



The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

www.SBHumanists.org

NOVEMBER 2015

November Program: John Foran: Finding Solutions to Global Warming and Climate Change – The Greatest Existential Threats That Humanity Faces in the 21st Century

John Foran's presentation will briefly lay out the arguments that climate scientists and sociologists alike have made, namely, that global warming and climate change in general are the most pressing problems of the twenty-first century, of an order never before faced by humanity, and thus an existential threat to civilization and life as we know it. We need to make deep changes to our economy, culture, and political system *now* – in the next 10-15 years at most -- because the longer we put this daunting and massive project off, the harder it gets to manage it in the future.



The presentation will conclude by introducing the global climate justice movement, the best hope we have of forcing global economic elites and political power holders to make these changes, and ways in which we can become involved in this epic challenge!

John Foran is Professor of Sociology and Environmental Studies at UC Santa Barbara, where he has taught since 1989. He is a founding member of the Climate Justice Project and co-founding director of the International Institute of Climate Action and Theory. He is active in the climate justice movement both locally and globally, and is a member of Santa Barbara 350.org, the Green Party of Santa Barbara County, and System Change Not Climate Change.

When: Saturday, November 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

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

Optional Buffet Dinner: Dinner buffet at Vista del Monte. \$25 includes tax and tip. RSVP to judithannfontana@yahoo.com or 805-967-7911.

For More Info: Call 805-769-4772 (769-HSSB)

Activities

Judy Fontana

November's meeting will take place at Vista del Monte on November 21st. The menu for the buffet following the program is: tossed green salad with assorted dressings, artisan bread, roasted New York strip with horseradish sauce, baked salmon with dill sauce, herb roasted potatoes, fiesta rice, fresh vegetable blend, cauliflower with cheese sauce and assorted yummy desserts. Wine is included as well. With tax and tip the cost is \$25 which is a great bargain. Last month we had 28 people who enjoyed some very lively conversations. Come join the fun.

RSVP to judithannfontana@yahoo.com or call 967-7911.

Don't forget to mark your calendars for the annual Winter Solstice party to be held on December 12th at the Encina Royale clubhouse in Goleta. Vista del Monte will cater the event as they did last year, and the food was outstanding. More details to come next month.

President's Column:

Affliction

Colin Gordon

With any luck, we settle into a nice routine and life goes smoothly without interruption. But sometimes we are jerked out of it by an unexpected event that throws us into confusion and anxiety. Our religious friends have their various gods to back them up, if they choose to do so, but the humanist is alone with no supernatural support system. So the question arises as to how a humanist copes with adversity. I was recently unlucky enough to contract a strange affliction; a yawning black hole appeared to open before me and I braced myself for the unknown. Soon I became a vegetable – a couch potato to be exact – but, thanks to the marvels of modern medicine, I soon rejoined the animal kingdom and life is

returning to near normal. The event will not make medical history but it did raise questions and gave time to think them over.

The ancients grappled with these problems in a different context. In the book of Job, written about four thousand years ago, Satan contends that no one serves Yahweh except for selfish reasons. But Yahweh disagrees and presents Job, a righteous man who “fears God and shuns evil,” to counter Satan's claim. In order to prove to Satan that Job's loyalty is not based on material reward, Yahweh permits Satan to take from Job all of the material benefits Job has received and to afflict him with the most severe and excruciating pain. Because he is conscious of no wrongdoing, he sees no justice in the way he must suffer. But he never complains. His only response is “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.”

Finally, Job acknowledges the justice of Yahweh and repents for all that he said in his own defense. After this admission, Yahweh recompenses Job by returning to him all the material wealth that was taken away from him and even doubling the amount of property Job originally possessed. It's a testament to Job's faith but that is a quality humanists do not profess.

We humanists have no invisible man in the sky, no super-parent to console us and see us through. Our misfortunes cannot be ascribed to a disagreement between God and Satan. Instead of control from above, we believe that our physical fate is determined by the complex chemistry of proteins, that our antibodies are locked in mortal combat with the attacking antigens and the outcome is unaffected by spirituality or any mental process.

