



The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

www.SBHumanists.org

NOVEMBER 2017



Join Us For:

Miracle or Science

A Talk by Brian Dunning

An insider's look at five religious miracles that are far more interesting when we discover what actually took place. *Simple debunking is just as useless as uncritical belief; the real excitement comes from learning the history and the context.*



Science writer Brian Dunning is the host and producer of the podcast *Skeptoid: Critical Analysis of Pop Phenomena* (www.skeptoid.com), applying critical thinking to urban legends and popular pseudoscientific subjects promoted by the mass media. *Skeptoid* has a weekly audience of 161,000 listeners.

Brian is also the author of five books based on the podcast. A computer scientist by trade, Brian uses new media to showcase the rewards of science and critical thinking. He is a member of the National Association of Science Writers and lives in southern California with his family.

When: Saturday November 18, 2017

Time: Meet and Greet at 2:30 pm. Program begins at 3:00 pm.

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

Where: Patio Room, Vista del Monte, 3775 Modoc Rd, Santa Barbara, CA 93105.

Parking: Park only in spaces marked **VDM**

Optional Dinner: We invite attendees to join us for dinner at a nearby restaurant after the meeting for further discussions. A dinner count will be taken at the beginning of the meeting to confirm our restaurant reservation.

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

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President's Column: Responses to Editorial *On Racism*

by Roger Schlueter

My editorial in the October issue of the *Secular Circular* was printed in the Santa Barbara Independent on Friday, September 22nd. It elicited 57 comments, some of which were positive, more were negative and most were simply bickering between two writers about the causes of racism. I thought I'd restate some of the comments here that seemed worthy of a reply. I have abridged the posted comments and added my thoughts after their posts.

Bill Clausen: ...who is practicing racism in Santa Barbara?

Roger: this represents a classic case of white privilege although I have no idea Bill's race or political ideology. When there are an equal number of Caucasian gardeners in Montecito and strawberry pickers in Santa Maria as Latinos, I'll give this comment more thought.

Botany (in reply to Bill): According to him [Roger], All police officers, doctors, nurses, teachers and many more, at least the White ones anyway. Roger's opinion is nothing more than vile drivel.

Roger: That last sentence seems a bit harsh. ☺

Bill Clausen (in reply to Botany): *Well yes, one has to cite facts as opposed to simply complaining about a problem but having no answers. They are more interested in attacking the so-called "privileged" than they are in bringing the people they claim to represent up to the living standard of*

those they insist are ignorant.

Roger: I thought, perhaps wrongly, that citing the beheading of the statue at the Mission was a fact but Bill does have a point in that I did not offer links to other resources documenting the issue although those are readily available.

His second sentence has little merit. I didn't attack anyone. But, more importantly, if I had a solution to the problem of racism in America, I would submit it to Congress and get a Nobel Peace prize in return.

Bill continues: If a small handful of racist Whites show up at a rally, then ALL whites are blamed for "not doing enough", and people are increasingly getting sick of being blamed for the actions of a few, and when they dare to speak up about it, they are accused of having a "fragile white ego".

Roger: Actually Bill's comment has merit, just not in the way he meant. I don't think "ALL whites" get blamed for their inaction but the opposite is too often true, namely, when a black man gets accused of rape or murder then opprobrium is sometimes cast on all black men for a lack of morals, for example.

This was followed by an extended discussion on the cause of racism. Some good points were made but, like most internet exchanges, there was more heat than light. The conversation then returned to my opinion piece.

CowGirlUp: I wish this author would enlighten us with some concrete examples

so that we could better understand what he is implying. I've lived here too many years, and know too many people, LOL, and have never in my life seen racism practiced here. The main discrimination I have seen is not race but class and age based.

Roger: Here is another person who has never seen racism practiced here. I suspect what she means is that she has never seen overt, direct racism such as that which is seen in the South. In that context, she's right but as stated it's another case of not seeing what she does not want to see.

That said, I agree that class and age discrimination is more obvious here. However, how does one differentiate between the privileges that wealth brings from discrimination based on that wealth? Or are they the same thing? That's a thorny subject on which reasoned people could disagree.

ramey: *Good exposition of the fundamental premise of the article. Saves one from wasting the time required to actually read it. Rather than making a statement about racism, removing the head from a statue of a historical figure, better illustrates common stupidity, which never goes out of style.*

Roger: Like CowGirlUp, ramey makes a false dichotomy between racism and stupidity. In my view, they are two sides of the same coin.

