



# The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

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

SEPTEMBER 2017

Our fifth edition of "The Ultimate Talk Show," Steve Allen's

## *Meeting of Minds*

Directed by Meredith McMinn

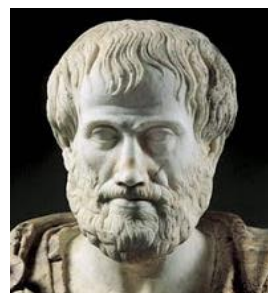
Featuring the following characters from history:



*Sun Yat Sen*, (1866-1925): "The father of modern China," revolutionary hero, and first president of China, played by Ed Lee.



*Niccolo Machiavelli*, (1469-1527): Renaissance historian, politician, philosopher, diplomat, and writer, played by Paul Nay.



*Aristotle*, (384-322 B.C.): Ancient Greek philosopher and scientist, played by William York Hyde.

*Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, (1806-1861): Popular 19<sup>th</sup> century English romantic poet, played by Meredith McMinn.

*The Host, Steve Allen* (1921-2000): 20th century Renaissance man: Television pioneer, comedian, musician, composer, lyricist, author, playwright, scholar, played by Tom Mates.



**When:** Saturday, September 16, 2017. Doors open at 2:30 p.m. Show starts promptly at 3:00 p.m. The performance will last approximately two hours with a 15-minute intermission.

**Where:** **The Theatre at Valle Verde**, 900 Calle De Los Amigos, Santa Barbara. Directions: From Modoc Road (heading NW, or towards Goleta), turn left onto Calle De Los Amigos.

**Parking:** limited parking in lot or on street; **Preferred parking:** First Baptist Church, 949 Veronica Springs Rd. *Shuttle Service Provided* by Valle Verde.

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

**Optional Buffet Dinner:** Gourmet dinner buffet at Valle Verde after the show. \$25.00 per person, includes wine, iced tea, coffee, tax, & tip. If attending the dinner please

**RSVP to** [Cisneyan@gmail.com](mailto:Cisneyan@gmail.com) by noon, Saturday, 9/9/17.

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

## Welcome New Members!

Jill Wilk, Goleta

### President's Column: Artificial Intelligence Roger Schlueter

Our speakers at the last meeting spoke on artificial intelligence (AI) in a clear and accessible manner. The two speakers were positive and enthusiastic and, as such, did not speak to many of the issues and impacts, both positive and negative, that AI may have on society not only here in the United States but also around the world. It is a huge subject of which I have only amateur-level knowledge but given its importance, I'd like to begin a conversation about its wider implications.

The most immediate impact of AI will be on employment. Actually, that impact has already happened and its downward pressure on wages and employment can only increase as AI becomes more commonplace. For example, if you've seen videos of Amazon's fulfillment warehouses, robots do all the product retrieval from the shelves and only the final packaging is done by hand. Presumably that last step remains for humans because the optimal arranging of various sized small boxes into one larger box is a very difficult problem. Nevertheless, I have every confidence that that problem will give way to automation as well.

Another example can be seen in modern automobile manufacturing assembly lines. There, spot welding and large part handling is all done by robots. Not only does this reduce the number of employees needed to build a car but also reduces the risk of injury to those employees who do work on the line. The result is lower car costs to the consumer and higher profits for the company.

Those higher profits mean better benefits for executive-level managers and higher return on investment for the company owners. But,

typically, these rewards do not trickle down to employees. One reason is that with fewer employees, unions have a correspondingly lower level of power to use in benefit negotiations. This is one component of the increasingly large gap between the haves and the have-nots.

Some have argued that past history suggests that newer technology doesn't depress employment rates but rather shifts employment into different job descriptions. The classic historical example is how the rise of the automobile manufacturers put an end to buggy whip manufacturers. But those jobs merely shifted to the factory floor.

With AI I think the analogy breaks down. For one reason, many of the displaced employees have no place to go without significant re-education and training. This is one reason why Trump's promise to bring coal back rings hollow. Coal pit jobs have been eliminated by automation and no amount of political pressure is going to bring them back.

Because this is such an important topic, I'll write more on the effects of AI in the future. But I'd also like to hear your thoughts on the subject. Let me hear from you.



