



The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

www.SBHumanists.org

FEBRUARY 2015

February Program: Jennifer Ouellette

Me, Myself and Why: What Science Has to Say About Who We Are and How We Got That Way

As diverse as people appear to be, all of our genes and brains are nearly identical. In *Me, Myself, and Why*, Jennifer Ouellette dives into the miniscule ranges of variation to understand just what sets us apart. She draws on cutting edge research in genetics, neuroscience, and psychology enlivened as always with her signature sense of humor-to explore the mysteries of human identity and behavior.



Jennifer is the author of four popular science books, including *Me, Myself and Why: Searching for the Science of Self* (2014). She specializes in physics and many related topics, with particular emphasis on how science intersects with popular culture, as well as science communication and outreach. Ouellette is the former director of the Science & Entertainment Exchange, an initiative of the National

Academy of Sciences (NAS) designed to connect entertainment industry professionals with top scientists and engineers to help the creators of television shows, films, video games, and other productions incorporate science into their work. She is also a prolific blogger, maintaining a blog at *Scientific American* called [Cocktail Party Physics](#), where she and other female contributors chat about the latest science news.

When: Saturday, February 21st, 2015

Where: Patio Room, Vista del Monte (**Park ONLY in spaces marked "VDM".**)

Time: Meet at 2:30pm for socializing and light refreshments provided by HSSB. Program begins at 3:00 pm

Cost: \$2 members/\$5 non-members

Dinner: Vista del Monte. \$22 includes tax and tip. RSVP to Judy Fontana, judithannfontana@yahoo.com or 967-7911.

For More Info: Call 769-HSSB.

Activities

Judy Fontana

We had a great turnout for the buffet following January's meeting. Let's keep it up! The buffet following the February 21st meeting consists of tossed salad with assorted dressings, whole wheat rolls, BBQ chicken, whitefish with red bell pepper pesto, mashed potatoes, bulgur pilaf, chef's vegetable blend, green beans, assorted desserts, and beverages and wine. All for the unbelievably low price of \$22 per person, tax and tip included. You won't find a better bargain in town nor will you find a more interesting crowd.

RSVP to judithannfontana@yahoo.com or call 967-7911. Looking forward to seeing you there!

President's Column:

Where Next?

Colin Gordon

Recently we have been reminded that life does not go on forever, by two events. We lost our co-founder member Dick Cousineau, who died on December 28, 2014. Dick played a major role in the founding of our Society and has been at the helm through most of our twenty-year history, guiding us through good times and fairly good times. His mellow baritone voice set the tone for many interesting meetings. A tribute to Dick Cousineau appears in the January issue of the *Secular Circular*.

On October 18, 2014, our speaker was Toni Broaddus, speaking on end-of-life choices. Here in California, unlike Oregon, Washington, Montana and Vermont, we do not have the right to death with dignity; to end our lives at a time of our own choosing if we are unfortunate enough to suffer from an illness that makes life unbearable.

Death with Dignity laws over the past two

decades in California have failed. The organization Compassion & Choices (C&C) is determined to change that over the next five years.

We all know that death is out there somewhere, but as long as we are in good health and life is treating us reasonably well, we suppose it to be far in the distance. We can even joke about it, most of the time anyway. The biology of it is fairly clear. Birth, childhood and on through the "seven ages of man," if you are lucky, and then the machine grinds to a halt in one way or another. "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player, That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, And then is heard no more." (*Macbeth*) But let's lighten up a little. "Always look on the bright side of life." (Monty Python)

Generally speaking, we humanists think that this mortal life is all we get, and there is nothing after that. But just think what we may be missing. Most religions have some belief in a life after death, usually a blissful afterlife that goes on for all eternity. That seems like a long time to sit around on clouds or whatever they do in heaven; it has been remarked that "Millions long for immortality who don't know what to do with themselves on a rainy Sunday afternoon." (Susan Ertz)

The Christian heaven is a busy place, full of angels, saints, cherubs, seraphs, and of course Jesus and his parents. To get in you have to be really virtuous and if you are not, you go to Hell where you burn and suffer for all eternity, a good place to steer clear of. But there are one or two other options. If you are not quite good enough, you may go to Purgatory, which is like a holding cell where you await the judge's decision; or Limbo, reserved for those who somehow missed out on being saved. Then there are further complications. The Millennium is a thousand-year period which, according to some sources, is followed by Resurrection on Judgment Day, when everyone is raised from the dead and their fate is decided

all over again, like a parole hearing. Theological debate continues with regard to what kind of resurrection is factual – either a spiritual resurrection or a material one with a restored human body. And no one seems to know what actually goes on in Heaven to keep us occupied all that time.

