



# The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

[www.SBHumanists.org](http://www.SBHumanists.org)

MARCH 2016

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## March Program: Andrew Seidel: Defending Jefferson's Wall of Separation

Andrew will discuss his legal work upholding the "wall of separation" between state and church, and his forthcoming book. As an attorney at the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), he's handled thousands of state-church complaints and filed plenty of lawsuits, including several in California. Andrew's book debunks the claim that America is founded on Judeo-Christian principles.

Andrew Seidel graduated cum laude from Tulane University with a B.S. in neuroscience and environmental science and magna cum laude from Tulane University Law School, where he was awarded the Haber J. McCarthy Award for excellence in environmental law. He studied human rights and international law at the University of Amsterdam and traveled the world on Semester at Sea. In May of 2011, Andrew completed his Master of Laws at Denver University Sturm College of Law with a 4.0 GPA and was awarded the Outstanding L.L.M. Award. He has written a book on International Human Rights Law and his essay on the role of religion in government and the founding of our nation placed second in the FFRF's 2010 graduate student essay contest. Andrew is a former Grand Canyon tour guide and accomplished nature photographer; his work has been displayed in galleries in Colorado, Texas, Florida, Louisiana, and Maryland. Andrew joined the FFRF staff as a constitutional consultant in November 2011.



**When:** Saturday, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2016

**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](mailto:judithannfontana@yahoo.com) or 805-967-7911.

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

## Activities Judy Fontana

We had a great turnout last month at the buffet dinner following the program. Thirty people conversed animatedly for a couple of hours and left seeking more answers. Don't miss out on the fun next time. The next dinner will be held on March 19<sup>th</sup> at Vista del Monte following the program. The menu is mixed green salad with assorted dressings, multigrain rolls, chef's fresh catch, BBQ chicken, cabernet rice medley, roasted potatoes, acorn squash, green beans and assorted desserts. Price per person is \$25 per person, which includes tax, tip and wine. Please RSVP to [judithannfontana@yahoo.com](mailto:judithannfontana@yahoo.com) or call 967-7911 to make reservations.

**Book to Read:** We would like to encourage all of our members to read *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson. This book has been selected by Santa Barbara Reads, which is the book chosen this year for A Community Conversation. The author will be speaking April 18<sup>th</sup> at Campbell Hall at U.C.S.B. It is a story of justice and redemption and should be of interest to members of our Humanist Society. If there is enough interest, we could put together a discussion group or two of our own.

**Social Justice:** In response to comments from our members, the Board has decided to select a local project geared toward social justice in which our members can participate. Some suggestions include helping with a Habitat for Humanities project, assisting at the Foodbank and working with an organization that helps the homeless. We are open to suggestions. Contact me at [judithannfontana@yahoo.com](mailto:judithannfontana@yahoo.com)

## Welcome to Our New Members!

Helen Caldwell, Santa Barbara  
Joyce Greene, Santa Barbara

## President's Column: Rights and Wrongs Colin Gordon

We humanists place our faith, if that's the right word, in reason, logic and science, rather than the invisible man in the sky. It serves us well in most situations, particularly those that can be reduced to logical choices. Buying a home or a car we can make up a spreadsheet listing all the key features, assign each one a score on the scale of 1 to 10, click on the right button and up comes the winner.

But there are situations where it does not seem to work so well. In the realm of social justice and human rights, the choices are often complex. What is social justice to one group may do an injustice to others. Sometimes exercising a right may infringe upon the rights of others

The Constitution does guarantee us many rights, and a more recent document, the United Nations Charter of December 1948, provides many more. Here is one that we humanists would approve of:

“Article 18: Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

Even that raises some questions. It would be difficult to deny anyone freedom of thought, at least until Apple comes up with a mind reader, so that freedom would seem to be laudable but superfluous. The question arises as to what exactly is a right. Here the scientific approach comes to our aid - we have to define our terms otherwise we don't know what we are talking about. A right is, of course, something everyone has ... a right to. But wait, that cannot mean that everyone must have it, for then the problem is how it is to be provided or acquired. Merely

stating it is only half the battle. We have the right to pursue happiness, but not the right to catch up with it.

Here is another section that highlights the problem:

“Article 25: Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”

Well, if there exists a country that enjoys all those rights I just might apply for citizenship. And that's only a few of those listed in the thirty articles of the UN Charter. We have to wonder if we really deserve all those goodies. There are many millions of people in the underdeveloped countries who lack the basics such as food, clothing and housing, and telling them they are theirs by right is not going to help much. You might get a less than flattering response. So the real problem is not in compiling a wish list of rights we would like to have, but in devising ways to make them available to all.