This is just a sampling of the many comments that were posted in response to my editorial. If nothing else, the level of interest in the topic suggests that it is on

the minds of many citizens and I hope that points toward an improvement of life in America in the long run.

Report On October's Program: Making the Population Connection

By Judy Flattery

Heaven Edwards, Senior Membership Relations Coordinator of Population Connection (formerly known as Zero Population Growth), was the main speaker at the October 21 HSSB meeting held at Vista de Monte.

Full audio for the presentation, "Making the Population Connection," can be found on the HSSB website at this link: [Population Connection Audio](#).



Roger Schleuter with Heaven Edwards of Population Connection. *Photo by Marian Shapiro*

Here are some of the key points of the lecture and discussion:

- It took until about 1850 for global population to reach 1 billion people. At this time the global population is 7.6

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billion and, at current rates, we can expect an additional billion people to be added about every 12 years.



Good turn-out for "Making the Population Connection." Photo by Marian Shapiro

- Small changes in Total Fertility Rate (TFR), the average number of children per woman, can have a major impact on the population growth curve.
- Thailand's TFR is at 1.5 children per woman due to a range of successful family planning programs including "Cops & Rubbers," whereby the police distribute condoms in their communities.
- Ms. Edwards recommended a very interesting & inspiring TED talk on the far ranging positive impacts of grass roots family planning efforts in Thailand. Here is a link to that talk: [TedX Talk by Mr Condom of Thailand](#)
- In contrast, Ghana's TFR is 4.0. In Ghana this rate of growth impacts other social inequities such as the disparity in education & literacy between boys and girls.
- The issue is that more people consume more resources and create more waste with far-ranging impacts on climate, species extinction, and environmental damage to land, air and water.
- Sana'a, the capital of Yemen, is expected to exhaust their ground water supply by 2025. This crisis has largely been driven by the population growth in Yemen which has more than tripled (from 8 million to 27 million) since 1980.
- People in developing countries are the first to feel the impact of these global changes such as the fishing village in Thailand where Heather worked at a "Study Abroad" program. The local fish population plummeted which impacted the livelihood of the entire village. In the developed world a similar event would be less devastating to a nearby community because we "outsource our resource and environmental footprint."
- There is impact on peace as well. Bradley A. Thayer is a researcher who studies the relationship between population growth rates, civil unrest, war, and terrorism. His [research](#) indicates that countries with higher population growth rates are more prone to civil unrest and terrorism activity.
- Globally 40% of pregnancies are unplanned. Preventing unplanned pregnancies would contribute to population stabilization while empowering women to make the best reproductive choices for their own life.
- The Philippines was mentioned as a country where a Catholic government denies women the right to control their own fertility with concurrent high rates of unsafe abortions. 99% of maternal deaths occur in the developing world.

- The World Bank published a study correlating failed states or states most likely to fail with their rate of population growth.
- Heather invited attendees to sign a petition opposing the “Global Gag Rule” which restricts funding and aid to international organizations and NGOs that provide any information about abortion. Population Connection supports replacing the Global Gag Rule with the “Global Her Rule” which would permanently repeal the Global Gag Rule.
- When President Trump reinstated the Global Gag Rule in January 2017, the international community responded with a global campaign called “She Decides”. Learn more about “She Decides” at this link: [She Decides](#)
- Population Connection will celebrate its 50th year in 2018. It has 40,000 members and is the largest organization of its kind in the US.
- Population Connection has three Core Programs:
 - Population Education (PopEd) which trains K-12 teachers and produces curriculum materials that address population issues which reach 3 million students each year;
 - Grassroots Outreach which engages an active constituency of U.S. advocates for international family planning programs;
 - Advocacy which works directly with federal policymakers to fund and improve international family planning.

- As usual, our members asked some very intelligent and insightful questions.

Why the Department of Health and Human Services Should Stop Saying Life Begins at Conception

By Richard Paulson

[In mid-October], the Department of Health and Human Services released a draft of its latest strategic plan, which will guide the agency from 2018 to 2022. Near the top of the document, the agency presents its mission statement: HHS activities “cover a wide spectrum of activities, serving and protecting Americans at every stage of life, *beginning at conception*” (the emphasis is the author’s).

This is a religious definition of life, not a scientific one. Health and Human Services is a government organization. Its actions should be evidence-based, not faith-based, and this decidedly unscientific language should be eliminated from its strategic plan.

