

### The Secular Circular

#### **Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara**

www.SBHumanists.org

**DECEMBER 2020** 

Please join us for our December Extra-Special Event on Zoom...

# SEEING A BRIGHT FUTURE CLEARLY: A 2020 VISION OF HUMAN RIGHTS Celebrating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

**Program:** This 90 minute event, celebrating the 72<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), will feature a live musical performance, an appearance by the Voices of Reason choir, inspiring educational videos, and presentations on current human rights issues by six authoritative, activist speakers, including:

**Ford Roosevelt**, (Yes! That Roosevelt!) Advisory Board Member, United Nations Association - San Diego reflecting on his grandmother, Eleanor Roosevelt's, crucial role as principal architect of the 1948 UDHR,

**Victor Schachter**, Founder and President of the Foundation for the Sustainable Rule of Law Initiatives on applying the UDHR for alternative dispute resolution in developing countries,

**Rima Nashashibi**, Founder and President of Global Hope 365, which launched the California Coalition to End Child Marriage – advocating across California to end the human rights abuse of minors bound into marriage,

**Carly Dunn**, Field Associate of UNHCR- San Diego – highlighting bi-national collaboration of the U.N. Refugee Agency with local organizations providing services on both sides of the U.S. - Mexico border,

**Womanaila Gerald**, Founder and Executive Director of Echoes of Faith – sharing her journey from Uganda to San Diego and her current work facilitating the resettlement of African refugees,

**Barry Simon**, President of the United Nations Association of the USA, Southern California Division – delivering closing remarks.

**When & How**: **THURSDAY December 10**, 6:00–7:30 pm Pacific via Zoom. Why Thursday?? Because it's Human Rights Day! Please register in advance at <u>this link</u>. Here is the program <u>Zoom link</u> to use on December 10. This event is being jointly hosted by HSSB, the Southern California Secular Coalition, and the United Nations Associations of San Diego & Orange Counties.



Ford Roosevelt



Victor Schachter



Rima Nashashibi



**Barry Simon** 

#### The HSSB Secular Circular - December 2020



Next COVID-19 Pandemic Models Updates

Dave Flattery

Dave Flattery will present his 11<sup>th</sup> update on the state of the COVID-19 pandemic on **Sunday December 6**<sup>th</sup>, and his 12<sup>th</sup> update on **Sunday January 10**<sup>th</sup>, at 3pm. All are invited to attend.

**When**: Sunday December 6<sup>th</sup> AND Sunday January 10th at 3pm Pacific / 6pm Eastern.

Where: Zoom link:

https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82598900099.

## Cultural Evolution: The Darwinian Basis of Change and Innovation and Why it is Important

**Peter Compo - November 21, 2020** *By Robert Bernstein* 



Peter Compo previously worked with Humanist Society President Judy Flattery and her husband David Flattery at DuPont, a fortunate connection that led to our hearing his ideas.

Dr. Compo is a scientist, engineer, corporate business veteran and author of the upcoming (mid-2021) book *The* 

Dr. Peter Compo

Emergent Approach, a New Approach to Strategy. He is also a musician from a family of musicians.

He made use of his diverse background to make connections that others might have missed.

He also has strong Humanist roots, having joined the American Humanist Association in the 1980s when Isaac Asimov was president. He sees cultural evolution as central to humanism because it begs the question, "How do change and innovation occur?" and just as importantly: "How can we drive positive progress?"

Compo very kindly has shared his slides which you can review here.

Compo's central point is that innovation in "cultural species" are not planned or "intelligently designed". They emerge from generations of selection processes, just as in biology.



Courtesy of Peter Compo

He started by comparing patterns of biological evolution with cultural evolution.

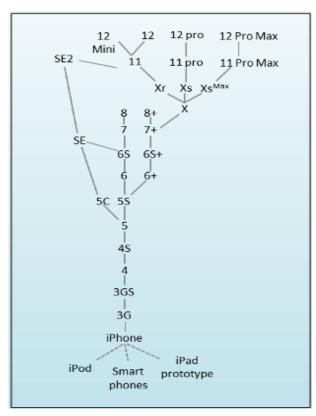
A *species* in biology is defined by combinations of **form**, **physiology**, and **behavior**. Analogously, *species* in culture can be defined by combinations of **ideas/representations**, **behaviors**, and **physical entities**.

Here are a few examples of entities that can evolve in culture. He noted that classification can be challenging, just as it is in biology:

- Idea/Representation: Ad campaign, law, constitution, poem, internet meme, scientific theory, song,
- **Behavior**: Studying, fighting, playing soccer, getting angry, communicating, traditions,
- **Physical Entity**: Phone, transistor, arrowhead, gun, love potion, violin, statue, shelter, office complex, satellite.

He points out that some cultural entities are large combinations of ideas, behavior, and physical entities, such as a corporation, a corporate culture, an army, a city, or an economy.

Compo showed parallel diagrams of evolution in biological and cultural examples. The first compared the horse and the iPhone both showing a genealogical tree and diversification over time. He



iPhone Evolution.