Islamic Heaven is best known as where true male believers are rewarded with 72 virgins (houris) on arrival. This concept is grounded in Quranic text which describe a sensual Paradise where believing men are rewarded in this way, the physical attractions of the houris being described in lurid detail. Conversely, women will be provided with only one man, and they “will be satisfied with him.” That is a sure case of gender discrimination and the NOW should get on it right away. The number 72 for each male also raises the question of where this very large number of young ladies are to be found. It would need at least a determined recruitment drive and there would still be a serious risk of running out entirely. Imagine arriving at the Islamic pearly gates only to be told that they are all out of houris.

It is customary among religious people to offer prayers to their respective gods when they feel that their end is approaching. We humanists tend to disparage the power of prayer but this anecdote may make us think again. A young man wanted to explore the nearby mountain range, so he asked the village priest if he could borrow his donkey. “Certainly,” said the priest, “but remember it is a church donkey; it will go when you say ‘Halleluyah!’ and to stop it you say ‘Amen.’” So with a loud “Halleluyah!” the young man set off for the mountains. He was riding a narrow trail, when he rounded a bend and saw that, just ahead, the trail had been swept away by a landslide. Now it ended in a sheer drop. “Whoa!” he said. “Stop!” The donkey kept going. He just could not remember the right word so, as a last resort, he looked up to heaven and prayed, “Please Lord, make this donkey stop. If you do, I will never sin again,

Amen.” The donkey stopped, only inches from the cliff edge. “Oooohh” he said, “Halleluyah!”

Here is a link to another read about the Christian heaven:

<http://www.alternet.org/10-reasons-christian-heaven-would-actually-be-hell>

Most people cannot bear sitting in church for an hour on a Sunday. How are they supposed to live somewhere very similar to it for an eternity?

– Mark Twain

Save the Date! HSSB 20th Anniversary

HSSB will celebrate its 20th Anniversary on Sunday, May 17th. Our party will be at Valle Verde with dinner and a special speaker, Tom Flynn. More information to come as the party planners get the details worked out. Interested in helping with the celebration? Contact Jean Olsen for information: jeanolsen@cox.net



**January Speaker:
Kendrick Frazier: Excursions in
Skepticism and Humanism: Some
Scientific and Moral Dimensions**

Robert Bernstein

Kendrick Frazier has been an important part of my life as he edited *Science News* and has been editor of *Skeptical Inquirer* since its start. I have been subscribing to both since graduating from college in 1980. I have every issue of *Skeptical Inquirer* going back to its original issue as the *Zetetic* (I bought the few back issues that came before my subscription).

These journals reflect the core values discussed in his talk. Skepticism and Humanism both come from the noblest human values. Skepticism asks us to let the highest standards of evidence guide our beliefs and world view, rather than letting our beliefs tell us which facts to accept. Humanism gives us an opportunity and a responsibility to shape our own future based on ethical values that we choose.

Both share a respect for critical thinking, science, reason and rationality; a distaste for dogma and a rejection of the supernatural.

"I have no need of that hypothesis" is credited to Pierre-Simon Laplace. Even if he never said it, it expresses how science views an intervening God.

Asimov, Sagan, Brownowski, Arthur C. Clarke, Stephen Jay Gould and Dawkins are among Frazier's heroes. He was able to meet them all.

And, especially Paul Kurtz, who founded all of the major publications of skepticism and humanism. (Side note: I subscribe to all of them!) Frazier went into greater depth on Kurtz' lasting achievements, especially the Center for Inquiry.

Shadows of Science: Pseudoscience and Antiscience in Modern America is Frazier's forthcoming book. He opens the book with some recent scientific discoveries:

How old is the universe? (13.8 billion years)

What is the universe made of? (Dark matter and energy mostly)

What caused the biggest mass extinction in Earth's history?

Where is the second tallest mountain in the solar system?

Can We Make Cancers Destroy Themselves?

What Do Our Molecules Look Like? (We can resolve ribosomes almost to the atomic level)

What are we made of? (90% of our cells are microbes)



HSSB President, Colin Gordon, on left, with our January speaker, Kendrick Frazier, on right. Photo by Robert Bernstein.

Yet, for each of these amazing discoveries based on painstaking research, there is a pseudoscience. An alternative universe with such claims as:

Earth is merely thousands of years old.

Humans arrived fully formed and did not evolve from other species.

UFO beings abduct people.

Stone monuments were built by ancient astronauts.