As an infertility specialist, I witness human fertilization in the laboratory every day. The human egg is a single living cell and it becomes a one-cell embryo if it successfully combines with a live sperm. No new life is formed — the egg and the sperm were already alive — and fertilization is not instantaneous. Nearly 48 hours pass from the time sperm first bind to the outside of the zona pellucida, the human eggshell, until the first cell division of the fertilized egg. The two newly formed cells then have the

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potential to give rise to a human being, but only if they are appropriately nurtured so that they continue to divide and then successfully implant in the uterus.

As women age, the proportion of eggs with chromosomal abnormalities increases dramatically. If such eggs are fertilized, they implant rarely, or result in a miscarriage. In vitro fertilization has shown human reproduction to be a highly inefficient process. Even a chromosomally normal embryo will successfully implant and result in a live birth only about half the time. This is true whether fertilization takes place in the body or in the laboratory.

The multicellular pre-implantation embryo cannot be equated with a human being. It is a collection of stem cells, each of which has the capacity to grow into any part of the placenta, as well as fetal tissues and organs, but it is not itself a new human life. It is also potentially more than one individual, since identical twins are the result of a single implantation.

From a scientific perspective, life doesn't begin at any one point, it is a continuum. For HHS to define it as beginning at conception is a transparent attempt to justify restrictions on certain contraceptives as well as abortion. It may also have an unintended consequence: the restriction of infertility treatments, especially in vitro fertilization.

Now nearly 40 years old, IVF has revolutionized infertility treatment. More

than 7 million babies have been born worldwide as a direct result of this technology, though it fails as often as it succeeds. If a pre-implantation embryo were to be considered a human being, then its lack of implantation during IVF would logically have to be considered a human death. Fertility clinics would not be able to function if they could be accused of harming human life in the process of trying and failing to achieve a successful pregnancy.

A preimplantation embryo has the theoretical potential to become a human life, but it cannot be considered on the same moral plane as a human life. We should insist that the Department of Health and Human Services be driven by science and data, not faith-based belief. All those concerned with the unscientific nature of the current HHS strategic plan draft [had] until Oct. 27 to email their comments to HHSPLan@hhs.gov. We need to embrace the founders' doctrine of separation of church and state, to keep faith and religion separate from the administration of our nation's healthcare. [Op Ed published in LA Times p. A-13, 10/26/17. Dr. Richard Paulson is a professor of obstetrics and gynecology at USC, the director of the Keck School of Medicine's infertility program, and the president of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM.org). [@DrRPaulson](https://twitter.com/DrRPaulson)]

God is an ever-receding pocket of scientific ignorance.

—Neil Degrasse Tyson

Declare Yourself!

By Roger Schlueter

The Freedom from Religion Foundation (FFRF) is promoting an effort to bring atheists out of the closet. I suppose this effort is patterned after the very successful effort of a similar nature by the LGBT community which led to a sizeable surge in their acceptance by most of our society. In any case, here is a blurb from the FFRF web site:

"Declare and share your nonbelief! Although the nonreligious — including one in four U.S. citizens — is a significant segment of the world population, many Americans have never knowingly met a nonbeliever. You can help dispel myths, educate and promote reason by adding your voice, face and message to FFRF's friendly neighborhood freethinker campaign. This is your chance to proclaim you're a freethinker and why. It's working for the gay rights movement. Now it's time for atheists and agnostics to come out of our closet. Many faces make Enlightenment work."

"It's fun, it's easy and takes less than a minute to complete! Once your cyberboard is approved by FFRF, you may post and tweet it or use it as your Facebook or Twitter image. We even size it for use as your Facebook or Twitter image or banner."

Let's join in the fun. Go to [this page](#) to sign up. If you enter, also send your contribution to our newsletter editor and we'll enter your contribution in an

upcoming issue of the *Secular Circular*.

Not Afraid of Burning in Hell

By Judy Flattery

Have you seen Ron Reagan's Freedom From Religion Foundation's commercial on cable TV? Ron Reagan is the progressive son of former Republican President, Ronald Reagan and former First Lady, Nancy Reagan.

In case you haven't seen it, here is a link to the 30 second spot ([Ron Reagan Atheist Commercial](#)) which ends with the memorable line, "Ron Reagan, lifelong atheist, not afraid of burning in Hell." The commercial first aired on Morning Joe and Rachel Maddow on MSNBC in February 2017. CNN and Comedy Central have also run the ad.



