



THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

JANUARY 2010

www.sbhumanists.org

January Program

"What's Love Got To Do With It?"

***The Emotional / Relational World of Pop Songs,* with Professor Emeritus Tom Scheff**

Carefully reading the lyrics of popular songs can be a way of understanding how our society perceives love, since most chart songs are concerned with it. Oddly, most of them don't seem to deal with genuine love, but with what might be considered caricatures of it.

- ◇ For the last 80 or so years, the most prevalent love songs involve not requited love, but heartbreak.
- ◇ Another large category is also about angry quarrels, sexuality without love, or spoofs.
- ◇ Next in frequency comes infatuation: being head over heels about someone you hardly know, or don't know at all.
- ◇ The smallest category is requited love: being in a romantic relationship, although these latter lyrics are usually abstract and idealized.

In the heartbreak songs, the intensity of the pain of loss (*I'm no good without you; what's the use of living?*) is assumed to be an indication of the depth of love for the lost one. Yet it might be something entirely different, reflecting the inability of the lover to deal with loss and grief. Similarly, the obsessive quality of infatuation may not be an indication of love at all, only the predilection of the lover for isolation and obsessive fantasies.

If heartbreak, infatuation, etc. are not genuine love, what is? This is not an easy question to answer: scholars, performing artists and regular citizens have been pondering it for thousands of years. UCSB Sociologist Tom Scheff will lead a discussion and maybe help us understand why our children, friends and neighbors are listening to music we don't like.



Saturday, January 16th in the Patio Room at Vista del Monte, 3775 Modoc Road
(Las Positas exit off Hwy. 101, midway between UCSB & SBCC) in Santa Barbara.

Join us for socializing @ 2:30 p.m.

Meeting starts promptly @ 3:00 p.m. Q+A to follow

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Membership Notes

by Mary Wilk

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

www.SantaBarbaraHumanists.org

or by contacting any of the board members listed in the left-hand column of this page.

If you would like a copy of this newsletter mailed to a friend or someone who might be interested in our Society, please send their contact information to: PO Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130, or call Mary Wilk. Alternatively, all of our newsletters are available at the web address shown above.

If you are not already a member, we encourage you to join our Society. Annual membership dues are \$36 for a single person, \$60 for a couple, and \$100 (or more) for a sponsor. Members receive the monthly newsletter and have the option of attending meetings, outings and special events sponsored by the Society.

Those unable to attend our monthly meetings may subscribe to our newsletter for an annual fee of \$20, but are not entitled to other membership privileges. When attending our meetings, a donation of \$2 from members and \$5 from non-members is appreciated. First or second-time visitors are welcome on a complimentary basis. For more information, please contact Mary Wilk or any member of our Society.

News About Members

by Mary Wilk

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

Elise Foldare
Santa Barbara

Christine Gallery
Goleta

Barbara Hill & Bill Vollero
Santa Barbara

Claudia Sole
Santa Barbara

Obituary

by Roger Schlueter

The Society has lost a valuable member and supporter, Bea Farwell Duncan. Bea passed away on December 21st, 2009 at her residence at the Maravilla Senior residence in Goleta.

Our long-time members will remember Bea (and deceased husband, Dudley Duncan) as principled Humanists who had advocated for nontheist ideas in both their personal and professional lives. Bea was actively involved with the Society as Program Chair in 2001-02. During that time she infused our programs with her own intellectual rigor and thoughtfulness.

We will miss Bea. She was a very sharp lady with a ready smile. As of this printing, there is no information available regarding a service or her wishes for remembrances.



On Wednesday, 12/30/2009 HSSB sponsor and photographer Robert Bernstein had two of his pictures published in the *Santa Barbara Daily Sound* newspaper. The first was of the Mission Ridge hiking trail before the Jesusita fire. The second (appropriately enough on Jesus' birthday) shows the burnt trail with green shoots of recovery. One such photograph is to the right, and more can be seen on web page <http://swt.org/hikes/MissionRidgeScout-2009-1225/index.html>

Activities Chair

by Roger Schlueter

I am quite happy to introduce Joe Navarro as our new Activities Chair.

By way of background, Joe's connection to Santa Barbara starts with him receiving his doctorate in Political Science from UCSB in 1977. He taught political theory and constitutional law at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City from 1978 to 1983. That year he returned to UCSB as an administrator, and after 25 years retired as the associate dean of students. While at UCSB he taught occasional courses in anarchist theory and jurisprudence. In 2007 he became the first staff advisor to the new student group "Scientific Understanding and Reason Enrichment" (SURE) and assisted them in gaining affiliation with the Center for Inquiry.

