



The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

www.SBHumanists.org

DECEMBER 2015



December Program: Winter Solstice Party

Come One, Come All to the 2015 HSSB Annual
Winter Solstice Party!



Date: Saturday, December 12th, 2015

Time: 6:00 PM

Place: Encina Royale Clubhouse
250 Moreton Bay Lane, Goleta

(North of 101, between Patterson and Fairview Aves.)

Fantastic Catered Buffet Dinner
Wassail Bowl* (see Page 2)
Fun, Friends, and Camaraderie

Cost: \$30 per person includes beverages, beer and wine, and tip.
RSVP an absolute must, by Monday, December 7th.

Contact judithannfontana@yahoo or call 967-7911 to reserve



Activities

Judy Fontana

Our December activity is the Winter Solstice Party on Saturday, December 12th. See Page 1 of this newsletter for details or call 967-7911 for information.

RSVP by Monday, December 7th. RSVP to judithannfontana@yahoo.com or call 967-7911.

*Wassail. **ORIGIN** Middle English *wes hael* "be in (good) health!" from the Old Norse *wes heill*. The drinking formula Wassail (and the reply drinkhail "drink good health") were probably introduced by Danish-speaking inhabitants of England, and then spread, so that by the 12th century, the usage was considered by the Normans to be characteristic of Englishmen.

President's Column:

The Two Cultures

Colin Gordon

We Humanists are committed to "...the use of critical reasoning, factual evidence and scientific methods of inquiry in seeking solutions to important human questions." On visiting one of our few remaining bookstores, I noticed that the section devoted to science is less than one tenth of the total stock and wondered just how well equipped we are to put this noble sentiment into practice. Most people have only a nodding acquaintance with science, a subject that was left behind long ago at high school and is now of little interest. For one thing it is so hard to understand. Who knows, or cares to know, the intricacies of thermodynamics, organic chemistry or differential equations?

But there is a small section of the population for which science is everything. The nerds of Silicon Valley, for example, are engrossed in their algorithms and, generally speaking, rarely come up for air to enjoy what many would

consider the real joys of life like art, music, literature and philosophy. So there are two cultures, the Sciences and the Arts, polar opposites which occupy two separate, although overlapping, domains.

Music seems to be in the area of overlap, many multifaceted people having both musical and scientific skills. The lead singer of the punk band the Descendants earned his Ph.D. in biochemistry at the University of Wisconsin. Past Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice played Mozart with the Denver Symphony at age 15 and is professor of political science at Stanford. But these are exceptionally talented people.

There is a major difference between the two cultures. Whereas a scientist has a general idea of what goes on in the arts - he can understand art and literature although not in the depth that a serious student can - an artist has almost no idea of the meaning or the methods of science. And it shows. The word "radiation" strikes fear into the hearts of many. But the difference between ionizing gamma rays and non-ionizing radio waves is lost on most people. Gamma rays can damage cell structure but radio waves are benign except that really powerful ones can cause heating as in a microwave oven. Recently, Southern California Edison switched to a meter that transmits data by radio waves to a central receiver, perfectly harmless but some considered putting up lead sheets for protection. No, that's for ionizing radiation

We sometimes hear the alarm, "There is lead in our drinking water." The amount of lead is actually less than 2 millionths of a gram per liter which is considered perfectly harmless, but the next question is: are you sure it is harmless? Well no, it is very difficult to prove a negative. But the poison is in the dose. A hundred aspirin will probably kill you, but two will cure your headache. The reasoning goes that if a hundred aspirin is 100% fatal, then if a thousand people each take a tenth of an aspirin, one will probably die. I don't think so. This is the Low

Dose Extrapolation controversy: Large doses of a chemical are fed to laboratory rats and then arithmetic is done to calculate the probability that a human will die from a microgram of it. The fact that it is not exactly zero arouses consternation and leads to a ban on the offending chemical. Genetic modification of plant and animal genomes to produce improved varieties is now under fire for possible unknown effects, although it has already increased the worldwide production of grains by a large factor.

