingston has 40-50 wives. And about 400 children. This is not the person you think of when you think of polygamy. Not like Big Love or Sister Wives on TV.¹

These are not simply consenting adults with a few extra wives. Many of his children don't know he is their father. Their surnames are changed so that the father can be protected. Opponents have argued that it also makes it easier for mothers to collect welfare as single mothers. By the time they find out he is their father they are usually 8 to 11 years old and it has lasting damage. Many are born through incest. Incest is not merely tolerated, it is encouraged as a way to maintain the purity of Kingston's bloodline that they claim goes back to Jesus. The Bible has many incest references, which are used to full advantage. This has led to at least one case of a baby born with no eyes, ears, arms or legs and buried in the yard.

Next, Sanjiv talked of a man who lived in a rock. Sounds like a limerick, Sanjiv notes. It started with him hearing a voice in his head. "A lot of people in Utah seem to hear voices." Sanjiv worried he would not be able to find the specific rock among so many, but he did and eventually blasted it out into quite a lovely living space. Interesting that this man lived near the town of Moab. Moab is the name of the child of an incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughters in the Bible.

More interesting perhaps was a man who did not live in a rock but who had two magic rocks. Mormons are into rocks. His name is Chris Nemelka. On a scale of one to bananas he was the full bunch in Sanjiv's view. A convicted felon, too. Though no longer a polygamist. He is a prophet who claims he is in touch with extraterrestrials from a faraway galaxy. With superpowers.

Sanjiv was invited back to his trailer, following a meeting in a diner. "What else to do when a convicted felon with ET stories invites you over? You go."

These magic rocks are claimed to be the ones Joseph Smith himself used to inspire the Book of Mormon. And Chris was going to go fetch them. Except they were missing. "The ETs have taken them away." But Sanjiv did eventually get to see them months later.

What about the larger issues of polygamy? Mormon fundamentalists defend polygamy as a matter of discrimination like black civil rights or gays being able to marry. Ironic, since Mormons historically have discriminated against these groups.

Interestingly, Sanjiv claims decriminalization might be best. Not because polygamy has no victims. It has many victims. But to allow victims to come forward without fear.

Who are the victims? Polygamy creates a winner take all society. The wives gravitate to the top one percent with wealth and power. "If Republicans want to increase the wealth gap, as they seem to want to do, they should support polygamy", Sanjiv says.

Polygamy creates a surplus of unmarried young men, a recipe for disaster. "Young men with no girlfriends tend to burn things. Look at the Jihadis."

Most young men at puberty are expelled from the community for minor infractions so that they will not be competition for the top guy. Their lives are devastated by this expulsion from such a tight community and they are called "lost boys".

But current laws make the predators into victims who fear persecution, which allows the nastiest prophets to rally their people. And it allows the predators to tell the real victims that the state will throw them in jail if they come forward.

His final story was full of yet more intrigue in the small town of Manti, in search of Jim Harmston. But, to find out that story's ending, you must buy the book!

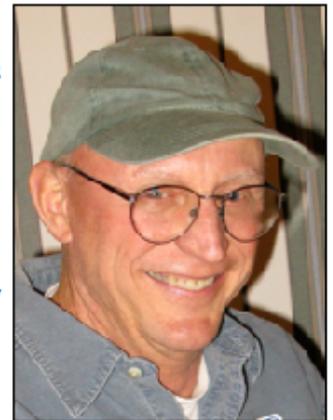
As you can see even from this retelling of his witty narratives, Sanjiv is not only a source of observations and insights where few have ventured, he is also a very engaging and amusing storyteller!

¹ For more information about Kingston and "the Order", check out:

<http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/inside-the-order-one-mormon-cults-secret-empire-20110615>

Woodworking Skill Available from Vincent Walker

Licensed Finish Carpenter and long time HSSB member, available for woodworking jobs such as shelving, hardware installation, door hanging, and all wood trim installation (baseboard, casing, crown molding). Phone: 636-1051 Vouching for his character and excellent work are members Marty & Marian Shapiro, John and Pat Coppejans and Dick Cousineau. "He does great work and is fair and honest."



2020: A Year Without War Joe White

[At our October meeting, Professor Joe White of SBCC told us about the 2020 project he was organizing. Here is an update on that work. Ed.]