In July, 2009 Joe began a term on the Santa Barbara County Grand Jury where he serves as Foreman Pro Tem. His interest in political theory continues and he is currently researching the evolutionary origins of political and religious thought and behavior. By utilizing the principles of evolutionary psychology, Joe hopes to shed some light on how the nexus of myth and authority influenced the development of modern societies.

Please give Joe your help and cooperation as he gains his new Activities Chair sea legs. Welcome, Joe, to the wonderful world of Humanist activism.



Contingency

by Roger Schlueter

As the year and the decade pass, it is natural to look backward to assess where we've been, and forward to see where we might be going. Such assessments usually ignore the unpredictable, random occurrences that can play an important role in the unfolding of history. These contingent events cannot be predicted and may overturn an otherwise sound forecast and can confound *post facto* analyses.

My first exposure to this concept was from Stephen J. Gould's fascinating discussion of the contingent nature of evolution. For example, if an asteroid strike had not happened 65 million years ago then mammals might have remained small rodents and dinosaurs would still dominate. But the asteroid did strike Earth and, as a result, we are here and the dinosaurs are not. It might very well have been different because, as Gould notes, if you rewind the "tape" and play it again, nothing will be the same.

Surely you can identify any number of unpredictable, contingent events in your own personal life that, had they not happened, your whole life story would have taken a totally different course. Such events also happen on many other levels. The best example of a contingent event at the national, political level in the past decade is the rise (and fall?) of Joe the Plumber during the presidential campaign of 2008.

Prior to October 12, 2008, Samuel Joseph Wurzelbacher was a nobody on the national scene. By pure happenstance, he got a chance to ask then candidate Obama a tax question during his visit to Ohio. Obama's reply became a major bone of contention at the final presidential debate three days later and Joe went on to be a significant symbol for the McCain/Palin ticket.

Nobody could have predicted that such a minor, unplanned, insignificant (at the time) chat would have national, if not international, fallout. Joe's life is forever changed, McCain is not our President and Obama is not likely to ever again talk tax policy with any random yahoo off the street.

In this light, we should be quite humble about

2010 predictions, because unforeseen events are bound to confound even the most rational, fact-based outlook. Staying at the national political level for the moment, I can confidently assert that every prediction for 2010 and 2012 will prove to be lucky or wrong. Lucky, if some unforeseen event does not happen and thus overturn the status quo. Wrong if it does.

The most obvious example of a future contingent event is a successful terrorist attack on the USA. We've just seen how an *unsuccessful* attempt to down an airplane on Christmas day has elicited several cycles of news coverage. One can easily imagine what would have happened had the attempt been successful. At the extreme, if a major USA city suffers a terrorist attack with a nuclear weapon, it is hard to imagine the national and international consequences.

Such contingencies can make a fool of any prognosticator. One of the best examples from the recent past is when *Golf Digest* averred, "Tiger never does anything that would make him look ridiculous." Countless economists have made countless erroneous market predictions. About the only future certainty is that some prognosticator will forget the contingent nature of our world.

Contingent events are a fact of life at levels from the personal to the national to the international. They promise to take us in surprising directions. I hope all your surprises lead to a Happy New Year.



HSSB members Loretta Redd and Jé Goolsby each used to write for the Santa Barbara Daily Sound. Space is now available in the paper, so Editor and Publisher Jeremy Gordon is seeking Guest Opinion pieces. Here is your chance to be published as a Humanist newspaper writer:

- 600-1,500 words
- Well-thought-out, original writing only
- All subjects are welcome

E-mail your entries to jgordon@thedailysound.com. The Santa Barbara Daily Sound is printed Tuesday through Saturday every week, and is available for home or office delivery, or free at news racks around Santa Barbara and Goleta.