"I hear he turned water into wine, but it was a rather poor quality Mesopotamian Cabernet"

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But did you know that ABC, NBC, CBS, ESPN, and *even the Discovery Science network* refused to air the commercial because they considered it too controversial? Reportedly, CBS was willing to run the ad if the 'Burning in Hell' line were removed, but later decided against airing it even if edited.

"It appears that if a public figure makes a simple declarative statement in support of state/church separation, FFRF and atheism, it's too hot to handle for CBS," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

"It seems that excess gas, erectile dysfunction and other intimate bodily functions, not to mention ads wherein political candidates viciously attack each other, are acceptable," added Dan Barker, who co-directs FFRF. *"But the plain-spoken, witty and slightly irreverent remarks of a well-known figure identifying as atheist are too much for the delicate sensibilities of CBS' censors."*

"Why are atheism and freethought still treated as socially unacceptable, even though fully a fifth of the population has no religion today?" Gaylor asked. *"If anything should be socially unacceptable, it ought to be blind deference to religion."*

Kudos to MSNBC, CNN & Comedy Central for airing this important ad. [Quotes excerpted from FFRF.org website]

N.J. Town Removes Devotional Shrine From Public Land

Saying he was motivated to defend the separation of church and state, a New Jersey mayor ordered the removal of a religious shrine from state-owned land.

Newly-elected Passaic Mayor Hector Lora called for the 14-year old shrine to Our Lady of Guadalupe to be dismantled because it was a religious display on public property. Mayordomia Guadalupe, the group caring for the shrine, was stringing electrical lines for security cameras on the site and collecting money for its upkeep, reported by the Bergen County Record.

"I can't allow any religious group to occupy public land permanently and collect money," Lora told the newspaper. *"I'm standing for the law."*

The shrine grew after two boys were clearing brush in 2003 and one of them claimed to see the Virgin Mary's image in a tree stump. Word of the vision, which some deemed a miracle, soon spread

through Passaic's large Mexican community.

Mayordomia Guadalupe is seeking a new home for the shrine, but local Catholic churches have been advised not to take it. The bishop of the Diocese of Paterson sent a letter to the parishes advising them not to accept the icon because it is not recognized or sanctioned by Church officials.

Passaic officials had given the shrine's caretakers six months to find it a new home, but none had been found when the deadline arrived on Aug. 15. A member of the Mayordomia Guadalupe told the newspaper they still hope to be able to place it on private property.

[Reprinted from Church & State, Oct. 2017 p. 17]

Report From CSI Con – Las Vegas

By Diane Krohn

I attended the October 2017 CSI conference in Las Vegas along with several other HSSB members. CSI Con is hosted by the [Committee for Skeptical Inquiry](#) (CSI). CSI publishes [Skeptical Inquirer](#), subtitled *The Magazine for Science and Reason*. Here are summaries of three of the speakers.

Lawrence Krauss: How Science Works

Lawrence Krauss, theoretical physicist and cosmologist, gave an opening presentation that was both entertaining and educational. He explained how studying the sun led to a wide range of knowledge of the universe. It started with

the question of “how long will the sun last?” People likened the burning of the sun to the burning of coal. From the starting point of 6000 years (accepted at the time, before the 1800's), it was increased when the study of geology determined that the earth was much older than thousands of years—so the sun must be as well.

From there, scientists thought that the sun was hot due to compression of gas. This could have kept the sun hot for millions of years but not billions of years. It was not until the 1930's that Hans Bethe figured out that the sun was heated as a result of the fusion of hydrogen atoms into helium.

Later in the sun's life, the helium, in several stages, fuses to become iron. And when a star collapses and blows up, it produces the material to make planets and all life, including you, the reader.

So, the initial question, “How long will the sun last?” led to many discoveries about the entire universe.

David Gorski, M.D.: Quackademic Medicine

Dr. Gorski talked about the trend in medical schools and hospitals to offer “integrative medicine,” which he defines as the infiltration of pseudoscience into medicine. It is described by advocates as “the best of both worlds” in that it treats the root cause of disease, treats the patient holistically, is natural, patient-centered, and preventative. But Gorski argued that it is the worst of both worlds,

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because it overuses both conventional medicine and “alternative” medicine.

Integrative medicine frequently serves as a vehicle to introduce quackery, such as homeopathy, naturopathy, acupuncture, and “functional medicine.” Functional medicine is not specifically defined and is such an open-ended term that it allows for basically anything that its practitioners want to do; frequently this ends up being lots of laboratory tests that have no known purpose for the patient’s condition (in addition to other questionable treatments).