2020 is moving along with a launch date for January. I'm in the midst of raising funds to make this happen with our web design company and support staff. I'm now trying to raise \$15,000 for initial launch and we are all optimistic.

Dr. Peter Chiaramonte, professor and writer at the University of Toronto in Theory and Policy Studies in the History and Philosophy of Higher Education

as of today has joined the 2020 project to help bring Canada on board. We have the backing of the nine local CC student governments and have formally partnered with the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation. More updates to follow.

Quote of the Month

Absolute faith corrupts as absolutely as absolute power. -Eric Hoffer, philosopher and author (1902-1983)

Founding Fathers' Views on Religion: James Madison Ron Holzwarth

James Madison was "the father of the Constitution." He opposed all use of "religion as an engine of civil policy." He also chaired the House conference committee on the Bill of Rights. In 1776, Madison was elected to Virginia's Revolutionary Convention, where he drafted a guarantee of religious freedom, to prevent such jailings for nonconformity. After the convention turned into a state legislature, he and Thomas Jefferson succeeded in having the Anglican Church cut off from tax support and denied exclusive legal status.

In 1784, the clergy attempted to recoup by persuading Patrick Henry and George Washington to support a bill "establishing a provision for teachers of the Christian religion" which would have given tax money to all churches. Henry called it a convenient compromise, but Jefferson and Madison called it government-enforced religion. Madison wrote a Memorial and Remonstrance against the bill and the legislation was defeated. Subsequently, the legislature passed Jefferson's Religious Freedom Act, affirming separation of church and state. Later this principle was written into America's Bill of Rights, in the First Amendment to the U. S. Constitution.

When Madison succeeded Jefferson as president in 1809, he affronted the clergy by vetoing two bills, one to give Mississippi land to a Baptist church, another to incorporate an Episcopal church in the

District of Columbia, which he said violated the separation of church and state. Madison also criticized the employment of chaplains at sessions of Congress.

James Madison Quotes:

Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprise, every expanded project.

Ecclesiastical establishments tend to great ignorance and corruption, all of which facilitate the execution of mischievous projects.

During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What has been its fruits? More or less in all places, pride and indolence in the clergy; ignorance and servility in the laity; in both, superstition, bigotry, and persecution.

What influence in fact have ecclesiastical establishments had on civil society? In some instances they have been seen to erect a spiritual tyranny on the ruins of civil authority; in many instances they have been seen upholding the thrones of political tyranny; in no instances have they been seen the guardians of the liberties of the people.

Rulers who wish to subvert the public liberty may have found an established clergy convenient auxiliaries. A just government, instituted to secure and perpetuate it, needs them not.

The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries.

Speaker Sponsor Program Richard Martin

Many thanks to our new Speaker Sponsors! With their support we are now able to bring to our meetings nationally-known speakers we could not previously afford.

Mencken Sponsorships

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Hastening Death

Dick Cousineau

After reading the entire April-May 2011 issue of Free Inquiry which was devoted to: *Facing Misery; Confronting Illness, even Death, without a Prayer* especially the words and thoughts of Jennifer Hecht and Ron Lindsay, and a Poem (song) by one of our own members, Bill Edgar. [See Below.] I began to look at the situation of assisted dying in this country.

Assisted Dying or Euthanasia is illegal in the United States except in the states of Oregon, Washington, and Montana and, in other countries, only The Netherlands and Belgium. For the rest of us who do not live in the Northwest, it is considered homicide. However self-induced suicide is not a crime.

All competent adults have the absolute right to insist that medical treatment be stopped even though such would be considered essential to keep them alive. Of course not many are conscious at

the time a decision is needed. Only when we express our clear decision prior to being in the hands of a surrogate will our wishes be followed. All should include Advanced Directives in their instructions to their heirs and doctor while still mentally competent.

Objections to the Oregon and Washington laws that permit doctor-assisted dying are voiced by relatives of unconscious patients and religious ministers. However, experience in Oregon confirms that legalizing doctor assistance has not created any problems nor rush to death but, counterintuitively, has encouraged many to live longer and to forgo the hastening of their death. It has been shown that of the only 15 percent of those who actually consider hastening their death, only 1 in 600 actually do it. Most do not choose death when they have something, anything, worthwhile to live for. Not until they believe that there is no other alternative do people choose the option of a peaceful death.