Consumption

by HSSB Member Dr. Marcia C. Sherman

The purpose of my life is not consumption

never has been
isn't that a disease

pneumonia used to be called

consumption

pleurisy

bronchitis

and the dreaded

tuberculosis

diseases of the lungs

inhaling the wrong things

into our lungs

denying our blood cells

enough oxygen

to breathe

bringing too much crap

into our lives

consumption

choking

isn't that what we're doing

to our lives

and to our planet



Encouraging news for secularists "Across The Pond"

Submitted by Andrew Hankin

According to the British Social Attitudes Survey conducted in 2008:

- ◆ Declining from two-thirds in 1983, only half of Britons now declare themselves to be Christian.
- ◆ Sunday church attendance in the UK has fallen over those twenty-five years, from 1.2 million to 0.978 million on average, mostly from the Church of England.
- ◆ Only 7-8% of the British describe themselves as "very religious" or go to church every Sunday; 49% of "Anglican Christians" said they never go to church.
- ◆ Holding strong for twenty-five years are 9-10% British Catholics; while Jews and Muslims have grown from 2% to 7% of the population.
- ◆ 37% of Britons either do not believe in God or are unable to say if a supreme being exists; while 35% have a definite belief in God or "belief with occasional doubts".
- ◆ Fading UK faith stands in sharp contrast to the USA, where 76% of Americans say they are Christian and 26% describe themselves as "very religious".

Original story <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/religion/6818004/Just-half-of-Britons-now-call-themselves-Christian-after-a-sharp-decline-in-faith-over-past-25-years.html>



Upcoming Events

by Andrew Hankin

HSSB Social Brunch...

is a secular gathering for humanists, atheists, agnostics, skeptics, freethinkers, singles, couples and families without religion, on the last Sunday morning of every month. No cover charge – pay only for your food + drink. Bring your friends, because membership and reservations aren't necessary.

10 a.m. Sunday, January 31st at Cody's Cafe, 4898 Hollister Ave. in the Turnpike Center, Goleta, in the room to the right as you enter the restaurant. For information call 805-967-3045. (Membership Chair Mary Wilk is a regular attendee, e-mail mwilk@cox.net.)

Board Meeting

The next board meeting will be held Tuesday, January 12th, 6pm at the home of Mary Wilk; 4384 Via Presada, Santa Barbara.

Non-HSSB Events of Interest

- ♦ P.Z. Myers will be giving presentation on the topic of "**Complexity and Creationism**".

Paul Zachary "P.Z." Myers is a biology professor at the University of Minnesota Morris (UMM), and the author of the science blog **Pharyngula**. P.Z. is big proponent of evolution and an outspoken critic of "Intelligent Design." His studies primarily focus on evolutionary developmental biology and neurobiology.

In 2009 P.Z. was named **Humanist of the Year**. In addition, he was a keynote speaker at the 2009 Secular Student Alliance Convention in Columbus, Ohio. P.Z. led a tour of the **Creation Museum in Kentucky**, together with about 300 atheists and skeptics last summer.

Date: January 20th

Time: 7:00pm – 9:00pm

Location: Embarcadero Hall

935 Embarcadero Del Norte, Isla Vista

- ♦ Film screening -- *The Yes Men Fix The World!* Armed with nothing but thrift store business suits, *Yes Men* Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bannano pose as top executives of corporations they hate, fibbing their way into conferences and newsrooms to parody their corporate targets. Beginning with a false declaration on BBC news of good intentions by "Dow Chemical", actual Dow stock plummets by \$2 billion. The *Yes Men* take on the biggest and worst businesses in this political documentary, exposing the twisted and accidentally hilarious underworld of free-market think tanks. (2009, 87 minutes)

Date: January 13th

Times: 7:30pm AND 9:30pm

Location: UCSB Campbell Hall

\$6 general, \$5 students, \$3 parking.

Movie web page <http://>

theyesmenfixtheworld.com/story.htm

- ♦ An evening with **Charlie Rose** – \$43. 8pm **Saturday, Jan.16th** at the Arlington Theatre, 1317 State St. SB.

<https://artsandlectures.sa.ucsb.edu/Details.aspx?PerfNum=1562>

- ♦ *In The Loop*, an absurdist comedy film about "the fate of the world on the line". 7:30pm **Tuesday, Jan.19th**, only \$6 at UCSB Campbell Hall.

<https://artsandlectures.sa.ucsb.edu/Details.aspx?PerfNum=1678>

- ♦ *Wired for War – The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century*: Senior Fellow and Director of the 21st Century Defense Initiative at the Brookings Institution, P.W. Singer, reveals how science fiction is fast becoming a reality on the battlefield. 7:30pm **Thursday, Jan.21st**, \$12 at UCSB Campbell Hall.

<https://artsandlectures.sa.ucsb.edu/Details.aspx?PerfNum=1700>

- ♦ An Evening with **T.C. Boyle**, author of *Wild Child* and *The Women*. He's also written twenty books of fiction, including *World's End* and *Drop City*. 7:30pm **Monday, Jan.25**, \$10 at Victoria Hall, 33 West Victoria St. SB.