Planets affect us.
 Psychics solve crimes.
 Other than the four forces of physics guide us.
 Untested concoctions cure cancer and diabetes.
 Dowsing devices with no mechanisms find explosives.
 Remote viewers find terrorists.
 New energy sources, including perpetual motion machines, are suppressed by powers that be.
 When we die our lives continue on.
 Mediums can communicate with the dead.

That is pseudoscience, and it is often backed by scientific-looking claims. But there is also anti-science. This does not mimic science, but opposes it. It can be more pernicious. Anti-science is often well-funded. The Tobacco lobby was a good example. Doubt is their product. And climate change denial is the most important current example.

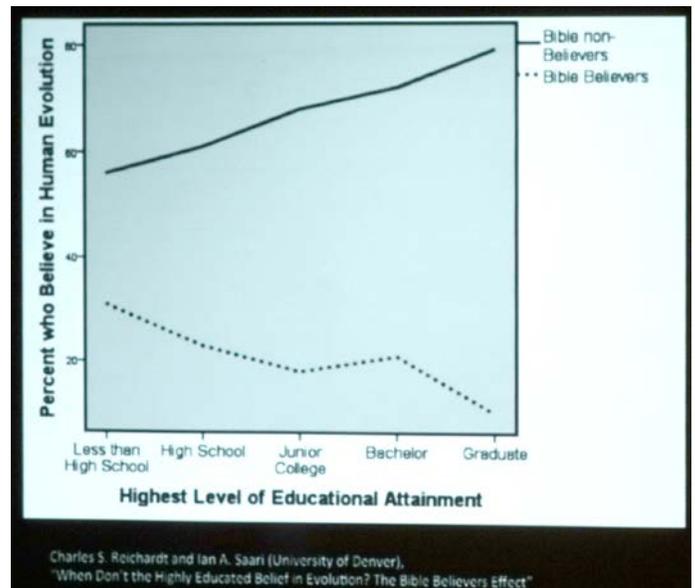
Not all humanists find this as troubling as skeptics do. Bogus “alternative medicine” is the current fad as astrology once was. It can affect public policy, as the current outbreak of measles from vaccination-refusers has shown.

“Would the world be better off without religion?” was the lead article in the July/August 2014 special issue of *Skeptical Inquirer* on Science & Religion. One hundred thirty books on Amazon Books deal with the issue. People on both sides are confident in the answer. Yet, the article showed, the scholarly literature doesn’t support such confidence.

Children naturally see purpose and agency in natural objects and phenomena. It is only as we mature that we outgrow this idea. But religion offers a sense of purpose, exciting stories and binds groups together. Is there a way to replace these benefits? Should we?

Frazier showed a most unsettling graph of the “Bible Believers Effect.” It turns out that

increased levels of education for Bible believers makes them less likely to believe in evolution.



Slide from Kendrick Frazier’s talk. Photo by Robert Bernstein.

The same effect is seen for climate change deniers. It seems that if one is committed to a certain view, education can increase rationalization rather than reason.

Interestingly, these beliefs are also very much subject to the framing of the question. Prefacing the question with, “According to the theory of evolution...” dramatically increased the percentage who agreed with the statement that humans evolved from other animal species, from 48% to 72%.

What does this mean? People know the science even if they choose to believe something else.

Climate change presents a stickier challenge: Many “skeptics” are also ideological anti-government libertarians. Michael Shermer (who spoke at HSSB) is such a person who was forced to accept climate change after first resisting it.

The evidence is ever more compelling. The year 2014 was the hottest year since records began

in 1880. Frazier presented long-term charts showing the powerful trend.

Climate science denial is not just about science. It is also a moral issue: If we are damaging the global environment, we have a responsibility to act.

“Satanic panic” in Africa is creating a revival of witch hunts and murders. Christian evangelizing has created a belief that traditional African beliefs are not just pagan, but are actually the work of the Devil. India has had some of this, too.

Faith healing is another case of real lives lost due to anti-science and pseudoscience.

Frazier ended with “The Higher Values of Skepticism” to show why these values are “congruent to the higher values of humanism.”

- Freedom of inquiry and expression at all levels;
- Science as the most reliable guide to truth about the natural world;
- A love of learning and questioning;
- Respect for human rights and dignity;
- The right to learn, and to study, and to investigate unfettered by any authoritarian interference;
- Free and open discussion of all issues;
- And the idea that hard-won new knowledge—while it always raises new issues and problems—is essential for continuing human progress.

He ended with two current examples of the challenges: Malala Yousafzi, shot by the Taliban for advocating education for girls. She is the youngest ever recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

And the case of the murdered journalists at *Charlie Hebdo* in France. “Je suis Charlie,” he said in closing.

