



# The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

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

MAY 2016

---

## May Program:

### Dr. Nathalie Cabrol: Searching for Habitable Worlds and Life Beyond Earth

Until recently, the notion of Habitable Zone (HZ) was the only one available to estimate the potential for a planet to harbor life. Today, this particular view of the HZ is regarded as the horizontal definition of habitability, which designates a region around a parent star where life (as we know it) could be possible. The exploration of the solar system and the study of terrestrial extremophiles have added the concept of environmental habitability, which most often refers to regions of the subsurface and interior of planets and moons where environmental conditions could allow the development and sustenance of life. With this other dimension of habitability, worlds that were before considered outside the HZ could, theoretically, be habitable for life as we know it.



The discovery of thousands of exoplanets gives us a chance to extrapolate what we are learning from our own solar system to others, and to expand our gallery of planetary systems. More importantly, it allows us to augment our ability to model a diversity of alien environments, infer their physicochemical characteristics, and start thinking about life as we do not know it.

Nathalie is the Director of the Carl Sagan Center at the SETI Institute. In addition to directing the scientific vision at the SI, she leads projects in planetary science and astrobiology, develops science exploration strategies for Mars, Titan, and the Outer Solar System icy moons, and designs robotic field experiments. She explores high altitude lakes in the Andes where environmental conditions are analogous to early Mars. With her team, she documents life's adaptation to extreme environments, the effect of rapid climate change on lake ecosystems and habitats, its geobiological signatures, and relevance to planetary exploration.

**When:** Saturday, May 21<sup>st</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

Don't forget to sign up for the buffet dinner following the program on May 21<sup>st</sup>. The menu is not available yet at this time, but be assured that it will be up to the usual standards of Vista del Monte. The menu will be announced as soon as it is available. Cost is \$25 per person, which includes tax, tip and wine. RSVP to [judithannfontana@yahoo.com](mailto:judithannfontana@yahoo.com) or call 967-7911 no later than Thursday, May 19<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 am.

## Summer Solstice Party

Don't forget to mark your calendar for the annual Summer Solstice Picnic on **Sunday, June 19<sup>th</sup>**, at Stow Park in Goleta. Catering will be provided by Woody's Barbecue. Please bring an appetizer or dessert to share (nothing that requires refrigeration), and bring lawn chairs if desired. Also consider bringing a hat for sun protection. We will be enjoying intellectually-stimulating games and riveting conversations!

Cost will be \$15.00 per person. You can pay at the event. Please email Anne Rojas with your name, and the number of people attending no later than **Wednesday, June 15<sup>th</sup>**. [annehrojas@gmail.com](mailto:annehrojas@gmail.com)

If you cannot email Anne, call and leave a message for her at 805-564-6086.

## President's Column:

### Politics

### Colin Gordon

It has been said that if you want to have a civilized conversation, stay clear of two subjects: religion and politics. We humanists don't exactly stay clear of religion but at least we have reached a consensus on the subject, so let's see, what does that leave. Yes the P-word, Politics.

It's a meaty subject to be sure, with endless newspaper columns and countless talking heads to keep us informed of who said what to whom. But we need to take a humanist approach; that is to apply reason and logic and, if possible, the scientific method to the knotty problems of who to vote for and why.

At one time, in another place, all the voter had to do was to place one cross on a piece of paper to select the party that he wanted to rule the country for the next five years. Here we have surely the world's most complex system. The ballot sheet is as long as your arm with every office from president to dog-catcher up for grabs at all levels of government from the White House and Congress, down through state, county, city and special districts, with judges and tax collectors also seeking our approval, to mention but a few. On the plus side, we do have the chance to throw out people we don't like or whom we think are corrupt or just plain incompetent.

So how do we make these big decisions? We can rule out most of the candidates by the simple rule that we have never heard of them. Then there remains a hard core of people that we do know something about and we have to sort out the winners from the losers. We could use the tried and true spread sheet, with a row for each candidate, a column for each of the various attributes they might or might not have and a "total" column at the end of each row. That might work but the real difficulty is deciding what rating to enter in each cell of the spread sheet. And maybe some of the politicians need to be entered into a different kind of cell.

