



The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

www.SBHumanists.org

APRIL 2015

April Program:

Ann Reid

The Science Denial Playbook

**What we can learn from debates on evolution and climate change;
the tactics that all science denialists use**

Science denial in the classroom, by the media, by politicians and others has far-reaching implications for society's perception of science, scientists and how science influences our lives. **Ann Reid** is executive director of the National Center for Science Education (NCSE), a not-for-profit organization that defends the teaching of evolution and climate science in the public schools from Science Deniers.



Ann holds a B.A. from Simon's Rock Early College in Massachusetts, and an M.A. from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. Her scientific background is in molecular biology.

For many years she worked for the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, as a lead member of the team that sequenced the 1918 influenza virus. She later served on the National Research Council's Board on Life Sciences where she oversaw a number of reports that explored the potential future of biology research, including "The New Science of Metagenomics," "The Role of Theory in Biology," and "A New Biology for the 21st Century."

Before joining NCSE in 2014, she was Director of the American Academy of Microbiology where she oversaw its colloquium program on cutting edge microbiology research. She spearheaded the creation of "FAQ" reports that provided easy to understand answers to questions about microbiology topics of interest to the public such as the microbiology of beer, and adult vaccination.

When: Saturday, April 18th, 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

Donation: \$2 members/\$5 non-members. Students with ID are free.

Optional Buffet Dinner: Vista del Monte. \$25 includes tax and tip. RSVP to Judy Fontana, judithannfontana@yahoo.com or 967-7911.

For More Info: Call 769-HSSB (769-4772)

Activities

Judy Fontana

After many years of our after-meeting buffet dinner costing the ludicrously low price of \$22, Vista del Monte has finally had to increase the cost to \$25 per person, which still includes their great buffet, tax, tip and wine. We have been expecting the increase for some time so this came as no surprise. They have had to increase the price to their residents as well. Our next meeting and dinner buffet will be on April 18th. The menu is unavailable at this time. As soon as I know I will let you know. In the meantime, you can still make reservations: judithannfontana@yahoo.com or call 967-7911.

Just a friendly reminder that the annual Summer Solstice Picnic will be held on Sunday, June 21st at Stow Grove Park in Goleta. It is Father's Day as well, so we will be honoring all of you dads and granddads also.

President's Column:

Easter

Colin Gordon

It is Palm Sunday, the day when, according to our Christian friends, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey along a path strewn with palm leaves. It is the start of Holy Week in which Jesus is arrested, tried, convicted and crucified on Good Friday, and which culminates in his resurrection on Easter Sunday. As a small boy raised in the Church of England, I was given a small cross made of palm leaf on that day to mark the occasion. Those were simpler times when young people accepted the beliefs of their elders without asking too many questions.

But then science arrived in my school curriculum and I discovered a new kind of truth, one that exposes itself to criticism and correction, and to complete revision if necessary. Newton's laws of motion, Darwin's

theory of evolution, Mendeleev's periodic table; these were my new inspiration. These I could believe in. Not just the facts themselves but the scientific method, the way mysteries are approached and resolved. Prompted presumably by the Devil, doubts of the Bible stories began to surface.

There is no doubt that the story of Easter is fraught with inconsistencies and some direct contradictions (see for example *Jesus, Interrupted*, by Bart D. Ehrman). The accounts of Jesus' death on the cross in the gospels of Mark and John differ widely. Mark was probably the first gospel written, about 40 years after Jesus' death, and it recounts his journey to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of Passover (Mark: 11-16). According to Mark, the Passover meal is eaten, Jesus is betrayed by Judas Iscariot and then is tried and crucified on the same day. According to John, who wrote his gospel some 25 years after Mark, the timing is quite different as are many of the events leading up to the crucifixion. (John: 13 - 19).

But although details may differ, we can accept that it did take place. It is the next chapter that causes real difficulty for the inquiring mind. After death, Jesus' body was placed in a tomb with a large stone blocking the entrance. About two days later it was found that the stone had been moved and the body had disappeared. It was a miracle. Jesus had been restored to life (resurrected) and subsequently appeared to various people, at various times according to which gospel you read. How can that be? What would Sherlock Holmes have made of these clues? Perhaps that Jesus was not really dead but unconscious and possibly comatose, and his followers had taken him from the tomb and revived him. A miracle would be low on his list of possibilities.