A friend suggested that I offer up a prayer. So I decided to give it a try but had a hard time remembering how to do it. Did I have to face east, prostrate myself, talk out loud or what? I

decided that if the invisible man is all-knowing, he will have no trouble following those nerve impulses through the synapses and along the dendrites and would know what I was thinking. Surely he has access to all my memory banks, folders and files, except for the Free-Will section of course, which is password protected, so I could just think it. I relaxed in my armchair, faced the TV and politely requested a rapid recovery. Presumably the message ascended to heaven and was stored on one of the celestial servers, but I had an uncomfortable feeling that it would be reviewed at the next meeting of the Prayer Evaluation Committee, marked as invalid for lack of reverence, and eternally deleted from the heavenly hard drive. But it worked! From then on the trend was up. Maybe those powerful little pink pills helped but we will never know for sure.

Fortunately, the big black hole has turned out to be just a pot-hole in the road of life which I bounced out of, hopefully without tire damage. But it had some profound effects. What had seemed like trivia before now became more real. The sun shines brighter, the grass is greener (or browner) and all is right with the world. So how does a humanist comport his/her self in hard times? I think we rely on our own fortitude, the support of family and friends, and some good old-fashioned luck. Maybe Maria in *The Sound of Music* got it right:

When the dog bites, when the bee stings,
When I'm feeling sad, I simply
remember
My favorite things and then I don't feel
so bad.

Vistas Lifelong Learning Ray Stone

The following Vistas Lifelong Learning classes are coming up:

- Crises in Higher Education (November

10, 17, 24)

- Electing Presidents: Great Elections in American History (November 30, December 7 and 14)
- The Wright Brothers (December 1, 8 and 15)
- The First Transcontinental Railroad (January 4, 11, 18, and 25)
- Damming the Colorado (January 13)
- Strategic Architecture of Victory & Defeat - WWII, Korea, Vietnam & Iraq (January 20 and 27; February 3 and 10)

For more information about these and other classes, check out VistasLifelongLearning.org, or email vistas@silcom.com or call 805-967-6030.



“When I was a kid I used to pray every night for a new bicycle. Then I realised that the Lord doesn't work that way so I stole one and asked Him to forgive me.”

--Emo Philips

**October Program:
Meeting of Minds 2015
Robert Bernstein**

Meeting of Minds 2015 brought a full house for two hours with Charles Darwin (Hugh Smart), Galileo Galilei (Paul Nay), Emily Dickinson (Meredith McMinn), Attila the Hun (Ray Stone) and host Steve Allen (Tom Mates). The casting was ideal and performances were brilliant.



L to R: Charles Darwin (Hugh Smart); Galileo Galilei (Paul Nay); Emily Dickinson (Meredith McMinn); Steve Allen (Tom Mates); and Attila the Hun (Ray Stone). Photo by Robert Bernstein.

Here are some highlights:

Darwin freely admitted he did not invent evolution. The main idea: God didn't invent each species but rather that all living things have a common descent. He thinks his view and that of Galileo makes for a more creative God.

Dickinson was not known as a poet in her time. She was shy and never appeared in public.

Attila said it is hard to know where any people come from. History is full of invasions and mixing of populations. "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." He advised Darwin not to be so critical of conquerors. The British were not pacifists and tens of millions were killed in 20th century wars.

As a child, Darwin read *The Natural History of Selborne*, by a clergyman named Gilbert White. It got him interested in observing birds, beetles, minerals and nature in general.

His doctor father wanted him to be a doctor, but it held no interest for him. He was fortunate to be invited to sail on the surveying ship, *Beagle*, by George Peacock. His father was opposed, but his uncle persuaded his father to let him go.

Those five years filled Darwin's notebooks with data and his mind with ideas. He realized fossils in rocks were millions of years old, which was revolutionary. He also appreciated the enormous diversity of living things and what forces may have caused that diversity.

Breeding of domestic animals was known in his time, but when he read *Population* by Malthus, he got the idea of natural selection without human intervention. He wrote up his ideas but did not publish them for many years. It took Alfred Russel Wallace coming up with a similar idea to force Darwin into publication.

Dickinson lived in a quiet New England village. It was her refuge from a world full of turmoil. She could see nature out the window. She was ambivalent about publication, but a few poems were published in her time. Steve Allen admired her poem about butterflies swimming through the air. Her later life, though, was off limits for discussion.