And that gets us into the question of distribution of wealth. We have in the U.S. a powerhouse of industry producing a GNP of about eighteen trillion dollars, far in excess of any other country, but we do not excel at distributing it equitably. Income distribution is in the hands of the private sector where everyone carves out for himself as much of the pie as he can get, and some people are much better at it than others. Perhaps a more fair way would be for the government to tax the wealthy and redistribute the proceeds to the poor. But then we are getting close to the dreaded S-word, Socialism.

One of the rights in which this country falls far behind most others is medical care. Although grouped with other items like food and clothing, medical care is a special case. In hard times you can get by with cheaper foods or less expensive clothes, but if you need brain surgery, nothing less will do. According to a study<sup>1</sup>, “... more than 60 percent of people who go bankrupt are actually capsized by medical bills. bankruptcies are linked to medical bills... Three-quarters of people with a medically-related bankruptcy had health insurance...” We need a single payer system that provides full protection against catastrophic illness.

<sup>1</sup>Theresa Tamkins:

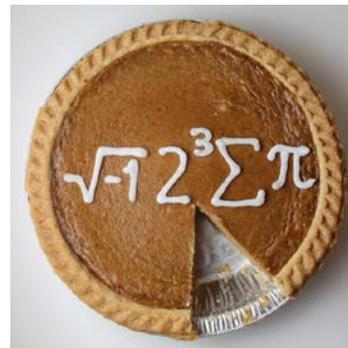
<http://www.cnn.com/2009/HEALTH/06/05/bankruptcy.medical.bills/>

### National Pi Day -- March 14

National Pi Day is celebrated annually on March 14<sup>th</sup>. It is a celebration commemorating the mathematical constant  $\pi$  (pi). Pi Day is observed on March 14<sup>th</sup> (or 3/14 in *month/day* date format), since 3, 1 and 4 are the three most significant digits of  $\pi$  in the decimal form. In 2009, the United States House of Representatives supported the designation of Pi Day.

Some ways to celebrate Pi Day:

- Eating a slice of pie.
- Pie eating contests.
- Watching the movie, *Life of Pi*.



**February Program:  
William Meller, M.D.—  
Medical Myths  
Robert Bernstein**

Doctors spend a lot of time dis-illusioning patients of medical myths, according to local doctor William Meller. He had a packed house and encouraged questions.

His main talk focus was on medical myths believed by doctors! Some have been held for thousands of years and only recently disproved by science.

He started with an important orientation to his life history. Born in 1950, he came of age during the height of the counterculture revolution. He was a fire-breathing hippie -- in his own words. He was sure the system was broken and lived in an alternate system of organic-farming hippies from age 18 to 25.

Then he heard a talk by visionary thinker Buckminster Fuller, who he already admired. Meller was reminded of his love for science and technology. He took Chemistry 1A through UCSB Extension and he was hooked! He loved learning how the world really worked!



*HSSB member Ray Stone (L), with our February speaker, William Meller, M.D. Photo by Robert Bernstein.*

He wanted to do medicine, which he was sure was messed up and planned to overthrow it all. Well, after all his studies he discovered a lot of

medicine really works! The "alternative" stuff, not so much.

But not all of medicine works. He began to study "evidence-based medicine." Shouldn't all medicine be evidence based?

Myths are the stories we tell ourselves to explain the world and to feel better. Sometimes that works against its intended purpose. He wants his patients to feel better. Stories can help. But they can also do harm.

Medicine is rooted in the past like most endeavors. Eighty per cent of doctors don't change what they think after medical school. Medical schools are so far ahead of general practice, that this is okay for about 15 years. Then doctors can get far behind.

The first myth he discussed is aging. We all want to think something will be found to stop it before we need it. Ray Kurzweil, Paul Allen and Bill Gates are all into this.

An early myth was the Fountain of Youth you could drink from and live longer. Newer ideas include cryo-preservation. Interestingly, a recent experiment did bring a frozen rabbit back to life after several weeks. He would not have believed it until it happened.

One of the earliest human stories is the Epic of Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh loses his dear friend Enkidu. A witch tells him of a plant in a river that can revive Enkidu.

We buy magical plants every day: vitamin pills and supplements. It is a \$120 billion industry. Unfortunately, everyone ages at the same rate regardless of the magical supplements and dies.