Even more challenging is the doctrine that his death atoned for our sins. There are two kinds of sin, we are told, original sin which we inherited from Adam, and actual sins, those we

personally commit. How we can be held responsible for an unfortunate incident in the Garden of Eden is not clear, but it only takes Baptism to clear that one and all others committed before then. Not a bad deal, but after that we are on our own. So the resurrection does not forgive all our sins. If it had, we could just go on sinning and all would be forgiven. But I suspect that people who commit sins, especially the really big ones, don't care much about forgiveness anyway and just go on their merry way.

The scientific method is the Humanists' path to the truth but there are casualties on the way, including some of our favorite Bible stories that I used to enjoy in the days of innocence. But that's progress. It is the cross we have to bear.

March Speaker:
Ryan Bell:
A Year Without God
Robert Bernstein

Ryan Bell was passionate about religion as a child, attending Seventh-day Adventist church that his parents had joined. In retrospect, he might have gone into philosophy if he hadn't grown up in a religious home.

Ryan made it clear that no one forced him. His experiences were positive, especially with the youth group run by his uncle.

Ryan excelled in math and science, but also in English. He really was interested in everything and still is. Seeing the first Space Shuttle launch inspired him to want to be an astronaut.

In college he went into astrophysics and math to try to fulfill that mission. But he realized he is too much of a people person to stay in the lab. So he took the English route.

He had been attending Pacific Union College, a Seventh-day Adventist school near Napa. He

was fascinated with stories of The Quest. Homer. Exodus. Voltaire's *Candide*. A caring professor created an independent study program for him and had him read literature designed to soften his views.

He went on to be a pre-med. Then a theologian. Then a pastor. He transferred to Weimar Institute between Sacramento and Tahoe. It was even more fundamentalist. This was the pinnacle of his fundamentalism.

He became a pastor at age 22 in the Philadelphia suburbs, serving three churches.

He met people who didn't fit in his theological box. One member mowed the church lawn for free, but the member felt he had to quit because he couldn't quit smoking. Ryan realized he prioritized people over ideology.

Ryan realized at that moment that is ridiculous! And realizing one ridiculous thing is a slippery slope!



L to R: HSSB President Colin Gordon and our March speaker Ryan Bell. Photo by Robert Bernstein.

After four years, he went to the seminary and almost lost his faith there. They were not teaching thinking. It was more like a vocational school. How to run a church, officiate weddings, handle conflict resolution.

He went back to being a pastor in Pennsylvania. In Pennsylvania, he was frustrated with the mundane aspects of running a church, especially money issues and recruiting new members.

A nearby Baptist church sign on a hot day read "You Think It's Hot Out Here?" Do they really think such fear of Hell will entice people?

It was around this time in 2003 he realized he would not have become a Christian if he hadn't inherited it.

On 9/11 he was living just three hours from the Shanksville, PA, crash site. On that day he was driving to New York and got a call to turn around and come home. The church signs read "God Bless America." He realized that is like "God Bless the Philadelphia Eagles." Why would God pick one team?

He started to have openly LGBT members. He was thrilled when he realized he had baptized a lesbian!

In March 2013, he was asked to resign over not paying 10% of his income back to the Church. It seemed silly that they would pay him and force him to "voluntarily" hand the money back.

The President of the Regional Conference of the Church asked, "Don't you think you have outgrown the Seventh-day Adventist Church?" Is the Church something to be outgrown? Does one graduate? Get a certificate?

For Ryan, the rules are changeable based on the people. He realized he was by nature a liberal thinker. For conservatives if the rule says no gays, too bad for the gays.

He tried other churches and found he didn't like them either. He went to museums, hiking, the beach and enjoyed it! But he wanted something more. A friend saw him in a Pasadena bookstore with questioning books.

Ryan impulsively said, "Maybe I'll live the next year as an atheist!"

It took off quickly. He created www.yearwithoutgod.com and cross posted to the *Huffington Post*. CNN called. Ryan knew he had a lot to learn. He knew people of many religions, but nothing of atheists. He was invited to The Amazing Meeting and other skeptic conferences.

He assumed that during that year he would read views for and against God and religion. And that he would eventually find the pro-God arguments convincing and would regain his faith. That is not how things turned out. He is starting a new project "Life After God". He doesn't want to rip away anyone's faith. He just wants to encourage people to ask questions and dig deeper.