<https://artsandlectures.sa.ucsb.edu/Details.aspx?PerfNum=1698>

(Events continued on page 10)

Professor Ditto by Robert Bernstein

Peter Ditto is Chair of the Psychology Department at UC Irvine. As such, expectations were high for his November talk "Through the Red and Blue Looking Glass: The Psychology of the American Culture War".

His goal was to show that the root of the cultural divide in the US is a natural human tendency toward bias. We each are on a team and we bias information to make our team look good and the other bad.

He starts out with a literal team example of a Princeton vs Dartmouth game played 23 November 1951. Penalties were called and a player had his nose broken.

Fans of each team were shown a film of the game and were asked to count penalties. Each side came up with a different count.

He argues that the Red (Republican) and Blue (Democratic) teams of American politics work the same way.

He gives an example of 1979 research done by Lord, Ross and Lepper on capital punishment. Pro and anti capital punishment subjects were selected.

Each group was given two different research studies to read. The "research" was made up. But there was rich scientific data as if it was real.

One study reported the deterrent efficacy of capital punishment; the other did not.

Two different methodologies were used. In one, adjacent states with and without capital punishment were studied. In the other, the same state was studied before and after capital punishment. Methodologies were counterbalanced so that half of each group of subjects saw each method associated with each outcome.

Each group was asked if it was good science. Ditto claimed that each group answered based its answer purely on the outcome they already believed.

However, the data he showed in his presentation

contradicted that. Capital punishment opponents were not nearly as biased as supporters were. Ditto brushed this off when it was pointed out to him.

Ditto brought up Jonathan Haidt's theory that conservatives and liberals have different bases for morality. Research shows that liberals base their morality mostly on two foundations:

- 1) Actual help/harm
- 2) Fairness/Justice

But conservatives have three other foundations:

- 3) Ingroup Loyalty
- 4) Respect for Authority
- 5) Purity/Sanctity

Several HSSB members attended Haidt's talks at UCSB and we heard Haidt make the case that liberals need to be more sensitive to these extra concerns of conservatives. However, it is hard to claim that this is a matter of "bias" as Ditto claims.

Ditto did make some good points about how to test for bias in one's own positions. He asks us to look at facts and actions rather than to attribute intentions that we cannot know to the other side.



And he asks us to imagine the sides reversed to see if we would keep our views. And he recommends we make an effort to listen to the media of the other side.

But Ditto's talk was thin on facts. Jim Balter pointed out that global warming and evolution are matters of fact. So what seems to be "bias"

on one side may be adherence to fact.

Ditto said Democrats and Republicans each think the other side has less education, according to a study. He used that to show each side was biased.

But what if one side really is more educated?

(Prof. Ditto continued on page 8)

(Prof. Ditto continued from page 7)

Shouldn't bias be measured from what is in fact true rather than from an imaginary neutral position that is not true? I asked this question to Ditto.

Some studies show that Democrats have more college and graduate degrees than Republicans have. So I asked Ditto, "What if Republicans really are more educated than Democrats? When they say they are more educated, doesn't that show factual accuracy rather than bias?"

Ditto was startled briefly by my supposing Republicans are more educated.

Then he went on to say the facts are completely irrelevant to the issue of bias.

This was a rare occasion when quite a few of us HSSB members were shocked at a position by one of our speakers that was based on wishful thinking rather than on facts. And it was notable that this was the very topic Ditto claimed to be researching.



Editor's Note: In an effort to reduce your carbon footprint, you can request to have your monthly Secular Circular sent right to your e-mail box, or you can ask to be notified when it has been posted to the HSSB web site. An additional advantage is that it will **reduce our society's costs associated with printing and mailing**. Yet another advantage is that you will be able to read it **two or three days before the snail mail version** would arrive, AND you will see it in all its **full color glory**. E-mail the editor at HSSB_Editor@cox.net to change your delivery method.

Thanks to all who submitted articles and information for this newsletter. This cooperative effort improves the quality and relevance of the Secular Circular. Thank you!

The deadline for submitting items for the February newsletter is January 24, 2010.

Story About Darwin Court Case

Excerpted from LA Times, Published 12/29/09 by Mike Boehm

LA's California Science Center will start the new year defending itself in court for canceling a documentary film attacking Charles Darwin's theory of evolution.