We really know very little about these candidates, other than what they say about themselves, which is always complimentary; and what others say about them, which is usually defamatory. Most would agree that there is far too much personal invective flying

about and very little information about what they intend to do if they get elected, and that is what we really want to know. We can check their track records but, as the stock market gurus say, past performance does not guarantee future results. Some do share with us their ambitions for this country. Depending on which presidential candidate gets elected, we might have a wall along the Mexican border, extended Obamacare, carpet bombing of selected parts of the mid-east, a near-socialist regime, deportation of eleven million aliens, and other options. No prizes for matching candidates to options.

The electorate seems to fall mostly into two categories, liberals and conservatives, separated geographically to a large extent, with Santa Barbarians falling mostly into the liberal bin. The question then arises as to how we decided which way to lean, left or right. Most of us did not use a spread sheet for that; it seems to depend on long-held beliefs and opinions whose origins are obscure, based more on emotion and sentiment than on the scientific approach. Maybe they are in our genes, or congenital, or learned from our parents in our early impressionable years. So the best we can do is to try to match our hopes for this country to the policies of one of the presidential hopefuls, if we can figure out what they are.

But for all its imperfections our political system is here to stay. In the year 1215 at Runnymede by the River Thames, the Barons persuaded a reluctant King John to sign their Magna Carta, which includes the following:

"... we willingly and spontaneously conceded and confirmed by our charter...freedom of elections which is held most important and very essential, the which we shall observe and wish our heirs to observe in good faith for ever."

## Storage Space Wanted

Storage and/or personal office space in a spare room, garage or shed. Requirements: at least 100 square feet, private entrance, and electric power. Will pay \$150--\$250 per month, depending. Please call David Echols at 805-685-0552 or leave a message, or email: [personaltoursltd@gmail.com](mailto:personaltoursltd@gmail.com)

## "Humanist Missionaries" in Uganda

[Brighter Brains Institute](#) (BBI) is a SF Bay Area nonprofit promoting humanism in western Uganda. In Muhokya, they built from-the-ground-up "[BiZoHa](#)" (the world's first humanist orphanage), and they recently completed Kahendero Nursery Humanist School, in a village on Lake George.

Their [Bakonzo Project](#) "converted" four Ugandan schools to humanism - enticing them to adopt Ten Humanist Principles and change their name to include the word "humanist."

Other goals are to publish an e-book of essays by Nigerian humanist Leo Igwe, and to provide all girls aged 12+ at the six humanist school with [AFRIPads](#) - recyclable sanitary pads.

Brighter Brains Institute generates income from GoFundMe campaigns, and its donor base of 227 humanists and atheists. Significant support is from commenters at reddit/atheism, and it received media attention from Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF).

Information on Brighter Brains Institute activities can also be found at [AfricaHumanists.org](http://AfricaHumanists.org), and donations can be made [HERE](#).

=====  
*"Magicians are the most honest people in the world; they tell you they're gonna fool you, and then they do it."*

---James Randi, magician

**April Program:  
Ted Anagnoson:  
The Influence of Money on Elections  
Ray Stone**

Professor Ted Anagnoson spoke at our April meeting on the topic of "The Influence of Money on Elections." At the outset, he explained the need for money in politics, and the history of its regulation by Congress. "We are a low-participatory democracy," he began, pointing out that the recent caucuses we've all watched on television involved only 5-10% of registered voters. In order to get the attention of those inclined to vote, candidates must advertise and they must travel. To do so, they need lots of money, especially so for non-incumbents. Challengers need to have an organization, and they need to know and to follow all the written and unwritten rules. "Much of the need for collecting large campaign funds would vanish if the idea of public financing were not so unpopular," he said.

**Attempts to regulate campaign contributions and spending.** During the presidential campaign of 1896, Mark Hanna, President McKinley's campaign manager, raised the equivalent of \$4-6 billion of today's dollars, about five times the amount Barack Obama and Mitt Romney each raised in 2012.