FYI Judy Fontana

Following Ken Frazier’s talk in January, many people were asking what the term *teleology* or *teleological* meant, as Ken used the term frequently. My memory was of a circular argument. I was curious and looked it up. Here goes:

The Free Dictionary
teleology

1. The philosophical interpretation of natural phenomena as exhibiting purpose or design.
2. The use of ultimate purpose or design as a means of explaining phenomena.
3. Belief in or the perception of purposeful development toward an end, as in history.

Miriam-Webster Dictionary
teleology

1. a: The study of evidence of design in nature.
b. A doctrine explaining phenomena by final causes.
- 2: The fact or character attributed to nature or natural processes of being directed toward an end or shaped by a purpose.
- 3: The use of design or purpose as an explanation of natural phenomena.



Slide from Kendrick Frazier’s talk. Photo by Robert Bernstein.

Meet Your Board Members! (Part of a continuing series)

Suzanne Spillman, Secretary:



Meet up with Suzanne after a Saturday HSSB meeting and have a chat with her over a glass of wine.

An Apology and an Explanation Judy Fontana

In the middle of our January 17th meeting, many of us were suddenly asked to move our cars from the church parking lot. We apologize for the inconvenience this caused, and due to many of the comments I received, I feel that an explanation is in order. First of all, Vista del Monte is under no obligation whatsoever to provide us with any parking. As part of VDM's non-profit tax status, they are required to provide some types of services to the community. One of the ways they meet this obligation is to provide us with a FREE place to meet every month. The fact that we pay no rental fees for space means that we save a significant amount of money each year, which enables us to afford an incredible array of top-notch speakers throughout the year. In addition, VDM sets up the chairs before each meeting and they provide space for us to store

our audio-visual equipment between meetings, which means that our volunteers don't need to lug the equipment to and from each meeting, a great convenience.

I do not know what arrangement VDM has with the church regarding parking, but for our purposes it really does not matter. What we can do in the future is communicate with VDM before our meetings to make sure that parking is available in the church lot and if not, notify our members by e-mail to arrive earlier and to park on the street.

HSSB pays for the beverage set up before the meeting, and at this time Diane Krohn provides the cookies and is reimbursed for this. Following the meetings, VDM caters the buffet, which they provide at an incredibly low price (\$22), which includes food, tax, tip and wine, and we are provided with a delicious buffet.

In appreciation, HSSB makes a yearly donation to the VDM scholarship fund, which provides scholarships to the children of VDM staff. So next time you come into contact with any of the VDM staff, thank them for all of their hard work.

HSSB Movie Night

We invite you to join us for movie night every month on the Friday before the last Sunday (February is an exception!).

Enjoy a pot-luck supper and conversation beginning at 5:00 p.m., or just come for the movie at around 6:30 p.m. There will be salad and spaghetti, or soup and salad. Bring something ready to share. Everyone will be welcomed. We will be in Goleta at Madeline's house at **5:00 p.m. on February 27th** and March 27th. RSVP for the address: 806-681-1105, or mmoreaux@dock.net

On movie night, we also collect paperback books for donation to the jail's recreational library. The books should be paperback, in

good condition from well-known publishers. They should have no previous owner's names or notes written inside the books. Small markings could be erased or blacked out. There should be no underlines or page notes. No pornography or anything racially provocative. The inmates can borrow 2-4 books a week from the sheriff's recreational library. They like to read novels, westerns and murder mysteries, etc.

February's movie will be: *The Ledge*, a movie about religious belief, non-belief, and moral conflicts.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1535970/>

See you on Movie Night!

How Secular Family Values Stack Up **Phil Zuckerman**

(This article is excerpted from the *Los Angeles Times* -Ed.)

More children are "growing up godless" than at any other time in our nation's history. They are the offspring of an expanding secular population that includes a relatively new and burgeoning category of Americans called the "Nones," so nicknamed because they identified themselves as believing in "nothing in particular" in a 2012 study by the Pew Research Center

The number of American children raised without religion has grown significantly since the 1950s, when fewer than 4% of Americans reported growing up in a nonreligious household, according to several recent national studies. That figure entered the double digits when a 2012 study showed that 11% of people born after 1970 said they had been raised in secular homes. This may help explain why 23% of adults in the U.S. claim to have no religion, and more than 30% of Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 say the same.

So how does the raising of upstanding, moral children work without prayers at mealtimes and morality lessons at Sunday school? Quite well, it seems.

Far from being dysfunctional, nihilistic and rudderless without the security and rectitude of religion, secular households provide a sound and solid foundation for children, according to Vern Bengston, a USC professor of gerontology and sociology...