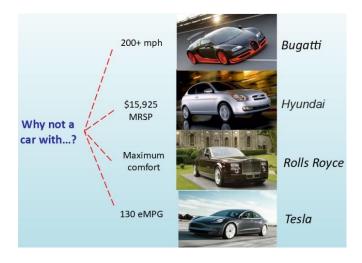
Diagram provided by Peter Compo.

pointed out that we call each new iPhone a generation, but they are really a new species of iPhone.

He compared the genealogy of languages, perhaps the most well-studied example of cultural evolution, with the evolution of canids (dogs, wolves, foxes, etc.) and showed other cultural genealogies (e.g. musical instruments, photography methods, and music playback formats).

He commented that there are biological arms races. As the prey gets faster, so does the predator, and vice versa. Culturally we do the same with militaries. During the upheaval of war this technological evolution speeds up.

Why are there no 100-mph deer? Well, there are always tradeoffs. You can't maximize all desirable parameters simultaneously. Think of a car. You can't have the speed of a Bugatti, the low price of a Hyundai, the comfort of a Rolls Royce and the energy efficiency of a Tesla all in the same vehicle.



The subtitle of the talk was "What do Archaeopteryx and Little Richard's Music have in Common?" The answer? They were both were transition species.

Archaeopteryx was discovered in 1861, two years after Darwin's *Origin of Species* was published. It was a valuable "missing link" between dinosaurs and birds, sharing characteristics of each.

Countless transition species in every domain of nature have been found since then.



Biological evolution: Archaeopteryx, a transition between dinosaurs and birds.

Little Richard's music was a transition between Jazz and Rock. The drums were swing/jazz style. The vocals and keyboard were more like rock. Compo played "Tutti Frutti" to demonstrate this.



Cultural Evolution: Little Richard's music, a transition between R&B/jazz and rock 'n roll.

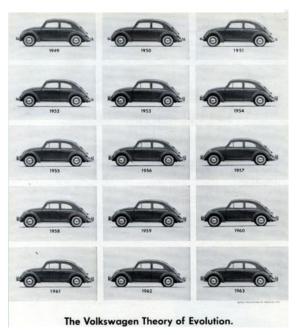
He then showed photos of the first 1886 patented vehicles by Benz and by Daimler. Are they automobiles or carriages? They were transitional "horseless carriages".



He finished this introduction of similarities between biology and culture with "living fossils" that have survived a surprisingly long time with few changes. Crocodilians have been around for nearly 100 million years. The original VW bug survived with only modest changes between 1949 and 2003, when the last one was produced in Mexico.



Living Fossils: Crocodile & Volkswagen Beetles

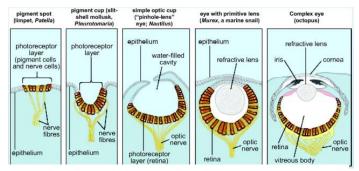


Compo's career path took him from music to science to business. In his DuPont career he worked in technology, supply chain, marketing, and business management. He was drawn to the study of cultural evolution because he saw the same evolutionary innovation patterns in every arena.

Compo reviewed biological evolution. He showed that environmental stressors acting on variations of living things leads to the destruction or dying away of the less fit to that environment. He argued that "Natural Destruction" might be a more appropriate term than "Natural Selection"!

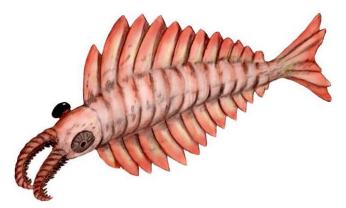
The complex eye evolved perhaps 40 separate times due to millions of generations of variation-selection (destruction) and heredity because it had such beneficial survival value.

"What good is half an eye?" is the wrong question. Some seeing is better than none.



Evolution of the Modern Eye: Over 100 million years (~540-440 MYA). Millions of generations, variations, and enormous stressors → selection pressure.

The evolution of the eye led to the "super predators" like a three-foot long shrimp-like creature, anomalocaris.



Anomalocaris, super predator of the ancient seas. Source: Wired

Compo corrected several myths and misunderstandings about natural selection:

- Does not requires DNA and genes Darwin did not know these things
- Is not slow slow compared to what?
- Is not all random although there are chance elements

- Does not require competition just stressors
- Does not always lead to "better" or "optimums"
- Fitness is not defined as "what survives;" fitness is the ability to resist environmental stressors.

Why was *Origin of Species* so sensational? Others, including Darwin's grandfather, Erasmus, had already promoted "descent with modification" from lower forms; however, Darwin's explanation, natural selection, was radical in new ways:

- There is no designer or orchestrator
- There are no goals or foresight (it is blind)
- Chance plays a role
- Destruction is the creative force
- All done by repetition of a "puny mechanism".

These radical ideas were rejected by other naturalists and by those who could not accept conflict with scripture. It was hard to believe there was no designer of biology and perhaps even harder to accept that there is no designer when it comes to cultural evolution!

Compo then addressed the mechanism of cultural evolution. He pointed out that there is more agreement on the observation that culture shares patterns with biology, than there is agreement on the underlying mechanism of cultural innovations.