I asked about the Calorie Restriction diet. Dr. Meller said it works in small animals, but has not worked in chimps. It led to interest in resveratrol, which is unproved. But calorie restriction does have other health benefits.

The next myth is about scarring. Everyone will tell you about some treatment after a cut or surgery to reduce scarring. No treatment has been found to work in controlled studies.

No, Vitamin E does not help. A woman insisted it worked for her. Dr. Meller explained that is not a controlled study. She may have healed as well without it.

The main factor in scarring is whether the tissue is properly re-aligned and whether it is kept clean.

The next myth: Antioxidants. They don't work and can do harm. Oxidants are made by the body to destroy bad things. Massive antioxidant doses actually increase cancer risk!

What about organic food? The organic aisle keeps growing in supermarkets. Organic typically costs two times the conventional price. Dr. Meller has poor patients who spend the extra money, fearing they are poisoning their family if they don't go organic.

This is tragic. They end up getting inadequate nutrition because they can't afford enough food.

What about the pesticides? Dr. Meller says pesticides can be a health problem for the guy applying them if he is not adequately protected. But most pesticides, like Roundup, break down quickly, long before the plants are consumed. Even more important: If plants are not sprayed with pesticides they produce their own natural pesticides. These are the same kinds of chemicals and are quite powerful.

Meller acknowledges that pesticides can cause environmental harm. Killing lots of organisms can disrupt the food chain and harm the soil. In the case of DDT, it caused pelicans to lay fragile eggs, almost driving them to extinction. But DDT is a valuable pesticide in places where mosquitoes carry deadly disease.

What about genetically modified organisms, GMOs? As far as he can tell, there is no harm to humans. Humans have been modifying genes for 10,000 years through selective breeding. GMOs are just a matter of selecting individual genes. They may give plants better drought tolerance or give rice a stiffer stalk.

He was asked about the increase in life expectancy since Social Security began in the 1930's. Dr. Meller explained that most of the benefits came from hygiene, public health, indoor plumbing, washing food, and vaccines. Not really high-tech medicine as much as letting people live to their natural old age.

What Web sources can he recommend? Even *WebMD* and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) have surprisingly incorrect information. He says *Wikipedia* is actually one of the best sources because it is so well policed.

What about weight loss? Your doctor may tell you to exercise more. Exercise may have some psychological and physical health benefits. It can increase heart health. But exercise is not an effective way to lose weight. You can burn about 300 calories per hour of vigorous activity. You can eat 300 calories in less than a minute!

Food intake is really the only effective way to control weight. Reducing weight reduces wear and tear on every part of the body. Being overweight is a factor in heart disease, osteoarthritis, and possibly dementia.

But the biggest determinant of longevity is still genes. Avoiding smoking and excess alcohol are the main factors we can control.

What about stretching? It is total nonsense according to Dr. Meller. Stretching is essentially micro-tearing of muscles and tendons. It increases the risk of injury and reduces performance. The one exception is very slow, gentle stretching done by yoga experts.

In contrast, warming up before exercise is good. This consists of using the exercise muscles gently in advance.

What about impact exercise? It is necessary to strengthen bones. But it is bad for joints! It should be kept at a reasonable level.

What about heat or ice after an injury? Surface heat or ice only penetrates a quarter inch. It will feel good and can mask pain. He claims that inflammation is the healing process, but ice or heat has no effect on inflammation below the surface.

What about supplements for cognitive health? One hundred years ago, thyroid hormone was discovered. Thyroid supplements helped some "slow thinking" people with a thyroid deficiency. But most people receive no benefit. As with some other supplements, the body has a feedback loop that compensates for excess quantities.

The important lesson: Just because a deficiency of a substance causes a loss of function, does not mean that a surplus of that substance will increase function!

When asked about supplements, almost everyone in the room raised a hand that they take supplements. Dr. Meller said that in our modern society, a normal diet provides all needed nutrients. The exception is if you have a known deficiency and a doctor recommends it. As for vitamin C, it is essential, but offers no benefit above the normal dose.

What about probiotics? Your stomach acid kills anything you eat. If you think you need probiotics, nothing is better than yogurt. In rare cases of powerful antibiotic use (after *C. difficile* infection, for example), they occasionally will introduce good bacteria rectally.

The supplements industry is largely unregulated and is a powerful lobby in Congress.

There is always a new fad supplement. The latest one is nicotinamide. Too soon to know if it is beneficial, but history has not been kind to supplement effectiveness.