*"He doesn't pray well with others"*

## 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.

I hope you take advantage of these opportunities to express yourself.

\* \* \*

"Human decency is not derived from religion. It precedes it."  
- Christopher Hitchens

## Clarence Darrow Joins William Jennings Bryan Outside "Scopes" Courthouse



Philadelphia sculptor Zenos Frudakis in his workshop.

Photo by Contributed Photo /Times Free Press.

On July 14, 2017 a statue of Clarence Darrow joined that of his Scopes' opponent, William Jennings Bryan, outside the Rhea County Courthouse in Dayton, Tennessee. Funds for the statue were raised by the American Humanist Society and by private donors. The Williams Jennings Bryan statue has been in place since 2005.

From July 10 to July 21, 1925, the Rhea County Courthouse was the stage for the trial of Dayton High School teacher John T. Scopes, who was charged with violating state law by teaching that human beings evolved from a "lower order of animals."

Scopes, defended by Darrow, was convicted and fined \$100, but the decision was reversed in 1927 by the Tennessee Supreme Court because the judge (and not the jury) set Scopes' fine. The Butler Act, the act at issue in the trial, stood until 1967 when it was repealed by Tennessee lawmakers. The case raised debate on



issues such as separation of church and state, academic freedom and the relationship between science and religion.

### POLL:

**Should Rhea County have a Clarence Darrow statue at the courthouse?**

No: 20.39% (62)



Yes: 79.61% (242)



Total Responses: 304

(Excerpted from *Times Free Press*, 7/14/17)

### Danes Vote to Scrap Blasphemy Law

(Excerpted from *AU Bulletin*, July/August 2017)

The Danish Parliament has repealed a law punishing blasphemy with a 75-27 vote, a move that was met with approval from the secular community.

"Blasphemy laws always contravene freedom of expression. Such laws don't help people live side by side, rather they are a block on open, honest discussion between communities, they marginalize minorities," Andrew Copson, president of the International Humanist and Ethical Union, said in a June 2 statement. "Congratulations to Denmark! The world must follow suit."

The law prevented people from criticizing religions or committing what some perceive as anti-religious acts. The last time a prosecutor attempted to use the law to punish someone was in 2015, when a man who burned a Quran would have spent as much as four months in prison if convicted.

"This [vote] means that we can have a freer and less prejudiced discussion about religions," Bruno Jerup, whose Red-Green

Alliance party was behind the proposal, said after the repeal was passed.

Other countries with similar laws to Denmark's repealed blasphemy law include Ireland and New Zealand.

### Your New Editor: Judy Flattery



How did a nice, Polish- Catholic girl from Buffalo become editor of a Humanist newsletter?

**\*\* My Story \*\***

I was born to a VERY large, devout, Polish-Catholic family in the suburbs of Buffalo, New York (I have over 80 first cousins—can anyone top that??). We went to church every Sunday, we observed all Holy Days of Obligation. We ate no meat on Fridays in those days. We underwent the rites of Baptism, Confession, Communion, and attended weekly religious instruction classes. Students at my public elementary school were bussed to religious instruction classes at the local Catholic schools on Monday afternoons. Pretty much everyone went and the only distinction was which parish you attended. We did not question it. It just was that way. There may have been a few Protestants or others who remained at the public school on Monday afternoons. They were the 'others'. I remember wondering if it was really ok to be friends with Debbie down the street; she was Protestant. No one ever said it was not ok but she occurred as one of the 'others'. It was just a little strange that she did not go to Church as we did.

My many cousins overwhelmingly married other Catholics in the Church. My grandmother's sister was a nun; one of my cousins became a priest; my aunt & uncle frequently entertained the local parish priest at their country cottage (note: from Father Ed I learned never to bet on a 2 year old horse at the track because they can buck their shins.... good to know!).

My Dad was a chemist (trained at a Catholic Jesuit High School & College) and fascinated us with science demonstrations at home that challenged our logic and developed our critical thinking skills. We went to the library every week and were encouraged to look up the answers to questions we had. My parents bought us a junior set of encyclopedias. I was a member of "The Look-It-Up Club."