To be eligible in those states for assistance a patient must have been diagnosed to have a terminal illness that will cause death within 6 months and can demonstrate that the patient is capable of making their own health care decisions; they must be competent! It is not available to psychotics. Finally the patient must ingest the prescribed drug; it is not to be administered by the doctor.

The overwhelming number of people who have chosen assistance in dying have been white, well educated, economically secure, and of both genders. They chose to die with dignity. These are not "despair suicides" but rather end-of-life pain managers. Knowing that one is needed can reduce the despair that drives people to suicide in the first place. If suffering is entirely psychological, one is encouraged to stay alive and give them self another chance. If disease is killing one painfully, then suicide is not a moral issue at all. The State of California should allow assisted dying similar to our northern neighbors, as soon as possible.

CAPTAIN OF MY FATE

We can die for a fictitious god and be called noble and good,
 We can die for a flag, in an immoral war, and be called the great hero,
 We can die by an act of a drunken lout, and be called a victim of crime,
 But we can't die for ourselves, for that's evil and bad.
 Even when pain is beyond unbearable, we can't speak for ourselves.

Who's to judge? An irrelevant dogma that's foisted by priests whose very god, they say, took it upon himself to do the same?
 Or a lying leader who even hides his dead "heroes" from the masses?
 Or a friendly scam artist who sells his country to the highest bidder?
 Or how about me? I've seen the pain that grows deeply and never ends,
 I know when life needs to be completed. In my hands alone should be my fate, my history, my actions, my worth.

Dick Cousineau

THE COLD SPRING CANYON BRIDGE SONG

High above Santa Barbara, up Route One Fifty Four
 A bridge spans Cold Spring Canyon where hawks and eagles soar
 They call it "Suicide Bridge" and if you're wondering why
 The main thing, my friend it's four hundred feet high

(CHORUS)

In a country that is free we should all have a say
 'Bout when we should die and in exactly in what way
 There should be lots more choices all more "humane" some would say
 Call it freedom or compassion let us die our own way!

Now she's had a good life but those days they're all gone
 Now her pain is so bad that she just can't go on
 There's not a soul who cares they'd just put her away
 So it's all up to her..... can she do it her own way?

Today her pain is just too much but her courage it is high
 She's promised to herself that today she will die
 They say that it's a sin and that she'll end up in hell
 But there isn't any proof so she figures "what the hell"

(Slower) Now she's driving alone up Route One Fifty Four
 In just a little while in the sky she will soar
 Where she'll fly with bald eagles and with the red tailed hawks
 They'll be the last thing that she hears before she hits the rocks (pause)

Now for her it's all over.... and so is her pain
 But thousands and thousands just like her still remain
 Will you give them a choice? will you help them along?
 But before you decide please remember this song!

W. H. Edgar

Atheists in Military Seek Official Recognition Matthew Hay Brown, Baltimore Sun

Capt. Ryan Jean wanted to perform well on the Army's psychological evaluation. But he also wanted to answer the questions honestly. So when he was asked whether he believed his life had a lasting purpose, Jean, an atheist, saw no choice but to say no.

Those and other responses, Jean says, won him a trip to see the post chaplain, who berated him for his lack of faith.

"He basically told me that if I don't get right with God, then I'm worthless," said Jean, now an intelligence officer at Ft. Meade. "That if I don't believe in Jesus, why am I in uniform, because this is God's army, and that I should resign my commission in order to stop disgracing the military."

Jean says experiences such as that confrontation three years ago, when he was serving at Camp Arifjan in Kuwait, have spurred him to seek Army recognition as a humanist lay leader — on par with Christian, Jewish and Muslim lay leaders who help military chaplains minister to the troops.

Jean is one of as many as a dozen atheists throughout the U.S. military in the process of applying for the status, which they and their supporters see as necessary to secure for nonbelievers the acceptance and support that they say Christians in uniform take for granted.

Some in the loosely knit but apparently growing movement of military atheists see the recognition of lay leaders as a step toward the appointment of nonbelieving chaplains, who would be responsible — like the priests, ministers, rabbis and imams now in uniform — for responding to the spiritual needs of service members.