What about salt? Before modern blood pressure medicine, reducing salt was the only option for hypertension. But its effect is very small, only 2-4mm of mercury. For 90% of people, there is no benefit to reducing salt intake. Salt is necessary. If a person has high blood pressure, try to lose weight and take drugs if needed.

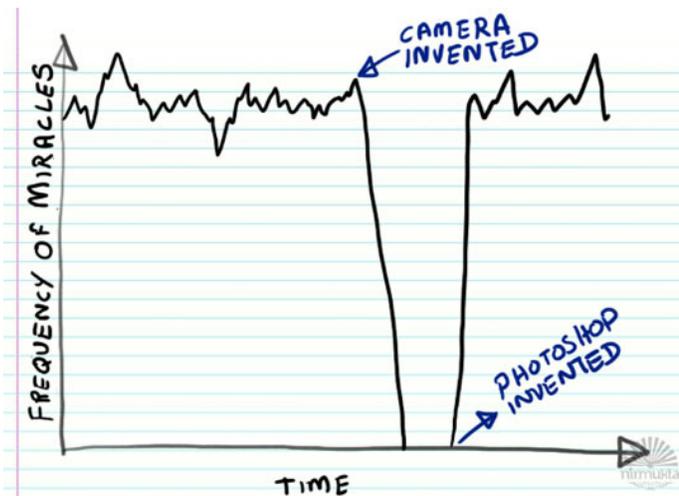
What about cholesterol? The famous Framingham study showed a correlation between high blood cholesterol levels and heart attacks. But no causal connection was proved. Statins do reduce cholesterol. But do they reduce heart attacks? The standard measure for a drug is "Number Needed to Treat". You would have to treat 140 patients five years with statins to prevent one heart attack. Those are low odds.

History is full of myths that persist. One is that some foods create mucous and that mucous is bad. Mucous production is unrelated to foods eaten. And mucous is a valuable immune system component to trap and remove bacteria and viruses.

What should we do? The same advice as always: Eat in moderation. Exercise in moderation. Give up stretching and vitamins. Eat real foods.

*Note: The various references and links associated with Dr. Meller's talk can be found here:*

[http://s3.amazonaws.com/siteninja/multitenant/assets/19973/files/original/medical\\_myth\\_references\\_Feb\\_2016.pdf](http://s3.amazonaws.com/siteninja/multitenant/assets/19973/files/original/medical_myth_references_Feb_2016.pdf)



## Movies for Humanists

### Diane Krohn

*Spotlight* (2015) received Academy Awards for both Best Picture and Best Original Screenplay of 2015. The film follows *The Boston Globe's* "Spotlight" team, a small group of journalists who write investigative articles. The new editor of *The Boston Globe* asks the Spotlight team to investigate the story of a Catholic priest who has reportedly been sexually abusing children and has been moved around several times, with the knowledge of the Boston Archdiocese and the Archbishop, Cardinal Law. The Spotlight team begins to uncover a pattern of sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests in Massachusetts, and an ongoing cover-up by the Archdiocese. They learn through an ex-priest that there should be approximately ninety abusive priests in Boston (six percent of priests). Through their research, they develop a list of eighty-seven names, and begin to find their victims to back up their suspicions.

Eventually, the story is published, along with a phone number requesting victims of pedophile priests to come forward. The following morning, the Spotlight team is inundated with phone calls from victims coming forward to tell their stories.

*Philomena* (2013) is in the somewhat same vein, that is, Catholic abusive power over minors. It is based on the true story of Philomena Lee's 50-year search for her forcibly adopted son, and the journalist who helps her with her search. The journalist, Martin Sixsmith, is approached at a party by Philomena's daughter, who suggests that he write about her mother's search for the young son that was adopted without her consent. Philomena had become pregnant as a teenager and was sent to live in Sean Ross Abbey in Ireland. After giving birth, she was forced to work in the convent laundry with very little contact with her son. Then her young son was given to an American couple for adoption without her consent (and barely her knowledge). Philomena and Martin start their search in Ireland at the convent but are told that the adoption records were lost in a fire. People in the local pub tell Martin that the records were deliberately burned and that the children were sold (yes, sold!) to wealthy Americans for adoption.

Martin and Philomena proceed to travel to the U.S. to continue the search. They find that her son, named Michael by his adoptive parents, worked in the Reagan administration but died from AIDS. They track down his lover and discover that Michael had traveled to Ireland at the end of his life and is actually buried at the convent's cemetery. Martin and Philomena return to Ireland and she visits Michael's grave.