Another problem resulting from scientific illiteracy is the politicization of science. Al Gore was the pioneer in this genre with his book, *An Inconvenient Truth*, and our recent speaker on Climate Change (yes, we know that 97% of scientists agree...) was a good example of the phenomenon. Instead of a scientific overview of the subject, he gave us a description of the campaign to popularize opposition to the burning of fossil fuels. A professor of sociology, he subjected his freshman class to indoctrination with the assignment to produce drawings expressing their consternation at climate change. There were also side-swipes at various scientific endeavors such as fracking, ably rebutted by our resident expert Don Margerum.

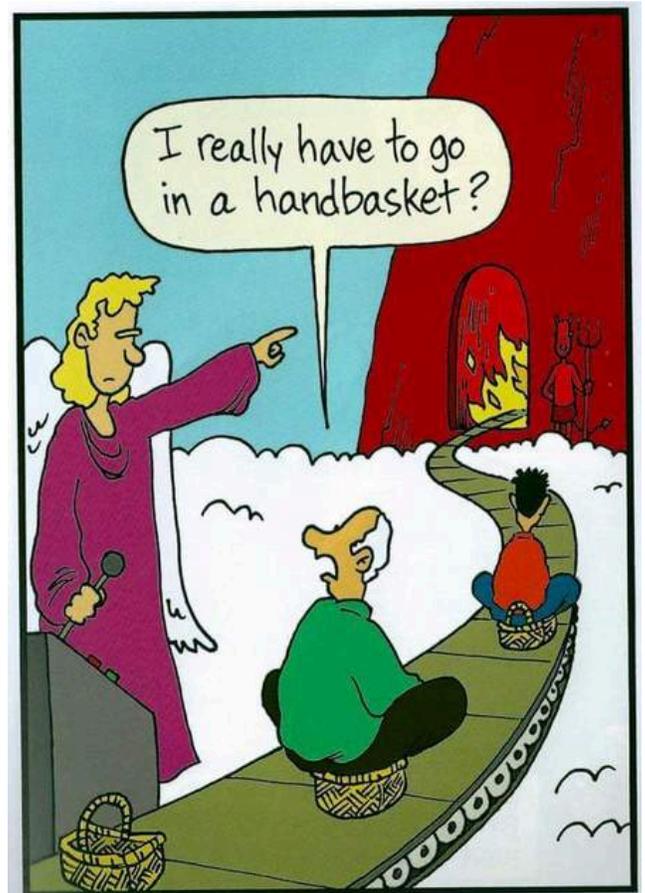
As a scientist I have belabored the inadequacies of non-scientists in this modern high-tech world. But I am acutely aware of my own failure to fully appreciate the great masterpieces of the arts. Our Society has members from all walks of life, arts and science. Perhaps we should try to be more inclusive and suggest that the humanities also have a role to play in the application of humanism to finding answers to human questions.

Vistas Lifelong Learning Ray Stone

The following Vistas Lifelong Learning classes are coming up:

- 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)
- Race to the Poles (February 2, 9, 16, 23; March 1, 6, 15, and 22).

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



November Program: John Foran

The write-up and photos for our November program and speaker, John Foran speaking on "Finding Solutions to Global Warming and Climate Change" will appear in the January 2016 issue of *The Secular Circular*.

In the meantime, you can listen to John Foran's presentation on our website: <http://www.santabarbarahumanists.org/article/7996-audio-of-nov-2015-talk-on-climate-change-by-john-foran>

Rally Bus to Reason Rally

The Reason Rally 2016 will be held in Washington, D.C. in June. There will be multiple Rally busses available for round-trip travel to the Rally. Unfortunately, none (so far) are located in California. The nearest location is Denver, CO, but that may change as the date gets closer. Check the site for updates: <http://rallybus.net/reason-rally>



The GOP's Proposed "Christian Test" for Syrian Refugees Dru Johnston

(Excerpted from Funny Or Die, November 24, 2015)

Jeb Bush came out recently saying he'd be open to allowing Syrian refugees into the United States if they can prove that they're Christian. Critics have come out against this saying that not only is it immoral to subjugate refugees to a "religious test," but it's also impossible to prove if someone is a Christian or not. Luckily, Funny Or Die has come across the proposed Christian test for Syrian refugees.