Galileo's family was from Florence but he went to college in Pisa. At that time, Aristotle was seen as the beginning and end of all learning. He was just human. Aristotle thought heaven was perfect and Earth was imperfect, and that the moon and sun were the same size. Attila disagreed, and said certainly they are. Galileo warned of the deception of common sense.

Galileo observed an invention of Don Giovanni de'Medici and saw its flaws. He was right, but

seeing the flaw itself made him an enemy and he left to Padua which was under the governance of Venice.

In 1610 he published *Message from the Stars*, announcing both the invention of the telescope and his support of the theories of Copernicus. Interestingly, while academics criticized him, he had support from many churchmen.

But the Dominicans saw themselves as the philosophy police. The Bishop of Fiesole wanted Galileo and Copernicus imprisoned. He was surprised to learn Copernicus was long dead!

Galileo had no problem with scripture, only with its literal interpretation. You would have a God with hands and ears! But you can't argue with the facts of nature.

He saw the Inquisition resulting from turmoil among Christians - the Protestant Reformation, the approaching Thirty Years' War, Christians killing Christians. The rulers and many people wanted unanimity on religious matters for security.

Aquinas had said the soul was more important than the body. So it was easy to justify bodily punishments in order to save souls.

The Jesuit Cardinal Bellarmine had ordered Giordano Bruno to be burned at the stake in 1600 for his own revolutionary cosmological ideas. Yet Bellarmine's own book on politics, titled *Controversies* was banned. In 1616 Bellarmine announced Galileo had submitted, and he enjoyed eight years of peace.

When his friend Cardinal Maffeo Barberini became Pope Urban VIII in 1623, Galileo broke his silence. But in 1633 he was convicted. Urban had become more interested in his own power than in spiritual leadership.

Urban did see to it that during his trial Galileo was placed under house arrest, complete with servant, rather than in jail. In the end he was convicted and sent to prison. His books were forbidden by the Church until 1822! In 1893 Pope Leo XII made his teachings part of official Church doctrine!

Attila made it all the way to the gates of Rome in 451 and then halted. He said his armies were sick, and he hoped to marry the daughter of the Eastern Emperor. He also was impressed with Pope Leo I who came out to meet him. But Leo's arguments did not save him from attack a year later by Genseric, king of the Vandals.

Dickinson wondered to Darwin if people really want to hear the truth. After her father died, she never left her family property. Attila was astonished at the contrast to his own travels.

Allen asked her what she thought of the women's liberation movement. "Obviously women deserve to be paid at the same rate as men if they do the same work. And no one, man or woman, should have less than equality before the law," she answered.

Men and women complement each other and are not competitors in her view. She sees loving another as crucial to understanding yourself. She suspects people don't really want originality. They want what is familiar.

Galileo was gifted in many ways, but his primary passion was mathematics. His father thought this was a waste and wanted him to be a doctor.

Allen noted that all of these people on stage had domineering fathers.

Galileo noted the regularity of a swinging lamp as a teen. The same period of swing even as the swing got shorter. He timed it with his own pulse. He didn't invent. He observed.

At the university in Pisa he got into trouble for finding fault with Aristotle's math and physics. He dropped objects of different weights from the Leaning Tower of Pisa and observed they fell at the same rate. His observations did not win praise, but anger. He was forced to go to Padua.

He used his telescope to see that the moon had craters and mountains, in contrast to Church teachings that it was a perfect sphere. The Church also believed all heavenly objects had to orbit the earth because that is where Christ had been born.

Attila and Darwin go on to debate. Attila thinks fat parents have fat children and likewise for muscles. Darwin explained that acquired characteristics are not passed on. But children may imitate the habits of their parents.

Attila could not imagine a frog's leg turning into a wing. Darwin explained that some changes are more probable than others. And change takes time. And we don't have to know the answer to every question raised by evolution or any other theory.

Bishop Wilberforce, who was a mathematician, in 1860 said he would "smash Darwin". Darwin was not there to argue. His "bulldog" Thomas Huxley did that for him. Huxley saw no shame in having an ape as an ancestor. He saw shame in a man who makes foolish claims by plunging into areas outside his area of expertise.