One interesting point about the movie is that the journalist, Martin, is an atheist and is angered by the church's actions and lies. Philomena is Catholic and chooses to forgive the nun who is unrepentant about her actions. It is an interesting contrast between faith, forgiveness and injustice.

IMDb links for both of these movies:

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2431286/>  
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1895587/>

## West Virginia Senate Votes Down “Religious Freedom” Bill

Lauren Nelson

(Excerpted from *The Friendly Atheist.com*, March 4, 2016)

Republicans across the country have been heavily invested in passing what they often call “religious freedom” laws. The name might imply something harmless, but as we’ve seen time and time again, they’re usually just an effort to allow business owners to discriminate against members of the LGBTQ community.

Such was the case with West Virginia’s HB 4012. The bill was advanced as a mechanism for protecting freedom of religion, using language similar to a 2012 bill modeled off of the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). But as *Think Progress* points out, even if the language is the same, its function has been altered dramatically:

“RFRA was originally enacted in 1993 to overrule a Supreme Court decision that was widely viewed as insufficiently protective of religious liberty. At the time, RFRA was also uncontroversial, largely because the law was not understood to permit religious liberty suits to undermine the rights of third parties. The Supreme Court’s 2014 *Hobby Lobby* decision, however, upended that balance, holding that a religious objector’s rights overcame the right of their employees to health plans that covered birth control. That decision also may permit anti-gay businesses to ignore bans on discrimination.”

And while some of the West Virginia reps were insistent that it was a matter of principle, others were far more transparent about their aims. As House Majority Whip John O’Neal put it while speaking about the Constitution:

“It doesn’t guarantee anyone’s right to not be offended. It doesn’t guarantee anyone’s right to

have any particular kind of lifestyle or behavior protected, but it guarantees the free exercise of religion. **That freedom has been severely curtailed in recent years with the growth of gay rights and mandated contraception coverage under Obamacare, among other things.** But these politicians believe the time is right for the Mountain State to push back.”

They pushed, alright. The West Virginia House pushed HB 4012 straight into a Republican-controlled Senate, where one might assume it would have enjoyed a warm reception.

But that didn’t happen. The Senate voted it down, 7-27.

West Virginia is hardly a progressive stronghold, so the move might seem surprising. But realistically, it was probably a pragmatic choice... Voting HB 4012 down might have been a half-hearted effort at political atonement. And an effort to avoid what Indiana went through last year, where many businesses vowed to avoid travel to or expansion in Indiana.

See the entire article here:  
[http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2016/03/04/west-virginia-senate-votes-down-religious-freedom-bill/?utm\\_source=dlvr.it&utm\\_medium=facebook](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2016/03/04/west-virginia-senate-votes-down-religious-freedom-bill/?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=facebook)



## Non-HSSB Events of Interest

### Upcoming Events in California:

- March 20: Amy Shira Teitel: *Breaking the Chains of Gravity: The Story of Spaceflight Before NASA*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles.  
[http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/story\\_of\\_spaceflight\\_before\\_NASA\\_3-20-16/](http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/story_of_spaceflight_before_NASA_3-20-16/)
- March 20: Dr. Sean Carroll: *The Serengeti Rules: The Quest to Discover How Life Works and Why It Matters*. Skeptics Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena.  
<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/>
- April 30: Orange County Freethought Alliance Annual Conference. Speakers include Mr. Deity, The SciBabe, Phil Zuckerman, and Jim Underdown. Fullerton.  
<http://freethoughtalliance.org/fta/annual-conference/>

### Upcoming Events Outside of California:

- May 26-29: American Humanist Association 2016 75<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, Chicago, IL.  
<http://conference.americanhumanist.org/>
- June 2-5: The Reason Rally, Washington, D.C. (Note: American Atheists is a major sponsor of this rally.)  
<http://www.reasonrally.org/>

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“The beauty of science is that it does not claim to know the answers before it asks the questions. There is nothing wrong with not knowing. It means there is more to learn, and as I have said before, ignorance bothers me far less than the illusion of knowledge.”

---Physicist Lawrence Krauss

## HSSB Contact Information

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Judy Fontana

Pat Ward

Diane Krohn

Mary Wilk

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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](http://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](mailto: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 March 15: Board Meeting:** 5:30 p.m. Encina Royale, 250 Moreton Bay Lane, Goleta. Members invited to attend.

**Saturday March 19: Monthly Meeting;** Andrew Seidel will speak on Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) legal activities; 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 March 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 April 12: Board Meeting:** 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

**Saturday April 16: Monthly Meeting:** Ted Anagnoson will speak on Money in Politics; 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.