

NEWSLETTER OF THE HUMANIST SOCIETY SANTA BARBARA

August, 2017

www.SBHumanists.org

August Program

Artificial Intelligence: Past Present and Future

AI specialists John O'Donovan and William Wang of the UCSB Computer Science Department will speak on the broad impact AI is having on our daily lives - the technology that enables these automated helpers to perform their tasks so efficiently, the current state of the art, future applications for AI and Machine Learning, and their potential impacts on society. They will summarize some of the current research in AI from two research labs in the Computer Science department at UCSB.



John O'Donovan

John O'Donovan is an associate researcher at the Computer Science Department, UCSB, where he co-directs the FourEyes research lab. He is also a founding director of Siras Systems Inc.

William Wang, an assistant professor in the Department of Computer Science at UCSB, has broad interests in machine learning approaches to data science.



William Wang

When: Saturday, August 19 2017

Time: Doors open at 2.30. Program begins at 3.00

Where: Patio Room, Vista del Monte, 3775 Modoc Road

For more information: Call 805.769.4772

Donation: \$2.00 members/\$5 non-members. Students with ID and residents of Vista del Monte are free.

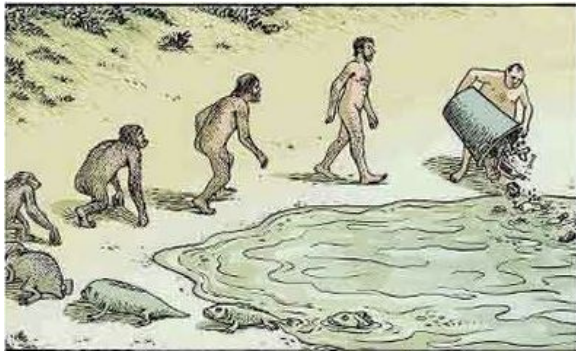
Remember: Park only on spaces marked "VDM"

Activities

Remember to reserve your place for the buffet dinner following the Saturday program on May 20th. The menu is tossed green salad, assorted dinner rolls, chili rellenos, fresh catch of the day, sweet potatoes, fiesta rice, cauliflower with cheese sauce, banana squash, and homemade flan. Beverages include red and white wine, tea, coffee, and lemonade. Cost is \$25 per person, which includes tax, tip and wine. RSVP to [Nan Cisney](#) no later than 12 noon, Thursday, August 17th. You can submit your payment to Nan before 3 p.m. on Saturday, before the program begins. If you are paying by check, make it payable to Humanist Society. Please note: It is very important to RSVP for the dinner and then attend it if you have signed up for it; otherwise, HSSB has to pay for no-shows.

Welcome New Member

William Hyne, Santa Barbara



The Evolution of Homo Sapiens

President's Column On: The Johnson Amendment Roger Schlueter

In 1954 Lyndon Johnson, then a senator from the state of Texas, was running for re-election against an opponent who was heavily funded by a tax-exempt, non-profit, *non-religious* organization called Facts Forum which was funded by the well-known H.L. Hunt, the Texas oil man and very conservative GOP political figure. Irked by this, Johnson introduced an amendment to Section 501(c)(3) of the tax code that prohibited non-profits from endorsing political candidates.

The amendment was noncontroversial. Both sides of the aisle suspected the other of secretly and improperly funding election campaigns through non-profit organizations so the amendment passed with little notice, especially as it was a part of a vast congressional rewrite of the tax code. It is noteworthy that since Facts Forum was not a religious organization, little attention was paid to the fact that the language as adopted also applied to religions.

It is also noteworthy that the amendment did not restrict the ability of non-profits from expressing their values on public issues or ballot measures, such as the propositions on California ballots. The only restriction was that they could not fund, advocate or express an opinion for or against any candidate for political office,

Over the ensuing decades the IRS has been very lax in enforcing the requirements of Section 502(c)(3). "After 60-plus years of the IRS strictly interpreting the

amendment, there is no reported situation where a church lost its tax-exempt status or was punished for sermons delivered from the pulpit," as reported by the Alliance Defending Freedom, a conservative advocacy group.

In fact, the ADF has energized conservative preachers and congregations to explicitly support like minded candidates for federal office. The goal is to prod the IRS into action so that they can file a First Amendment lawsuit against this section of the tax code. Obviously, the IRS has failed to rise to the challenge. I don't know why but I would guess that at least part of the reason is that no presidential administration wants to be seen fighting Christians in court.

This brings us to today and the Trump Administration. During his campaign, Trump and (especially) Pence were very aggressive in courting the conservative Christian vote and their promise to rescind the Johnson Amendment played a very visible role in that process. After the election, the current Administration has not gone back on that promise. Speaking as Press Secretary, Sean Spicer stated that the President "is committed to get rid of the Johnson Amendment" and Trump himself made a similar promise at the National Prayer Breakfast this year.