People contact him who are not "out" yet. Often being out is not as bad as expected. But in the South and in some families it can still be a big deal.

Giving up these beliefs is not really a loss. They were always false promises. Like a store jacking up prices and giving a discount.

He said he would rather live with a painful truth than with a comforting lie. As the Good Book says "The truth will set you free." Let's indeed hope he can inspire others to understand and follow his path to freedom.

Please note: The full version of this article is posted on EdHat at:

<http://www.edhat.com/site/tidbit.cfm?nid=150466>

Note to HSSB members and other interested readers: You can listen to Ryan's talk on our website:

<http://www.santabarbarahumanists.org/article/6825-audio-of-march-2015-ryan-bell-a-year-without-god>

Freedom to Discriminate: How “Religious Liberty” Bills Hurt Us All

Merrill Miller

(Excerpted from TheHumanist.com)

Last week, humanists were outraged when Indiana Governor Mike Pence signed a bill that would, among other things, allow businesses to deny service to same-sex couples looking to get married. Hopefully, pressure from numerous large companies to boycott the state as a result of the legislation will encourage government officials to repeal the new law, but the governor has indicated such a reversal is unlikely.

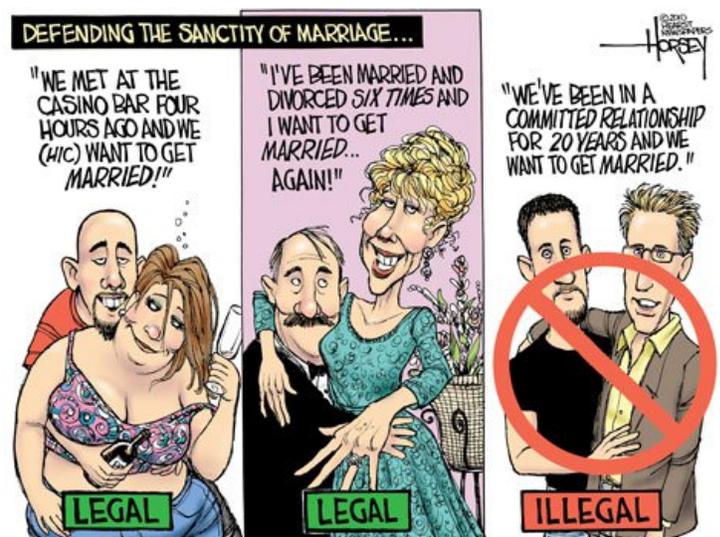
Indiana is not the only state, however, to grant special religious privileges to those looking to discriminate against customers or employees. Currently, nineteen other states have enacted their own versions of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) that are almost identical to the federal legislation of the same name. Nominally, these statutes are meant to ensure that the government does not interfere with religious traditions, but in practice, these laws all too often let religious individuals burden others with their personal beliefs and morality.... As marriage equality is becoming legalized in more and more states, those who would like to continue to see LGBTQ individuals restricted to second-class citizenship are cloaking their prejudice in religious liberty legislation.

This religious privileging could also negatively impact humanists and nontheists, and some people who have been attempting to restrict the right of same-sex couples to marry are not shy about expressing their contempt for those who lack a belief in a god. Earlier this month, the Oklahoma state legislature passed a measure that would block marriage licenses in the state, leaving clergy as couples' only option for officiating marriages. The legislation is meant to attack marriage equality for same-sex couples, but State Representative Todd Russ, who authored the bill, has also indicated

disdain for atheists' marriages...Clearly, Rep. Russ and those who share his views see atheists' and humanists' marriages as less than the marriages of religious individuals, and by extension, they seem to view humanists and atheists themselves as second-class citizens.

Despite their rhetoric meant to sound as though they are extending liberty, the religious freedom bills popping up in states across the country actually do the opposite. They restrict the liberty of same-sex couples who wish to partake of the same services offered to opposite-sex couples. They also allow businesses to discriminate against other marginalized groups, such as women, people of color, and atheists and humanists. Instead of ensuring that the government remains religiously neutral, these bills actually grant certain fundamentalist religious groups special privileges and allow them to hide their prejudices behind masks of “liberty” and “freedom.” It's up to humanists to be vocal about the true intentions of these bills and to unmask their proponents as advocates of discrimination, not freedom.