Reactions so far, they say, have ranged from perplexity to hostility. Military authorities have yet to approve an atheist lay leader.

"What I've heard is, 'Well, you guys aren't like us. You guys don't believe like we do,' " said Jason Torpy, a former Army captain who heads the Military Assn. of Atheists and Freethinkers. "What I haven't heard is, 'Yes. We accept.' "

An Army spokesman did not respond to requests for comment. A spokeswoman for Ft. Meade, Mary Doyle, said atheists seeking lay-leader status faced "a high mountain to climb."

"The group that they want to be a lay leader for would have to be considered a recognized religious organization," she said.

The military does not recognize atheists or humanists as members of an organized religion. (Atheists do not believe in a god. Humanists typically are nonbelievers who find meaning in ideas about community, science and human potential. There is much overlap between the two groups.)

Nonetheless, the drive for lay leaders reflects the growing level of coordination among atheists in uniform and their increasing willingness to speak out in a military that has labored in recent years to develop a more inclusive environment.

Allegations of religious bias — most notably at the Air Force Academy, where concerns have flared about attempts by fundamentalist Christian staff members and cadets to win converts — have led to tougher restrictions against proselytizing. Some have expressed fear that having the wrong faith, or none at all, could hinder their careers.

Martin L. Cook, a professor of military ethics at the Naval War College, called it the "imponderable question."

"As for careers being held back ... only a really stupid person would do that in such a way that you could see that," said Cook, who has taught at the Air Force Academy and the Army War College. "So if it happens — and, honestly, I suspect it does — it would happen either in the privacy of the mind of the person doing the performance review or perhaps in a small, private discussion among senior officers who make those decisions."

Religion — specifically Christianity — is embedded in military culture. The Chaplain Corps traces its origins to the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. Until the 1970s, the service academies required cadets to attend chapel services. Nightly prayers still are broadcast throughout Navy ships at sea.

Fewer than 10,000 of the 1.4 million active-duty members of the armed forces identify themselves as atheists or agnostics. Atheists say many more are hidden among the 285,000 who say they have no religious preference.

Whatever their number, nonbelievers describe themselves as a minority that is often isolated and sometimes closeted. Torpy, of the military atheists group, said he heard from service members looking for "affirmation" and "connection to a community of like-minded individuals."

Jean, 28, recalls the run-in with the chaplain in Kuwait. And a soldier who said he chafed at Jean's command because he felt it amounted to "following in Satan's footsteps."

Jean also speaks of a reserve unit in California where members were given the choice of attending Bible study or performing vehicle maintenance checks.

In practical terms, Jean says, lay-leader status would make it easier for atheists at Ft. Meade to get access to facilities and services on the base. But he says recognition would carry a larger message.

"It shows that we're not going to be silent and go away," he said. "It shows that we are a community with real needs. It shows that the chaplaincy by its very nature is not meeting those needs — and, I would argue, is inherently incapable of properly meeting those needs without some sort of liaison."

Letters to Editors

To Editor, Santa Barbara News Press
November 25, 2011

There have been times when the armed forces were a progressive force in America. The racial integration of the armed forces after World War II was well ahead of our nation.

Any young person who takes on the burden of service to our country, and is accepted by our

country to serve, deserves our complete support in meeting his/her legitimate needs.

Treating atheism as an illness requiring guidance by a bigoted pastor is unconscionable.

We have recently made progress concerning gays in the military, and nothing bad happened. The armed forces, and the country, become a better place if even the needs of atheists can be respected.

Ron Kronenberg

To Editor, Santa Barbara News Press
November 10, 2011

"In God We Trust"

The House of Representatives has voted overwhelmingly in favor of a congressional resolution reaffirming the phrase "In God We Trust" as the national motto and supporting its placement on public buildings, public schools and other government institutions. Christians should be outraged for a couple of reasons.

First, because the resolution necessarily assumes that Christians will forget (or maybe lose altogether) their faith if they are not reminded of it at every turn. Surely their connection to their god is sufficient to withstand the absence of a direct, written reference to god for a few minutes.

The second reason arises from a ruling by the Supreme Court regarding the constitutionality of legislation such as this. The court ruled that this phrase was "meaningless" because it is part of the background noise of our public "civil religion" and thus could pass constitutional muster.