As I entered 6<sup>th</sup> grade we moved to a wealthier, more diverse suburb and I became personally acquainted with people of different religious beliefs. Although the Catholic Church was modernizing, it occurred as less central to everyday life and something that fewer of my friends were concerned with. I asked a lot of questions to my new friends about their beliefs and rituals and listened carefully and critically to the answers. Very interesting!

In 6<sup>th</sup> grade at our parish's religious instruction classes we were being prepared to become confirmed as Catholics. The nun explained that, as a baby, we were baptized Catholic without having a say, but now we had the opportunity to exercise our free will to be confirmed as a Catholic for life. I thought about this and asked the nun if we could invite representatives of all different religions, to come speak to us so we could be better informed before making that important choice. My suggestion was not accepted. I was perplexed and disappointed by her refusal.

I went through the Confirmation process with mixed feelings. Although skeptical, I learned that as a confirmed Catholic I had the power to baptize people in an emergency and save them from an eternity in purgatory. That seemed to be a cool superpower. I baptized my new Korean-American friend, Mina, in her bathroom at a sleep-over 'just in case'. It was easier to go along sometimes or to passively resist rather than to take a strong stand. I asked my parents to be excused from going to Confession because I just did not believe in any of it. They refused. I responded by letting the priest in the Confessional know I was there against my will. My brother remembers that day with some amused discomfort and alarm.

I had a boyfriend in 7<sup>th</sup> grade who told me he did an experiment where he prayed to a god of a different religion every night for 14 days to see which one, if any, would respond. No god responded so he declared himself an atheist. This seemed to me to be a very clever, scientific and reasonable approach.

I was a huge *Star Trek* fan. *Star Trek's* creator, Gene Roddenberry, envisioned a science-based future free from religion. He had a compelling view that humanity can work out creative answers to tough problems by observing, experimenting, analyzing, and taking actions consistent with our chosen values. No god required.

Around 9<sup>th</sup> grade, Fr. Bruce Ritter, a visiting Franciscan priest, spoke at our church about his new charity, Covenant House, which took care of underage street kids and runaways in New York City. I was very touched and inspired by this important work and gave him all the babysitting money I had earned the previous week (\$22, it was a fortune to me). I continued to support Covenant House until the early

1990's when Fr. Bruce resigned amidst scandal of sexual improprieties against the youth he was helping and financial mismanagement of the charity.

When I could drive I would leave the house on Sunday morning in time for noon mass but would often drive to K-Mart instead. I am not proud of this; I was not comfortable confronting my parents again on something that means so much to them. It would be like refusing to go to Confession all over again. I tend to avoid direct confrontation.

I went to college and earned degrees in Engineering and Business. College was freeing. No more church except when my parents came to visit, then I went to church with them while feeling like a hypocrite.

The moment of truth was approaching and finally came when I decided to get married.

I was not willing to be married in the church. For me, it would be a level of personal hypocrisy I was unwilling to tolerate and, I reasoned, would be insulting and patronizing to my believer relatives. So, I wrote a letter to my parents "coming out" as an atheist. They received it and read it. We never discussed it. We held our civil ceremony and raised our children in a secular manner.

The wedding was carefully planned. I invited only a few trusted family members to a civil ceremony in a conference room at a hotel. A hundred more were invited to the reception that followed. However, the judge forgot about the ceremony and arrived 90 minutes late by which time many of the hundred arrived and crowded into the conference room for the ceremony. The judge finally appeared, apparently inebriated, without his script and he 'winged it'. He made up some vows I've never heard before such as asking us if we

promised to always be friends and asking us to promise we would always be lovers (oh dear). Then he had us shake hands to seal the deal. Excruciating. Despite a few guffaws, everyone behaved themselves and we went on to enjoy the reception.

I saw the movie *The Big Sick* last night, a true story about a secular Muslim comic who dates a woman outside his family's faith and his struggles to deal with it. It really hit home! I highly recommend it. Very funny, very authentic & very moving.