<http://thehumanist.com/commentary/freedom-to-discriminate-how-religious-liberty-bills-hurt-us-all>





Interested in becoming an HSSB board member? The Board election is coming up and there are open spots for the 2015/2016 fiscal year. Your reward will be learning more about your Society and the opportunity to have input on speakers, activities, and policies.

Contact President Colin Gordon or any other Board member for more information. You can also attend a Board meeting for a full immersion experience! The next Board meeting is Tuesday, April 14th at Mary Wilk's house.

*Disclaimer: Robert Redford and Katherine Ross are not Board members. If Paul Newman were alive, I'm sure he would be a supporter!

Creationists make it sound like a 'theory' is something you dreamt up after being drunk all night.
 — Isaac Asimov

HSSB Movie Night

In April, the HSSB movie night will be **Friday, April 24th**, at Marty Shapiro's home in Goleta. All HSSB members and interested friends are invited to join us.

Enjoy a pot-luck supper and conversation beginning at 5:00 p.m.; bring something ready to share. Or just come for the movie at around 6:30 p.m. RSVP for the address and directions: Phone: 968-0478 or email Marty or Marian: martinshapiro@cox.net or marianshapiro@cox.net

The April movie will be *Life's a Breeze*. Nan is a good old-fashioned Irish hoarder. The Dublin resident has never been much trouble to her neighbors and generally keeps to herself. Her unemployed son Colm joins forces with his other family members to give Nan a gift she could never give herself—a clean house. Niece Emma takes Nan out for the day, and they return to a spotless home. Old Chinese takeout menus, newspapers, broken kitchen appliances and an outdated TV: all gone. So is the old mattress Nan has been sleeping on for decades. And shoving her money in because she doesn't trust the banks. That's right: there's a million Euros in a mattress now winding its way through the Dublin recycling system. A wacky journey to find it ensues.

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.

Non-HSSB Events of Interest

Upcoming Events in California:

- April 19: Dr. Phil Zuckerman: *Living the Secular Life: New Answers to Old Questions*. Skeptics Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena.
<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/>
- April 19: Yvette d'Entremont: *Bad Health Science in the 21st Century*. CSI West, Los Angeles and Costa Mesa.
http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/bad_health_science_in_the_21st_century/
- May 3: Wendy Thomas Russell: *If You Teach Critical Thinking, Will Your Kids Become Secular?* CSI West, Los Angeles.
http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/if_you_teach_critical_thinking_will_your_kids_become_secular/
- May 3: Orange County Skeptics Freethought Alliance Conference. Speakers include Ryan Bell, Hemant Mehta, and others. Fullerton.
<http://freethoughtalliance.org/fta/annual-conference/admission/>
- 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:

- May 7-10: American Humanists Association 74th Annual Conference. Denver, CO.
<http://conference.americanhumanist.org/>
- June 11-15: Reason for Change: A CFI International Conference. Speakers include Tom Flynn, Kendrick Frazier, Harriet Hall, David Gorski, Phil Zuckerman, and many others. Buffalo, NY.
<http://reasonforchange.centerforinquiry.net/>

HSSB Contact Information

Officers:

President: Colin Gordon

colin3@juno.com

Secretary: Suzanne Spillman

urbanfollies@gmail.com

Treasurer: Ron Kronenberg

seelberg@cox.net

Board Members at Large:

Wayne Beckman	Anne Rojas
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. Students are free with a Student ID.

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 April 14: Board Meeting: 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

Saturday April 18: Monthly Meeting: Anne Reid, the new executive director of the National Center for Science Education will talk about the Science Denial Playbook; 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.

Friday April 24: HSSB Movie Night: We will be watching *Life's a Breeze*. Meet at 5:00 p.m. at Marty's house. Bring a potluck dish to share and a couple of paperback books for donations to the jail. Call Marty for information and directions: 805-968-0478.

Sunday April 26: (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.

Tuesday May 12: Board Meeting: 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

Saturday May 16: Monthly Meeting: Tony Ortega, author of *The Unbreakable Miss Lovely*, will be joined by Paulette Cooper and they will discuss the Church of Scientology's "Fair Game" retaliation schemes; 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.



Humanist Society of
Santa Barbara
PO Box 30232
Santa Barbara, CA 93130