In 1904, following Teddy Roosevelt's election, he called for the prohibition of campaign contributions by corporations, even though he himself had benefitted from them. The Tillman act of 1907 was the first legislation to regulate campaign finance by prohibiting contributions from corporations and national banks. Penalties were provided, but no enforcement method was specified.

The Federal Corrupt Practices Act of 1925 built on the Tillman Act, setting spending limits and disclosure requirements by political parties, and later by candidates, for certain elections.

This law remained in effect until 1971, when the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) was passed.

Between 1956 and 1968 campaign expenses increased by 500% as television advertising became widespread. During the Nixon campaign of 1972, corporations were pressured for contributions, much of which, it was found later, was laundered through foreign bank accounts. Wealthy donors discovered that in return for their contributions, they could receive ambassadorships and other federal jobs. Congress responded by amending the FECA to limit contributions by individuals, political parties and Political Action Committees. Candidates were limited to spending \$50,000 of their own funds and limited in how much could be spent generally on their campaigns in total.

At this time a law for public financing of Presidential campaigns was put into effect. A new agency, the Federal Election Commission (FEC) was set up in 1975 to regulate campaign finance legislation.

**Supreme Court Cases related to campaign spending.** In a 1976 case, *Buckley v. Valeo*, the Supreme Court upheld contribution limits in the FECA, but overturned limits on campaign expenditures, unless candidates accept them in return for public financing. (In 2016, only Martin O'Malley of all presidential candidates accepted the primary election spending limits in return for public financing. Barack Obama rejected the general election spending limits in 2008, and raised over \$800M for his campaign; John McCain accepted the public fund limitation of \$84M.)

The FECA put into effect aggregate caps on the total amount that an individual may give to all candidates and parties. But a Republican Party activist, Shaun McCutcheon, hoping, in 2012, to donate more than was allowed by these limits, filed suit (*McCutcheon v. the FEC*) to have these

limits removed. The Supreme Court agreed with him and struck down the aggregate limits.

**PACs.** Political Action Committees (PAC) are commonly formed by corporations, labor unions, ideological organizations, and trade associations to raise money for candidates at both the state and federal level. There are about 7,500 PACs now in existence, with the number growing. They can accept contributions and make expenditures up to \$5,000 each. It is estimated that PACs make up about 30% of the average Senate and House campaign funding.



**Citizens United.** Prior to the election of 2008, Citizens United, an organization funded by the Koch Brothers, prepared a documentary film about Hillary Clinton, but were unable to show it because a clause in the McCain-Feingold Act of 2002 declared that corporations and unions cannot make expenditures influencing elections within 30 days prior to primaries, and 60 days prior to general elections. The constitutionality of this clause came before the Supreme Court in 2010.

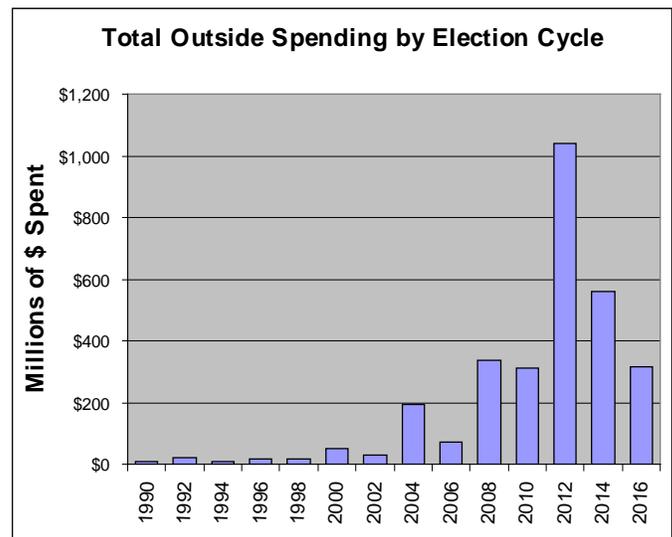
Earlier, in 2007, the Supreme Court had ruled that the 30- and 60-day blackouts did not apply to “issue ads,” that did not advocate “vote for” or “vote against” candidates. This brought about an explosion of issue ads, and increased contributions to 501(c)4 organizations that

were not bound by contribution limits or disclosure regulations.