A lawsuit alleges that the state-owned center improperly bowed to pressure from the Smithsonian Institution, as well as e-mailed complaints from USC professors and others. It contends that the center violated both the First Amendment and a contract to rent the museum's Imax Theater when it canceled the screening of "Darwin's Dilemma: The Mystery of the Cambrian Fossil Record."

The suit was filed in Los Angeles Superior Court by the American Freedom Alliance, an L.A.-based group described by senior fellow Avi Davis as a nonprofit, nonpartisan "think tank and activist network promoting Western values and ideals."

The AFA seeks punitive damages and compensation for financial losses, as well as a declaration from the court that the center violated the Constitution and cannot refuse the group the right to rent its facilities for future events.

The AFA had planned an Oct. 25 screening of two films at the Exposition Park museum -- one a short Imax movie called "We are Born of Stars," which favors Darwin's theory; the other, "Darwin's Dilemma: The Mystery of the Cambrian Fossil Record," a feature-length documentary that criticizes Darwin and promotes intelligent design.

Intelligent design is the theory that an intelligent being, rather than impersonal forces such as Darwinian natural selection, is responsible for shaping life on Earth. An overwhelming majority of scientists and science and natural history museums consider the theory of evolution to have been proved beyond a doubt by genetic and fossil evidence. Critics of intelligent design have dismissed it as a superficially scientific cloak for the straightforwardly religious belief known as Creationism that's anchored in a literal reading of the biblical Book of Genesis.

Full story <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/news/arts/la-et-science-center29-2009dec29.0,6400745.story>

PRESS RELEASE: Freethought Art Vandalized

From: Brian Parra
Director of Communications and Membership-
Atheists United
Date: Saturday, 26 December, 2009

Last year, the Grinch stole Solstice; this year, he got violent.

The end of December marks the Winter Solstice in the Northern Hemisphere, the time when the sun is lowest on the horizon, and long before Christianity, civilizations have marked this time with fire, feast, and evergreen decoration. Every December, there are holiday displays at Pacific Park in Santa Monica. Almost all are New Testament dioramas sponsored by churches in honor of the birth and childhood of Jesus.

In honor of the Solstice, after the many elaborate religious exhibits, atheists have put up modest displays. Last year, Atheists United, Southern California's largest freethought group, erected a simple sign wishing onlookers "Reason's Greetings," but it was soon stolen. This year, they put up a more playful image, a gnome with the face of Charles Darwin and the same message. On December 22nd, a member visited the site and found "Charlie's" face had been bashed in.



Artist Joel Pelletier noted, "While I was repairing Charlie, a number of people stopped to express their support and their concern that someone would attack freedom of speech in this way. This gives me a lot of confidence that most people, whatever their own beliefs, care about everyone's right to free expression and reciprocate our good wishes toward them."

In response to the observation that atheist symbols are often vandalized, Atheists United President Bobbie Kirkhart noted, "Few religious people would go to such extremes to suppress alternate views, but there are always some people so insecure in their own beliefs that they cannot tolerate anyone who believes differently."



The repaired Gnome by artist Joel Pelletier

The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, and wiser people so full of doubts.
— Bertrand Russell, Philosopher, Mathematician, Author (1872-1970)



Which is it? Is man one of God's blunders, or is God one of man's blunders.
— Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche.



Absolute faith corrupts as absolutely as absolute power. — Eric Hoffer, Philosopher and Author (1902-1983)

(Events continued from page 6)

◆ Neil Gaiman, "**the best-selling author you've never heard of.**" A master of myth and legend, he is the creator and writer of the cult DC Comics series *Sandman*; he co-authored the scripts for the films *Beowulf* and *Stardust*, and an animated film version of Gaiman's highly popular novel *Coraline* was released to rave reviews in 2009. 8pm **Wednesday, Feb.3rd**, \$22 at UCSB Campbell Hall.

<https://artsandlectures.sa.ucsb.edu/Details.aspx?PerfNum=1556>

◆ ***Building Bridges: Gandhi's Path to Tolerance.***

How did Gandhi demonstrate an imaginative and non-violent means of overcoming sectarian violence and of building communities with true toleration of diversity? In our time of uncompromising polarizations and animosity between religions, ideologies and partisan political positions, what can be learned from Gandhi's principles and self-sacrificing practice? **Gerry Kiffe** will lead a discussion to commemorate the 62nd anniversary of Gandhi's death by assassination. 3pm **Saturday, January 30th**, free at the Institute of World Culture, Concord House, 1407 Chapala St. SB.

<http://www.worldculture.org>



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