Attila challenges Dickinson's own sentimental view of nature. He points out the hypocrisy of her wearing leather shoes and eating animal products. He points out nature is full of brutality and killing.

Darwin agreed that nature is brutal and wasteful. But he pointed out that man is different. Man can improve conditions.

Attila is skeptical. He agreed that Christ had some good principles. But when Christians ruled vast territory they were brutal, oppressive and warlike invaders.

Galileo wondered of Dickinson how she wrote so much about love yet never married. She read a bit of a poem that, "We outgrow love, like other things..." She refused to say who her love poems were written to or for. She said it does not matter anymore than we need to know who was the subject of the Mona Lisa.

Note to HSSB members: You can listen to Meeting of Minds presentation on our website:
<http://www.santabarbarahumanists.org/article/7783-audio-of-oct-2015-meeting-of-the-minds>

The Humanities and the Brain Lecture Series at UCSB

A yearlong series, *The Humanities and the Brain*, is presented by the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center at UCSB. It will explore the brain from a variety of perspectives deriving from the humanities and fine arts, as well as from newer interdisciplinary fields such as neuroesthetics and neuroethics.

The series began in October and will continue through November and 2016.
<http://www.ihc.ucsb.edu/series/brain/>

Freethought Meetup Group and Camp Quest

A local freethought Meetup group was started in July 2014, organized by Rachael Quisel. They have both social and educational meetings. The website is here:
<http://www.meetup.com/freethought/>

Rachael is also on the Board of Directors for Camp Quest, a camp that offers traditional

summer activities and is particularly geared towards building a community for children from atheist, agnostic, humanist and other freethinking families. Camp Quest is open to children from ages 8 to 17, and has camps all over the U.S., including two in California, Nevada City and Wrightwood.

Currently, Camp Quest is trying to double the number of campers by the year 2020 with their Envision 2020 campaign. The Stiefel Freethought Foundation has awarded them a \$50,000 matching grant towards the 2020 vision that will double a gift. The campaign ends on December 31, 2015.

Information about Camp Quest:

<https://campquest.org/>

Information about donating:

<https://campquest.org/civicrm/contribute/tranfact?reset=1&id=38>

End of Life Option Act Becomes Law in California

On October 5, 2015, Governor Jerry Brown signed the End of Life Option Act! The legislation, which allows terminally ill Californians to request a medication to bring about a peaceful death if their suffering becomes unbearable, makes California the fifth state to authorize medical aid-in-dying.

In Gov. Brown's signing statement, he expressed his extensive deliberations over the historic bill: "In the end, I was left to reflect on what I would want in the face of my own death. I do not know what I would do if I were dying in prolonged and excruciating pain. I am certain, however, that it would be a comfort to be able to consider the options afforded by this bill. And I wouldn't deny that right to others. "

Read Gov. Brown's signing statement here:

https://www.gov.ca.gov/docs/ABX2_15_Signing_Message.pdf

Another Good Law Signed by Gov. Brown

Gov. Brown signed the Reproductive Fact ACT into law on October 9, which requires anti-abortion crisis pregnancy centers to post signs disclosing to their patients if they are medically licensed, and informing them the state provides low-cost family planning, abortion services and prenatal care. In other words, factual information.

The Reproductive Fact Act requires medically licensed facilities who primarily provide family planning or "pregnancy-related services" to post signs with this wording:

"California has public programs that provide immediate free or low-cost access to comprehensive family planning services (including all FDA-approved methods of contraception), prenatal care, and abortion for eligible women. To determine whether you qualify, contact the county social services office at [insert the telephone number]."

Unfortunately, two anti-abortion clinics have subsequently sued the California Attorney General, arguing that the signs violate their First Amendment rights.

Read more here:

<http://jezebel.com/california-crisis-pregnancy-centers-sue-over-medical-li-1736020701>

"God does not work in mysterious ways – he works in ways that are indistinguishable from his non-existence."

--Anonymous from the internet

Carl Sagan Day Diane Krohn

Carl Sagan Day is Monday, November 9th, the day of his birthday. Many groups celebrate Carl Sagan Day to commemorate his contributions to science, and his efforts in popularizing science. His many books, television appearances (most notably *Cosmos*) and NASA projects influenced a generation of thinkers.