Read the rest of the article here:

<http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-0115-zuckerman-secular-parenting-20150115-story.html>

More Phil Zuckerman

"There's absolutely more atheists around today than ever before, both in sheer numbers and as a percentage of humanity... Security in society seems to diminish religious belief." Capitalism, access to technology and education also seems to correlate with a corrosion of religiosity in some populations."

"Humans need comfort in the face of pain and suffering, and many need to think that there's something more after this life, that they're loved by an invisible being... There will always be people who believe, and I wouldn't be surprised if they remain the majority."

- Phil Zuckerman, a professor of sociology and secular studies at Pitzer College in Claremont, California, who came to talk to the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara in July, 2010. Prof. Zuckerman and university professors from New Zealand, Canada, and around the world are quoted in a *BBC Future* online article on December 19th, 2014, entitled "*Will Religion Ever Disappear*".

<http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20141219-will-religion-ever-disappear>

Non-HSSB Events of Interest

Upcoming Events in California:

- February 8: Dr. Michael Shermer: *The Moral Arc: How Science Leads Humanity Toward Truth, Justice and Freedom*. Skeptics Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena.
<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/>
- February 15: Dr. PZ Myers: Darwin Day Lecture: *Bad Biology: How Adaptationist Thinking Corrupts Science*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles and Costa Mesa.
http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/darwin_day_lecture_bad_biology/
- March 1: Edward Larson: *George Washington and the Founders' Religion*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles.
http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/george_washington_and_the_founders_religion/
- March 29: Dr. Susan Pinker: *The Village Effect: How Face-to-Face Contact Can Make Us Healthier, Happier, and Smarter*. Skeptics Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena.
<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/>
- May 29-31: *In the Year 2525: Big Science, Big History, and the Far Future of Humanity*. A conference at Cal Tech, with speakers Jared Diamond, Donald Prothero, Lawrence Kraus, many more.
<http://www.skeptic.com/lectures/conferences/in-the-year-2525/>

Upcoming Events Outside of California:

- April 2-5: American Atheists 2015 National Convention. Speakers include Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Susan Blackmore, Matt Dillahunty, Jennifer Michael Hecht, Eddie Tabash, Dave Silverman, many others. Memphis, TN.
<http://atheists.org/convention2015>

HSSB Contact Information

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David Echols	Roger Schlueter
Judy Fontana	Pat Ward
Diane Krohn	Mary Wilk

Newsletter Editor:

Diane Krohn

djkrohn@cox.net

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. At meetings, a donation of \$2 from members and \$5 from non-members is appreciated. First-time visitors are welcome on a complimentary basis.

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

To join HSSB, please send your contact information and a check for your membership dues to HSSB, PO Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130, Attn: Mary Wilk. For membership information contact Mary Wilk at 967-3045, or mwilk@cox.net.

Copies of this newsletter are posted on the HSSB website. Photos are on the website and available via the link
<http://picasaweb.google.com/Humanist.Society.of.Santa.Barbara>

See us on Facebook::



HSSB Calendar

Tuesday February 17: Board Meeting: 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

Saturday February 21: Monthly Meeting: Jennifer Ouelette speaking on *Me, Myself and Why: What Science Has to Say About Who We Are and How We Got That Way*; the Patio Room at Vista del Monte. Meet at 2:30 p.m. for socializing and light refreshments. Talk starts at 3:00 p.m. Dinner after the talk at Vista del Monte.

Sunday February 22: (and the last Sunday of every month), 10 a.m., **Secular Sunday Brunch** for humanists, atheists, agnostics, skeptics, freethinkers, singles, couples and families without religion. No cover charge; membership not required. Pay only for your food, drink and tips. Cody's Cafe, 4898 Hollister Ave. in the Turnpike Center, Goleta in the room to the right as you enter the restaurant. For information phone Board member, Mary Wilk at 805-967-3045.

Friday February 27: HSSB Movie Night: We will be watching *The Ledge*. Meet at 5:00 p.m. at Madeline's house. Bring a potluck dish to share and a couple of paperback books for donations to the jail. Call Madeline for information and directions: 805-681-1105.

Tuesday March 17: Board Meeting: 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

Saturday March 21: Monthly Meeting: Ryan Bell, former Seventh-Day Adventist pastor, who spent a year as an atheist and emerged as a non-believer; the Patio Room at Vista del Monte. Meet at 2:30 p.m. for socializing and light refreshments. Talk starts at 3:00 p.m. Dinner after the talk at Vista del Monte.



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