Yes, "meaningless." Surely no Christian thinks his/her god or trust in god is meaningless.

Sadly, our House of Representatives and our Representative Lois Capps seem to think otherwise.

Roger Schlueter

To Editor, HSSB Secular Circular

November 18, 2011

"Disproving Christianity"

My new book, *Disproving Christianity and other Secular Writings*, is now available on Kindle! Check out the press release for more info:

<http://davidgmcafee.wordpress.com/2011/11/18/disproving-christianity-and-other-secular-writings-now-available-in-kindle-and-paperback/>

David G. McAfee

Biblical Scholarship and the Right to Know, part 1

Bart Ehrman

[Biblical scholar, author, and former born-again Christian Bart Ehrman is recognized as a preeminent expert in the field of biblical criticism. He recently was presented with the Religious Liberty Award at the American Humanist Association's 70th annual conference, not just for outstanding scholarship in the field of biblical criticism, but for publicly advocating honesty about the biblical record and the history of early Christianity. The following is the first of two articles, taken from his acceptance speech.]

Published in *The Humanist*, November / December 2011 issue.

I'm honored to be the recipient of this award, and I'd like to offer the association my sincerest thanks.

This is a very different audience from what I'm accustomed to as a scholar of the Bible. I teach in the Bible belt, and my students come largely from North Carolina, have grown up in the church, and, in my experience, have a much deeper commitment to the Bible than knowledge about it. So when I teach my class in the New Testament, I begin by explaining that it's not a Sunday school class and I'm not a preacher. I'm a historian and the class will engage in a historical study of the New Testament.

One of the things I want them to learn right off the bat is that the contention that the very words of the Bible are divinely inspired has some problems. First, the Bible wasn't written in English, it was written in Greek. So when you're reading it in English, you're reading it in translation. Not only that, but Jesus spoke Aramaic. And there are some things in Aramaic that can't be represented in Greek, and then there are things in Greek you can't represent in English. You're getting it third hand and things get changed with translations, so it ends up mattering.

People in the ancient world didn't have last names unless they were in the upper crust of the Roman aristocracy, where people had multiple names. If you were a normal person, you'd just have one name. And that's why in the New Testament, when many people have the same name, they use identifiers. Mary is an example; in the New Testament you have Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary of Bethany, Mary Magdalene, and so on. This is news to my students, some of whom naturally think that Jesus was born to Joseph and Mary Christ.

The other crowd I typically speak to are conservative evangelical Christians, as I'm frequently invited to do public debates with academics from their ranks. This spring, for example, I debated an evangelical Christian scholar named Craig Evans on whether the gospels of the New Testament are historically reliable. This was at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in front of 700 people, two of which were on my side. Three months earlier, I debated Dinesh D'Souza at Gordon College, a conservative evangelical school in Massachusetts. Six hundred people were in attendance, three of those were on my side.

I should add that I am always well received in these contexts. Even so, every time I do one of these debates and my opponent is talking and everybody's applauding, I'm writing notes to myself asking, why are you doing this? During those moments of darkness, I comfort myself by reasoning that at least I'm trying to get people to

think, whether they're religious people or not. This is one of my goals as a scholar, to get people to think—to question what they believe, so that they can liberate themselves from whatever forms of ideology or religion may be preventing them from living life to the fullest and from showing love and concern for the well being of others.

Let me also stress that I'm not opposed to religion and I don't think that all religion is oppressive—far from it. I also think that people should be free to embrace whatever religious or non-religious views they choose whether they're Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Pagan, agnostic, humanist, or atheist, so long as they don't use their religious or non-religious views to silence, oppress, or harm others. Even though I'm not opposed to religion, I am opposed to strident ideology and to every kind of fundamentalism.

[Part 2 of this article will appear in our January, 2012 issue. Ed.]

The Problem of Evil

Shadia B. Drury

[Reprinted from Free Inquiry, published by the Council for Secular Humanism, October/November 2011 issue.]