In Citizens United the Supreme Court decided, by a vote of 5-4, that the government cannot censor or ban political broadcasts in candidate elections funded by corporations or unions. This decision made possible what came to be known as Super PACs.

**Super PACs.** Super PACs may not make contributions to candidate campaigns or parties, but may engage in unlimited political spending independently of the campaigns. They can legally raise funds from individuals, corporations, unions, and other groups without limit to donation size. Super PACs must disclose their expenditures. They may attack candidates.

The graph below depicts the increased outside spending resulting from recent Supreme Court decisions. Note that the year 2014 was an election off year, and that the 2016 value is only for four months.



*Note to our readers: You can listen to Ted Anagnoson's talk on our website:*  
<http://www.santabarbarahumanists.org/article/8794-audio-of-ted-anagnoson-april-2016-talk-on-money-in-politics>

## Member News

**Helmar Janée** died on April 5, 2016. Helmar joined HSSB in March 2015. He lived an interesting and active life, growing up in Europe during challenging times. He had a master's and Ph.D. degree in physics and worked as a nuclear physicist and then a medical physicist. His obituary is here: <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/newspress/obituary.aspx?pid=179574579>

## Need a Carpenter?

If you need anything around the house that a licensed carpenter can do, give Vincent Walker a call at 805-636-1051. Vincent can install grab bars in the shower, and any other things that we may need as we age. If you know anyone who needs an onsite manager, Vincent would love to find a job where he can live. Contact Vincent or Marian Shapiro if you have questions or need more information.

[marianshapiro@cox.net](mailto:marianshapiro@cox.net)

## Summer Science Camp Roger Schlueter

As Judy Fontana mentioned at our March general meeting, the Humanist Society Board has decided to make one or more efforts to expand our humanist values out into the larger Santa Barbara community. One opportunity right now is to provide financial support for financially needy kids to attend Summer Science Camp at Elings Park.

Elings Park has hosted science camps each summer, but they've never had scholarships to help families with the cost to attend. We Humanists support scientific endeavors in general and especially scientific learning for younger kids. Thus, there is an obvious match made in heaven (sorry) that the Humanist Society is going to take advantage of.

The Board has decided to start a John Coppejans Summer Science Camp Scholarship Fund and "seed" it with \$1,000. In addition, Pat Coppejans has contributed another \$1,000 in John's name. Thanks a lot, Pat. That is very generous of you and we deeply appreciate the contribution.

And here is where you can join in. The cost of sending one kid to summer camp is \$125. The Humanist Society will set aside every penny of contributions to the Fund and not mix that money with our general budget. In addition, Elings Park will not take any cut out of the money we contribute to their science camp. Further, the families who apply for scholarships will be evaluated (at no cost) by the Santa Barbara Police Activities League (PAL). Thus, you can be confident that every dollar you contribute will go directly to help a kid in real financial need to attend summer camp this year.

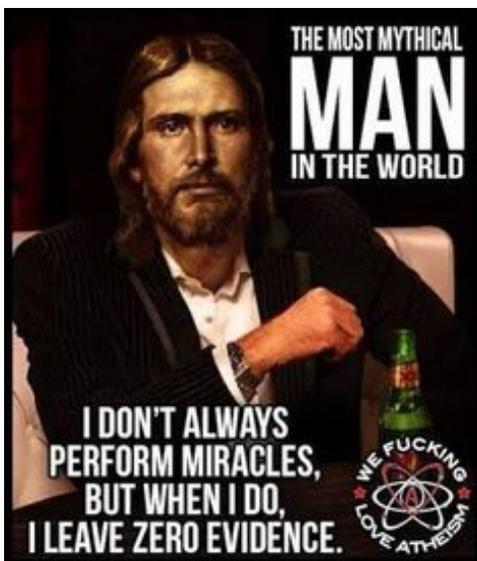
We do not plan to spend the entire Fund this year. We intend that the John Coppejans Summer Science Camp Scholarship Fund will be available on an annual basis to support needy kids. If you want to contribute to the Fund, just make a check out to "Humanist Society" and write "Summer Camp" in the memo field. And you can contribute any amount you feel comfortable with. Any contribution of any size will help the kids who need it most.