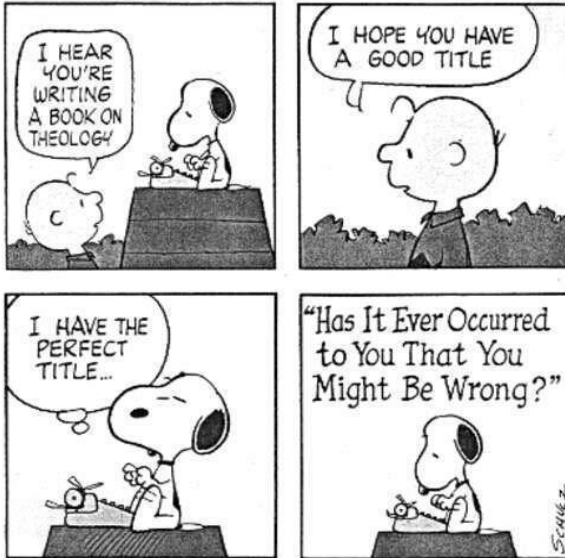
Over the years I have become more comfortable with how to manage this transformation. I recently discovered what I can say when someone sneezes ("Salud! Dinero! Amor!" for a triple sneeze). Last fall I wrote a letter to the Bishop of Buffalo renouncing my Confirmation as an issue of personal integrity. I recently had a life-threatening health incident and found I was fine facing death without a god (Should god ever be capitalized if written by an atheist??). The saying, "There are no atheists in a foxhole" is not true.

Becoming the editor of this newsletter is the next step of 'coming out as a non-believer' for me. It is a structure that has me keep up with what's happening in the world of secularism, atheism, and humanism, and contributing to others with similar experiences. I invite you to share YOUR story with us.

I am committed to welcoming other Humanists to the safe and enriching space of our Society, to expanding appreciation for the value Humanism brings to our world and am interested in developing community projects aligned with our Humanist values.

I thank the Board for giving me this opportunity and Diane Krohn, the previous editor, for all of her excellent work.

**An Oldie And a Goodie:** Charles Schultz, Secular Humanist, originally published Aug 9, 1976



### Non-HSSB Events of Interest in CA

- September 17: Glenn Branch: *Teaching Climate Change: Dealing with Doubt and Denial*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles.  
<http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/teaching-climate-change-dealing-with-doubt-and-denial/>
- September 17: Dr. Nancy Segal: *Twin Mythconceptions: False Beliefs, Fables, and Facts About Twins*. Skeptics Society Science Salon #14, Pasadena.  
<https://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/>

### Upcoming Events Outside of California:

- September 15-17: Freedom From Religion Foundation 40<sup>th</sup> Annual National Convention 2017. Speakers include Jerry Bloom, Jesse Castillo, Michelle Goldberg, Cara Santa Maria, Steven Pinker and many more. Madison, WI.  
<https://ffrf.org/outreach/convention/future-conventions>
- October 26-29: CSI Conference 2017. Speakers include Richard Dawkins, James Randi, Lawrence Krauss, Maria Konnikova, among many others. Las Vegas, NV.  
<http://csiconference.org/>

### HSSB Contact Information

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David Echols	Judy Flattery
Colin Gordon	Mary Wilk
Pat Ward	Clover Broadhead Gowing

#### Newsletter Editor:

Judy Flattery [FLATTEJL@cox.net](mailto:FLATTEJL@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, P.O. Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130, Attn: Mary Wilk. For membership information contact Mary Wilk at [mwilk@cox.net](mailto:mwilk@cox.net).

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

Copies of this and past newsletter are posted on the HSSB website.

See us on Facebook





Humanist Society of  
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PO Box 30232  
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### HSSB Calendar

**Saturday September 9:** Noon is the deadline to let [cisneyan@gmail.com](mailto:cisneyan@gmail.com) know if you plan to attend dinner after Saturday September 16 monthly meeting.

**Tuesday September 12: Board Meeting:** 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

**Saturday September 16: Monthly Meeting:** 3:00-5:15pm Steve Allen's 'Meeting of the Minds', The Theatre at Valle Verde, 900 Calle De Los Amigos (off of Modoc)

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

**Saturday October 21: Monthly Meeting:** 3:00 pm. Featuring Heaven Edwards speaking on Population Dynamics.

**Tuesday November 14: Board Meeting.** 5:30 p.m. Home of Mary Wilk. Members invited to attend.

**Saturday November 18:** Monthly Meeting 3:00 pm. Featuring Brian Dunning, author, producer & host of the podcast, *Skeptoid*.