The so-called problem of evil belongs to Christianity in a way that it does not belong to Judaism or Islam. In Judaism and Islam, God's power is fundamental, but his goodness is questionable. When the God of the Old Testament behaves badly, the Israelites usually talk back. Every time God decides to slay the Israelites in the desert for worshipping other gods, Moses manages to talk him out of it by shaming him, saying for example: "What will the Egyptians think of us? They'll say he [God] took them out of Egypt just to slay them in the desert" (Exodus 32:10-14; Deuteronomy 19 and 28).

Like the Jews, Muslims make no bones about the fact that they live under an all powerful but somewhat brutal God. They think of God as someone who does as he pleases without regard to

anyone else. Unlike the Jews, Muslims are not inclined to challenge him. They see no option but to submit to his undeniable power. It's the only reasonable thing to do in the face of such reckless power.

If there is a creator, why must he be so harsh? In response to this sentiment, Christianity tries to rehabilitate the God of the Jews; it tries to make him into a paragon of virtue - though without depriving him of his omnipotence. Christians insist that God is all-powerful and all-good at the same time. But if that is the case, then it is natural to wonder why there is so much evil in the world. The Christian answer is that God gave us freedom, but we have abused it. Human beings are therefore responsible for the evil in the world.

It's indisputable that human beings are the source of much of the evil in the world. But it is certainly not the case that they are the source of all the world's misery and senseless suffering. Why do volcanoes, hurricanes, tornadoes, famines, and diseases inflict such terrible misery? Why must innocent children be buried alive in rubble as a result of earthquakes? Why are blameless people swept away to terrible deaths by tsunamis? How can a good God allow so much misery if he is powerful enough to stop it? This question was put to Benedict XVI by a little girl from Japan after the earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011. "I don't know," was the reply of this font of wisdom.

Christians insist that God is all-powerful and all-good at the same time. But how can that be? Some classic Christian responses have been provided by C. S. Lewis, but far from solving the problem, they make it worse. In *The Great Divorce*, Lewis surmises that we are too attached to the world and the people in it. He tells us that all this love of the world is unhealthy. In destroying the world and the people we love, God makes it possible for something bigger and better to grow in the midst of the loneliness and desolation of his "surgery." We might come to realize that the world is chimerical and insubstantial, that our love of the world is misguided, and that real love is possible only through God. So by taking away what we love,

God opens the door to a richer kind of love - the love of God, of course. Lewis does not seem to realize that his effort to solve the problem of evil makes his God even more hideous.

To those who suffer from the senseless ferocity of God, Lewis says (in what became a typically Islamic posture) - surrender, believe, let his will be done, and all will be redeemed - "in the end." If they deny that future bliss could make up for a life of suffering, Lewis says, then they deserve to rot in hell. God offers you redemption; if you reject heaven, it's your fault, because "Hell is a state of mind." In other words, Lewis blames the victims for God's brutality and for their suffering. He blames them for clinging to the wretched world instead of denouncing it in favor of God's offer of redemption.

It is natural for people who worship what they believe to be a good God to emulate him. Interestingly, Lewis is opposed to making Jesus a role model. He rejects the idea that Jesus was a great moral teacher. In *Mere Christianity*, he points out that if Jesus were not God, he would be intolerable. Clearly, Lewis believes that what is appropriate for God is not appropriate for human beings. In my view, this flies in the face of two of Lewis's most important tenets - the objectivity of the good and the goodness of God. If you insist that the good is objective and independent of arbitrary will, as Lewis does, then what is good is good regardless of who does it. But even though Lewis argues that the good is objective, he claims that whatever God does is good, even if it seems terrible. So, even though he insists that God is good, he tells us not to use God as a moral compass. But what is the point of insisting on the goodness of God if he cannot be emulated? Christians since Augustine have raged against the pagan gods because they set a bad example. Christianity was supposed to produce a God worthy of being emulated.

Far from defending God, Lewis turns him into a murderous megalomaniac. It is no wonder that the history of religion has been so bloody and murderous. The character of God as Lewis understands it incites crime. It explains why those

who do terrible things in the name of God are not evil people perverting religion but true believers who see nothing wrong with imitating a hideous God that they mistakenly believe is the personification of goodness.

[Shadia B. Drury is Canada Research Chair at the University of Regina in Canada. Her most recent book is *Aquinas and Modernity: The Lost Promise of Natural Law*. (Rowman and Littlefield, 2008)

Sonnet to a Christian

You say you pity me because I fail
To worship an almighty God above.
Your exhortations are to no avail,
Your God has proved unworthy of my love.