One of the things I like about the Humanist Society is that we don't endlessly bug you for contributions to our group; pay your annual dues and you're a member in good standing. But any money you give goes 100% to the intended use, not to us. Please contribute to this Fund and help extend a humanist helping hand to a very worthy cause. Contact any member of the Board if you have any questions.

**Humanism for the High Court:  
AHA's Brief on *Zubik v. Burwell*  
The Humanist.com Staff, May 3, 2016**

One of the highest profile Supreme Court cases this term is *Zubik v. Burwell*, where religious groups are objecting to the procedure for exemption to the Affordable Care Act's contraception mandate. The American Humanist Association filed an amicus brief in the case earlier this year, presenting a unique humanist view of the issue to the court.

After oral arguments in the case were heard in March, the Supreme Court asked the attorneys for the parties to provide supplemental briefs, an unusual twist in a case that is expected to be decided by a close vote. Amicus parties like the AHA were not allowed to file supplemental briefs, but Attorney Gordon Gamm, author of the AHA's amicus brief, wanted to get the humanist view heard, so he drafted a supplemental memorandum addressing the court's concerns. Here [at this link](#), we present Gamm's supplemental humanist argument supporting the contraception mandate process of the Affordable Care Act. Summed up succinctly, the humanist position isn't hard to understand: *religious opinions of employers and judges should not endanger anyone's healthcare.*



**Orange County Freethought Alliance  
Conference 2016  
Diane Krohn**

Wayne and I attended the Annual Orange County Freethought Alliance, held in Fullerton on April 29<sup>th</sup>. This was a 1-day event, with 14 speakers, many of whom we have had for HSSB presentations (Bill Zuersher, Ross Blocher, Jim Underdown, Phil Zuckerman, and Mr. Deity). This was a very well-run conference; each speaker had 25 minutes for a presentation, and they were kept to their time limit. The presentations were therefore succinct and packed with information.

**Jim Underdown** took a hard look at the 10 Commandments and after determining that most of them are not relevant in today's world, has come up with his own list of "Underdown's 11 Strong Suggestions," which include:

- Be nice
- Live within your means
- Take responsibility for what you do
- Try to see the other person's point of view
- Leave a place better or as good as it was when you got there
- Keep your brain and body active
- Take a moment everyday to be grateful.

*(There's more, not all are listed here.)*

**Brian Dunning** does the *Skeptoid* podcast. His podcast is a critical analysis of pop phenomenon. For his presentation, he discussed religious miracles and instead of a simple debunking of them, he looked more closely into the history of the story. The three different miracle stories were: The Miracle of Calanda, the Angel of Mons, and the John Frum Movement. His website is here:

<https://skeptoid.com/>

**Phil Zuckerman** started his discussion with the statement that there's a lot to dislike about religion, but since he did not have any bad experiences with religion, his question has

always been, “How can people believe this nonsense?” Then he went on to describe what he called “the problem with the Patrick Masons of the world.” Patrick is a Professor of Religion at Phil Zuckerman’s college and is a good friend and one of the nicest and smartest persons that Phil knows. But he is also a Mormon. Phil has determined that, despite Patrick’s beliefs (and he is a strong Mormon), they have more in common than not. Phil has determined that they are both trying to make the world a better place, and maybe that should be a basis for befriending religious people—even if you don’t agree with their beliefs.