See the entire test here:

http://www.funnyordie.com/articles/b4b1743180/the-gop-s-proposed-christian-test-for-syrian-refugees?cc=S_d_&ccid=bfm98c.nyecit

DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION:
CHRISTIAN TEST

<p>1. Are you Christian?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<p>5. What's the color of your skin?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> White <input type="checkbox"/> Other	<p>8. If you are Christian you'll know it's a sin to lie, so are you Christian?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, I am Christian and I am not lying. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, I am Christian and I am lying because I'm Muslim.
<p>2. Are you lying?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<p>6. Life _____?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Begins at conception <input type="checkbox"/> It is a cereal first and foremost.	<p>9. TRICK QUESTION, LYING ISN'T A SIN. DID YOU LIE?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<p>3. Who's your favorite disciple?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Judas <input type="checkbox"/> Any of the others	<p>7. Seriously though, are you Christian?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, I already answered this one <input type="checkbox"/> No, I lied before but you caught me this time.	
<p>4. What's the best country in the world?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> America <input type="checkbox"/> Islam	<p>10. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING IS A CHRISTIAN?</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <input type="checkbox"/> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <input type="checkbox"/> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <input type="checkbox"/> </div> </div>	
<p>11. WHAT ARE THE MAIN COLORS OF CHRISTIANITY?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Red, White and Blue <input type="checkbox"/> Green	<p>12. WAS JESUS A CAPITALIST?</p> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No, he believed in terrorism.	

FUNNY OR DIE

Terror At Planned Parenthood: Facing The Consequences Of The Far Right's Lies

Rob Boston

(Excerpted from Wall of Separation, November 30, 2015)

In the wake of Friday's horrific shootings at a Planned Parenthood clinic in Colorado Springs, we're hearing calls to deescalate the rhetoric around the issue of abortion.

The implication is that both sides are reaching for rhetorical excess. The problem with this claim is that it's demonstrably untrue.

Pro-choice advocates have argued calmly in favor of reproductive choice for years. They've marshalled facts and figures. They have pointed out that Planned Parenthood provides an array of services to men and women, many of whom are low income. They've challenged anti-choice activists to explain how these services would be provided if Planned Parenthood were defunded.

The response from many in the anti-choice community has been nowhere near as reasoned. They have ignored the facts, repeatedly employed the most lurid rhetoric imaginable and lobbed charges that don't stand up to scrutiny...

Details about Robert Lewis Dear, the shooter in Colorado who stands accused of murdering three people, are still leaking out. But several media outlets have reported that Dear made comments about "baby parts" to police after his apprehension.

It's likely this was a reference to a series of "sting" videos released over the summer by an anti-abortion group called the Center for Medical Progress. The videos were deceptively edited to make it appear that Planned

Parenthood staffers were illegally selling fetal tissue.

Right-wing media outlets spread these false charges, and they were quickly picked up by politicians eager to score points with the Religious Right... Carly Fiorina began claiming that the videos showed a botched abortion that resulted in a live birth, and that Planned Parenthood staffers plotted to kill the child and harvest its brain.

Even with the deceptive editing, the videos show no such thing. This was pointed out to Fiorina several times, yet she continues to spread the ghastly tall tale...

...Three people were murdered at the clinic – Ke'Arre Marcell Stewart, Jennifer Markovsky and Garrett Swasey. Swasey, a police officer with the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, was a deacon at a non-denominational Christian church and the father of two young children...

They are being memorialized now and that will continue, but it's not enough. The anti-abortion zealots, their political allies and the right-wing media figures who spread these lies about Planned Parenthood – the lies that very likely whipped an unstable man into a state of violent frenzy – need to engage in self-reflection and then offer an apology to the nation.