You sing his praise, and yet your scriptures tell
He murders innocents without just cause,
Sends sinners to an everlasting hell,
And brings you famine, pestilence and wars.

I have no need for miracles or prayer,
But take the bounty that this earth provides.
For present joy, not future bliss, I care,
With reason and with knowledge as my guides.

So I will savor all that life can give,
And serve no gods as long as I shall live.

Mary Wilk

Mary F. Wilk was born and raised in England and later immigrated to California. She has operated a manufacturing business, and for several years has served as membership chairman for the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara. "Sonnet to a Christian" was published in *Above Us Only Sky, Atheist Poetry, Volume Two*, Incarnate Muse Press, 2008.

Dear Abby (11/18/11)

DEAR ABBY: I am a middle-aged woman who is Baptist by faith. I believe that when I die I will go to heaven. My problem is, if going to heaven means

being reunited with my parents and other family members, then I don't want to go! The idea of spending eternity with them is more than I can stand, but I don't want to go to hell, either. Any thoughts? -- ETERNALLY CONFUSED IN MISSISSIPPI

DEAR ETERNALLY CONFUSED: Yes. When you reach the pearly gates, talk this over with St. Peter. Perhaps he would be willing to place you in a different wing than the one your parents and other family members are staying in. And in the meantime, discuss this with your minister.

Non-HSSB Events of Interest Diane Krohn

Upcoming events that may be of interest to humanists, atheists, skeptics, and freethinkers:

Upcoming Events in California:

- December 4: Edward J. Larson: *Re-Inventing Scott: Science in the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration*. CFI West – Los Angeles and Costa Mesa.
<http://www.cfiwest.org/calendar/FeedYourBrain.htm#brower>
- December 11: Margaret Wertheim: *Physics on the Fringe: Smoke Rings, Circlons, and Alternative Theories of Everything*. CalTech, Pasadena.
<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/>
- January 14-16, 2012: Viva Mojave! A geology field trip sponsored by the Skeptics Society.
http://www.skeptic.com/geology_tours/2012/Viva-Mojave/

Upcoming Events Outside of California:

- December 16-18: Florida Regional Atheists Meet (RAM), Fort Lauderdale, FL. Speakers include James Randi, Mr. Deity, David Silverman, Sean Faircloth, and many others.
<http://freethoughtflorida.com/wp/archives/821>

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Newsletter Deadline:

Deadline for submissions to the Secular Circular is Midnight, the last day of each month.

HSSB meetings are held on the 3rd Saturday of each month at 2:30 pm, usually in the Patio Room of Vista del Monte, 3775 Modoc Rd., Santa Barbara. More information is available at our web site:

www.SantaBarbaraHumanists.org or by contacting any board member. At meetings, a donation of \$2 from members and \$5 from non-members is appreciated. First-time visitors are welcome on a complimentary basis.

To send a copy of this newsletter to someone interested in our Society, please send their contact information to: PO Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130, or contact Mary Wilk at 967-3045, or mwilk@cox.net. Newsletters are also available at the above web address.

Annual HSSB membership dues are \$36 for a single person, \$60 for a couple, and \$100 (or more) to become a sponsor. One may subscribe to our newsletter only for an annual fee of \$20.

Link to HSSB Photos:

<http://picasaweb.google.com/Humanist.Society.of.Santa.Barbara>

HSSB Phone: 769-HSSB

HSSB Calendar

Sunday, December 18. Winter Solstice Party. Valle Verde Auditorium, 4:30pm. Reserve now!

Sunday, December 25. The usual brunch held on the last Sunday of each month will not be held this month.

Wednesday, January 18, at 1:30 p.m. **Book Club** reorganizational meeting at the home of Dick Cousineau, 505 Alegria (off Las Positas).

Saturday, January 21. Monthly meeting. Barney Brantingham.

Saturday, Feb 18. Monthly meeting. Tom Mates. "Judeo-Islamic America"

Saturday, Mar. 17. Monthly meeting. Michael Newdow. "My Day at the Supreme Court"

Saturday, Apr. 21 Greta Christina

Saturday, May 19 Barbara Forrest



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