(On the other hand, **Mr. Deity**, AKA Brian Keith Dalton, gave a very impassioned argument for why we should not be accepting of even moderate religious beliefs, because they all, moderate or fundamentalist, stem from the same original source—Abrahamic religions.)

We thought that the two most interesting presentations were by Phil Ferguson and John Goodman.

**Phil Ferguson** is a financial planner and his presentation focused on two topics: socially-responsible mutual funds, and long-term care. He showed that socially-responsible funds underperform, and that as an individual investor, one does not really impact those “bad” stocks, such as tobacco and weapons manufacturers. He suggested that, instead, one should invest in index funds, and use the difference gained in those versus socially-responsible funds (about 1.6% difference) to support those groups or charities that are in line with one’s conscience.

The other topic was long-term care insurance. He discussed the finances of long-term care insurance versus self-insurance. In summary, it is probably not a good deal for most people. Phil is a strong supporter of many secular causes and his website is <http://polarisfinancialplanning.com/>

**John Goodman** talked about population issues. He asked the audience whether they thought there were too many people, or the right amount, or if the world can support even more people. (*Ed: Having seen a similar presentation at TAM 2015, I knew what the answer was.*) John discussed several prior authors (Malthus, 1798; Erlich, 1968; and Meadows, 1972) who felt that resources limit the population and all predicted doom, but the doom did not happen. They misestimated human inventiveness; for example, agriculture efficiency has been doubled.

Demographics follow a clear pattern: as resources increase, the population also increases, and the death rate decreases; but as prosperity continues to increase, the birth rate starts to decrease, because children are no longer an asset, but a liability. Almost half of the current countries today have a lower birth rate than death rate.

John’s premise is that energy is crucial to prosperity. All prosperous countries today have high energy uses and low birth rates. But with the new problem of global warming, how do we address increasing prosperity without overheating the planet? If we can find a solution to global warming, then the prosperity-population connection can be made.

John has written a book that outlines his ideas for building a global solar energy infrastructure. (Wayne bought the book, *Avoiding the Extinction of Humanity: A Practical Plan*, so we can read it to determine if this is a crackpot idea or not!)

<http://www.avoidingouextinction.com/>

In summary, this was an excellent conference that was well-run and presented attendees with a wide variety of speakers, ideas, and topics.

## Non-HSSB Events of Interest

### Upcoming Events in California:

- May 15: Cecily Hintzen and Susan Johnston: *Exploring Your End of Life Options*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles.  
<http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/exploring-your-end-of-life-options-5-15-16/>
- May 15: SkeptiCal 2016: A northern California one-day conference for skeptics and freethinkers. Speakers include Indre Viskontas, Carolyn Porco, Steve Silberman, Henry Gilbert, and others. Oakland.  
<http://www.skepticalcon.com/>
- May 18: An Evening With Bill Moyers; Granada Theatre, Santa Barbara.  
<https://events.ucsb.edu/event/an-evening-with-bill-moyers/>
- June 5: *Prophet's Prey*: The Documentary About Warren Jeffs and the Fundamentalist Mormon Church. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles.  
<http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/prophets-prey-documentary-6-5-16/>

### 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/>

*"An atheist is a person with no invisible means of support."*

---John Buchan, Scottish novelist and historian.

### HSSB Contact Information

#### Officers:

*President:* Colin Gordon

[colin3@juno.com](mailto:colin3@juno.com)

*Secretary:* Suzanne Spillman

[urbanfollies@gmail.com](mailto:urbanfollies@gmail.com)

*Treasurer:* Ron Kronenberg

[ronkronenberg1@gmail.com](mailto:ronkronenberg1@gmail.com)

#### 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](mailto: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](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 May 17: Board Meeting:** 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

**Saturday May 21: Monthly Meeting:** Dr. Nathalie Cabrol speaking on Searching for Habitable Worlds and Life Beyond Earth; 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 May 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 June 14: Board Meeting:** 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

**Sunday June 19: Monthly Meeting: Summer Solstice Picnic** at Stow Park, Goleta. See page 2 of this newsletter for more information.