Consider celebrating Carl Sagan Day by watching *Cosmos*, or perhaps reading one of his numerous books. *The Demon-Haunted World – Science as a Candle in the Dark* (1995) is one of my favorites, and is still very topical.

Some notable quotes from Carl Sagan:

“Somewhere, something incredible is waiting to be known.”

“We live in a society exquisitely dependent on science and technology, in which hardly anyone knows anything about science and technology.”

“It is far better to grasp the universe as it really is than to persist in delusion, however satisfying and reassuring.”

“If you wish to make an apple pie from scratch, you must first invent the universe.”



Ben Carson Proposed A Tax Plan Based on the Bible – Good Lord! Adam Chodorow

Excerpted from Slate.com, October 30, 2015.

Republican presidential candidate Ben Carson recently proposed a tax system “based on tithing, because I think God is a pretty fair guy.” The basic idea is that people would pay a set percent of their income in taxes, and most of the federal tax code’s current deductions and loopholes would be closed. Carson suggests that such a system is inherently fair and simple... During Wednesday night’s debate among the Republican primary candidates in Boulder, Colorado, Carson noted that his ideal rate might not be the biblically mandated 10 percent, but something closer to 15 percent.

Looking to the Bible for guidance on tax policy raises a host of questions, not the least of which is whether we should be turning to an ancient document to design a secular tax system for our modern world. For the sake of argument, however, let’s accept that we *should* look to the Bible. That leaves us with the more concrete questions of just what the Bible says about tax fairness and tithing, and whether a tax system based on tithing would be the panacea that Carson suggests. The answer is almost certainly no.

The Bible actually refers to a number of different taxes or tax-like practices that are divinely inspired, including the temple tax, the agricultural tithe, and nonagricultural tithing, the practice of giving 10 percent of one’s income to the poor. Each of these reflects a different conception of fairness...

Read the entire article here:
http://www.slate.com/articles/business/moneybox/2015/10/ben_carson_s_tax_plan_is_based_on_the_bible_good_lord.html

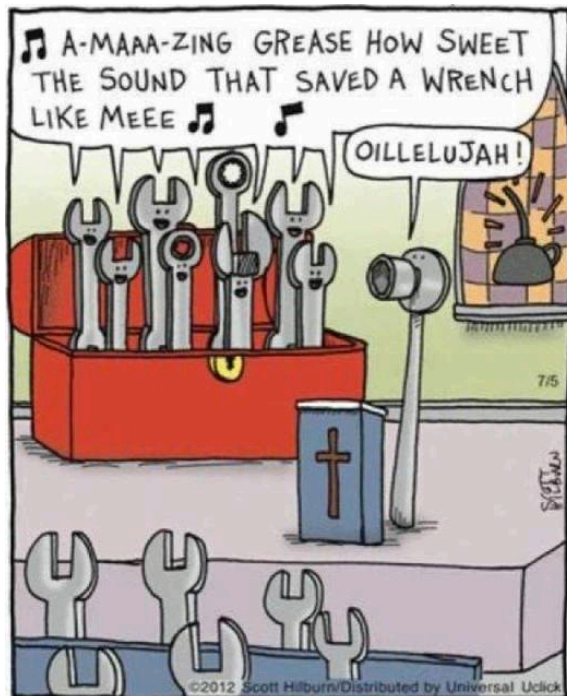
Non-HSSB Events of Interest

Upcoming Events in California:

- November 15: Jill Tarter: *The 21st Century: The Century of Biology on Earth and Beyond*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles.
http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/jill_tarter_11-15-15/
- December 6: "No God But Funny" Contest winning entries. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles.
http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/no_god_but_funny_contest_winning_entries/

Upcoming Events Outside of California:

- June, 2016: The Reason Rally, Washington, D.C.
<http://www.reasonrally.org/>



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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. 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 805-967-3045 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





Humanist Society of
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PO Box 30232
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HSSB Calendar

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

Saturday November 21: Monthly Meeting: John Foran speaking about climate change; 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. Optional buffet dinner after the talk at Vista del Monte.

Sunday November 29: (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 December 15: Board Meeting: 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

Saturday December 12: Monthly Meeting: Winter Solstice Party! Eat, drink, and be merry with friends. Encina Royale, 250 Moreton Bay Rd., Goleta.