In response a number of secular organizations have taken up the effort to preserve the Johnson Amendment including several that our Society is affiliated with including American Atheists, the Freedom From Religion Foundation, the American Humanist Society and others. Although the President appears to have

little influence over Congress, with the House and Senate controlled by Republicans, there is a good chance that bills to repeal the Amendment will be introduced; Republicans may well take the approach that Johnson himself took in 1954 by attaching such a repeal to the upcoming tax reform effort.

Initially, I viewed the effort to retain the Amendment to be nothing more than support for what is basically a symbolic representation of the wall of separation between church and state since the IRS refuses to enforce the law. My view was that time would be better spent in forcing the IRS to enforce the law. But I have changed my mind in light of what the repeal of the law could allow well beyond candidate advocacy from the pulpit.

Even without the Johnson Amendment, current IRS regulations limit non-profits, including churches, to spending no more than half of their income on political activity. While this may be meaningful for small, local houses of worship, consider what it would allow the Catholic Church or Scientology, for example, to spend vast sums supporting candidates who deny women full control of their health. Even a group like the Salvation Army with an annual budget of \$3.5 Billion could spend about \$3 Billion on political activities.

Also, with the Johnson Amendment, churches could become little more than PAC's. If a big dollar donor wanted to donate to a candidate but remain anonymous, they could simply donate through the church with an understanding (*wink*, *wink*) of how the money would be used. AND, the donation would be tax

deductible. Finally, one can only speculate how many "churches" would soon be formed with a congregation of only a few people..

Humanists can take a clear, unequivocal position on this matter: The Johnson Amendment is vital as a part of the wall of separation of church and state and should remain the law of the land. I would encourage you to contact you congressman and senators and let them know of your position.

September Program Meeting of Minds: Ray Stone

At our September 16th meeting, Aristotle, Niccolo Machiavelli, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Sun Yat-Sen, as well as Steve Allen will participate in another "Meeting of Minds" presentation. This, our third in a series of re-enactments of Steve Allen's original work has been one of our most popular programs. Don't miss it.

[Ed. Note: The following three quotes by Steve Allen give a flavor of his thinking. Today, these seem quite prescient.]

The hair is real - it's the head that's a fake.

Ours is a government of checks and balances. The Mafia and crooked businessmen make out checks, and the politicians and other compromised officials improve their bank balances.

In a rational society we would want our presidents to be teachers. In our actual society we insist they be cheerleaders.

Speak Out! Roger Schlueter

Our Society has a couple of means to communicate with our membership. The primary one is the monthly Secular Circular which is sometimes supplemented with announcements from the podium at our general meetings. However, there is little opportunity for the membership to give feedback or to make general statements that might be of interest to all of us. We would like to emphasize and expand on how you can make your voice be heard.

First, you are welcome to write a Letter to the Editor of the Secular Circular if you would like to address an issue that might be of concern to our members. This rarely happens, but I'd like to take this opportunity to invite you to take advantage of our newsletter to express your own views. Know of a meeting that Humanists might be interested in? Write a note to the Editor. Think that an editorial by the President misses a large issue? Write a rebuttal.

Second, we have decided to have a "Speak Out!" opportunity at our general meetings where anyone can talk about any issue that is on her or his mind. There are a couple of rules:

- You have to let the President know ahead of the meeting that you want to speak your mind. I will ask what you want to discuss but I will NOT be censoring topics except that they may not be pornographic or illegal.
- You will be limited to 3-5 minutes. Full stop. No exceptions.

Non-HSSB Events of Interest

Upcoming Events Outside of California:

- August 19-21: American Atheists National Convention. Speakers include Chris Kluwe, Richard Dawkins, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, David Silverman, Seth Andrews, Matt Dillahunty, and many more. In addition, there will be an Eclipse Viewing party on Monday, August 21! Charleston, South Carolina. [Link](#).
- September 15-17: Freedom From Religion Foundation 40th Annual National Convention 2017. Speakers include Jerry Bloom, Jesse Castillo, Michelle Goldberg, Cara Santa Maria, Steven Pinker and many more. Madison, WI. [Link](#).
- October 26-29: CSI Conference 2017. Speakers include Richard Dawkins, James Randi, Lawrence Krauss, Maria Konnikova, among many others. Las Vegas, NV



HSSB Contact Information

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Newsletter Editor:

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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 mwilk@cox.net.

For any information about HSSB, call 805-769-4772.

Copies of this newsletter are posted on the HSSB website.

See us on Facebook



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

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HSSB Calendar

- Tuesday, August 15th Board Meeting 5:30 pm. Home of Mary Wilk. Members are invited to attend.
- Saturday, August 19th Monthly Meeting: John O'Donovan and William Wang will speak on the trends and importance of Artificial Intelligence. ; 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.
- Tuesday, September 11th Board Meeting 5:30 pm. Home of Mary Wilk. Members are invited to attend.