It's the least any decent person would do, but I'm not holding my breath.

Read the entire article here:
<https://www.au.org/blogs/wall-of-separation/terror-at-planned-parenthood-facing-the-consequences-of-the-far-right-s>

10 Best Christmas Songs for Atheists

Greta Christina

(Excerpted from AlterNet, December 10, 2010)

What do you do if you're an atheist who likes Christmas carols?

It's widely assumed that atheists, by definition, hate Christmas. And it's an assumption I'm baffled by. I like Christmas. Lots of atheists I know like Christmas. Heck, even Richard Dawkins likes Christmas. Plenty of atheists recognize the need for rituals that strengthen social bonds and mark the passing of the seasons. Especially when the season in question is dark and wet and freezing cold. Add in a culturally-sanctioned excuse to spend a month of Saturdays eating, drinking, flirting, and showing off our most festive shoes, and we're totally there...

Sure, most of us would like for our governments to not be sponsoring religious displays at the holidays. Or any other time. What with the whole "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion" thing. And some of us do rather resent the cultural hegemony of one particular religious tradition being crammed down everybody's throat, in a grotesque, mutant mating of homogenized consumerism and saccharine piety. But it's not like all atheists are Grinchy McScrooges. Many of us are very fond of Christmas. Some atheists even like Christmas carols. I'm one of them. It is, however, definitely the case that, since I've become an atheist activist, my pleasure in many Christmas carols has been somewhat diminished. It's harder for me to sing out lustily about angels and magic stars and the miracle of the virgin birth, without rolling my eyes just a little. And I do notice the more screwed-up content of many Christmas songs more than I used to: the guilty self-loathing, the fixation on the blood sacrifice,

the not-so-subtle anti-Semitism. I'm content to sing most of these songs anyway... But for some time now, I've been on the lookout for Christmas songs that I can sing entirely happily, without getting into annoying theological debates in my head.

So, with the help of my Facebook friends, I've compiled a list of Christmas songs that atheists can love unreservedly.

10: White Christmas. This is a funny one. I don't even particularly like this song: it's kind of drippy, and it lends itself far too well to unctuous lounge singers. But come on, people. It was written by a freaking agnostic. A Jewish agnostic at that. And it's become one of the most classic, wildly popular entries in the Christmas music canon. How can you not love an entirely secular Christmas classic written by a Jewish agnostic?

9. Jingle Bells

8. Sleigh Ride

7. Silver Bells

6. We Wish You a Merry Christmas

5. Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow!

(See the rest of the list here: http://gretachristina.typepad.com/greta_christinas_weblog/2010/12/10-best-christmas-songs-for-atheists.html)

So Merry Christmas, to everybody who likes to celebrate it! Enjoy your decked halls, your ringing bells, your food, your hooch, your snow, your staying the hell out of the snow and fooling around, your sleigh rides, your expensive jewelry, your neighbors who you're pestering with endless Christmas carols... and above all else, the people you love. There's probably no God -- so stop worrying, and enjoy Christmas!

Non-HSSB Events of Interest

Upcoming Events in California:

- 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/
- December 20: Michelle Feynman: *The Quotable Feynman (& His Van)*; Science Salon hosted by The Skeptics Society; Altadena.
<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/>
- January 1-2, 2016: SkeptiCamp: A free daylong event sponsored by Monterey County Skeptics and the Humanist Association of the Monterey Bay Area.
<http://lanyrd.com/2016/mcssskeptcamp/>



HSSB Contact Information

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Anne Rojas

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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 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
Santa Barbara
PO Box 30232
Santa Barbara, CA 93130

HSSB Calendar

Tuesday December 8: 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. Starts at 6:00 p.m. Encina Royale, 250 Moreton Bay Rd., Goleta.

Sunday December 27: (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 January 12: Board Meeting: 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

Saturday January 16: Monthly Meeting: Avi Tuschman will talk on "Our Political Nature"; 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.