Dr. Gorski presented an example of a patient who had received “functional medicine” for treatment for inflammatory breast cancer. Standard therapy for this disease is chemotherapy followed by surgery and radiation. But because this patient was also receiving functional medicine, she received massive IV doses of vitamin C, was placed on a limited diet (gluten-free, dairy-free, low glycemic), and given 9 supplements with no known efficacy for cancer treatment. She had 152 (!) laboratory tests performed. Chemotherapy patients get a lot of labs done, but these tests included amino acid levels, heavy metal levels, parasite presence and lots more that have no identified purpose or use. The patient survived, but at what extra medical costs that have no benefit?

Gorski’s conclusion about functional medicine is that it takes “make it up as you go along” to a new level, not a good thing in medicine.

You can read the case report here: <http://imjournal.com/openaccess/taxman151.pdf>

Eugenie Scott: How Do We Explain Knowledge Resistance?

There are some things that people can change their minds about, but other things that people are resistant to changing. What is it about these things that allow for knowledge resistance? Dr. Scott brought up several potential reasons: 1) People are dumb; 2) People are ignorant; 3) People hate science. But she pointed out that research and surveys show these not to be the case.

Since knowledge resistance is not due to any of these, it seems to be that facts are viewed through ideology, values and group identification. Ideology is not necessarily bad (for example, humanism is an ideology), and we are all mixtures of ideologies. When presented with contrary information to one’s position, a person will frequently double down. This backfire effect occurs more with people who are more extreme.

Dr. Scott concluded that changing minds requires effective messaging, must come from a trusted messenger (from the tribe), and must be repeated often. Trustful relationships can overcome resistance to knowledge.

“The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, and wiser people so full of doubts.”
–Bertrand Russell

WINTER SOLSTICE PARTY AT CODY'S CAFE

Come celebrate and join your fellow Humanists for a wonderful dinner, sparkling wine and a repast to satisfy all palates.

SUNDAY, DEC. 17TH, 5:30 PM

BUFFET MENU:

SPARKLING WINES WITH APPETIZERS
FOUR ENTREE OPTIONS: SIRLOIN,
SALMON, CHICKEN OR A VEGETARIAN
SELECTION
SALAD, SIDE DISHES
CHOCOLATE MOUSSE AND FLAN
DESSERT

COFFEE, TEA, & SOFT DRINKS INCLUDED.
EXTRA CHARGE FOR WINE OR DRINKS BY THE
GLASS

AN ALL INCLUSIVE BARGAIN AT JUST
\$25.00

. Mail check made out to HSSB for \$25.00 to:

Nancy Cisney, 649 Verde Mar #E,
Santa Barbara, CA 93103

No payments accepted at the door.

Reservations accepted until Wed. Dec. 13th.

40 Person maximum. Don't miss
out on this fun evening!

Upcoming Non-HSSB Events in California:

February 9-11, 2018: LogiCAL – LA, Los Angeles. Registration starts November 10, 2017. This event includes a Friday night Magic and Mentalism show and a geological field trip to the La Brea Tar Pits on Darwin Day (February 12). Dr. Lawrence Krauss will be the featured Sunday speaker and other speakers to be announced. <http://logically.com/blog1/>

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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, P.O. 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 and past newsletter are posted on the HSSB website.

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HSSB Calendar

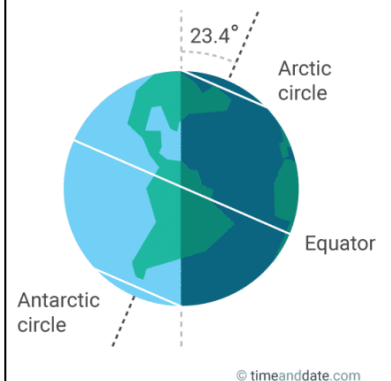
Saturday November 18: Monthly Meeting 3:00 pm. Featuring Brian Dunning, author, producer & host of the podcast, *Skeptoid*, speaking on Miracle or Science: An insider's look at five religious miracles and the excitement of discovering what actually took place within historical context.

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

Sunday December 17: Year End Solstice Party: Cody's Café, 4898 Hollister (Turnpike exit), Santa Barbara, CA 93111. \$25 Paid in advance to Nan Cisney. 649 Verde Mar #E, Santa Barbara, CA 93103. No payments accepted at the door. Reservations accepted until December 13.

Tuesday January 16, 2018: Board Meeting. 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

Saturday January 20, 2018: Monthly Meeting 3:00 pm. Speaker TBD.



PARTY