He showed that the hugely successful Blackberry phone declined quickly after the introduction of the iPhone, and Blackberry's operating system is now extinct while the iPhone evolves with new features and capabilities yearly. Blackberry development starved, lacking a critical resource: money.

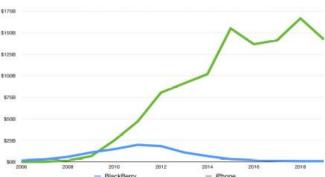
How do myriad iPhone innovations arise? How do other innovations arise?

How do we control it, improve it, and learn from it? He discussed three alternative explanations:

- 1. Evolutionary transmission between people and objects
- 2. Intelligent design

3. Darwinian variation/selection mostly in the mind.





Blackberry vs. iPhone Annual Revenue, 2006-2019 Source: AppleInsider.com

Transmission of ideas between people as the cause of innovation is one current cultural evolutionary explanation. While transmission is crucial for understanding how successful innovations radiate to new places, and for understanding how new variations can be communicated, transmission cannot explain how an innovation happens in the first place.

The transmission of Little Richard and other rock and rollers' music influenced the Beatles profoundly; however, Little Richard certainly didn't transmit to the Beatles the extraordinarily innovative music that they created.

A non-evolutionary explanation for cultural innovations is the concept of intelligent design. Does innovation come about because intelligent humans design it?

Yuval Noah Harari, author of *Sapiens*, argues that although natural selection guided evolution for four billion years, intelligent design will take over around 2050. Harari muses that bioengineering and

cyborg engineering may have us dispense with the organic completely in these creations.

Compo agrees with the spirit of Harari's narrative, but not with the implied mechanism of intelligent design. Harari's choice of words implies that we are becoming god-like designers of future technology, just as a theist might argue that a supernatural designer created life.

Intelligent design implies seeing and planning the future. It implies a certain prescience. It rejects the radical conclusions of Darwinian selection and encourages our worst inclinations about innovation.

We all want to believe that the future can be envisioned and planned by leaders. We want to believe that such planning is relatively straightforward and leaves little room for uncertainty and chance. We want to believe that we can predict and guide our collective actions to a desirable future. Compo challenges such conscious planning.

He gave several examples to counter the idea of intelligent design and to demonstrate that cultural evolutions are in fact a result of the third option—a strict analog to Darwinian selection.

One example was Marie Curie's discovery of radium. She was trying to understand why pitchblende (now known as the mineral Uraninite) was so radioactive. She tested every known element, sometimes 10 or 20 times, and decided there must be a new yet undiscovered element in pitchblende causing the radioactivity.

Academic leaders assumed she had just made a mistake, but her conviction drove her to spend four years stirring vats of boiling acid to extract one tenth of a gram of radium salt from tons of pitchblende ore [Note: Marie Curie's radioactive notebooks are encased in lead-lined boxes; her coffin is also lined with lead. Read more about her fascinating story <a href="here">here</a> or watch the 2019 biopic movie *Radioactive* on Amazon Prime -ed.).





Marie Curie exhausted all other possibilities before concluding this must be a new element, radium.

Compo went on to argue that Curie did not see a new element in some kind of "Eureka!" moment or with a vision or planning. As in all selection processes, she eliminated all other options. A new element was the last explanation standing.

Another example? Compare Antoni Gaudi's extraordinary Sagrada Familia Basilica with a termite mound. This wonderful example was taken from a talk by Daniel Dennett, the author of *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*. Clearly, the basilica is

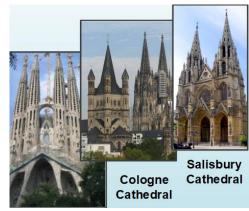




envisioned and planned while the termite mound arose from a blind process of natural selection.

Compo pointed out, however, that Gaudi's

"Intelligent
Design" also
evolved
from
generations
of previous
cathedral
designs and
that Gaudi
was adding
the next
increments
of innovations.



Or, consider Paley's Watch, famous teleological argument used "prove" to Intelligent Design and the existence of a creator. The argument goes something like this: "A design implies there is a designer and an intelligent design implies an intelligent designer. If you were to find a watch on the streets of London in



Paley's Watch

1800, you would know it was purposefully designed and was not purely the result of random chance, thus there must be a designer of something so wondrous... and thus the incredibly beautiful and intricate wonders of the natural world must also have a designer."

The flaw in this argument is that it overlooks the fact that no one person ever designed a whole watch, and that the watch design itself evolved over countless generations of human discoveries and tiny improvements, made by many people in other trades, such as glass blowers and metallurgists.

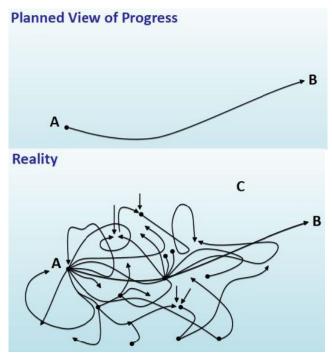
Dennett suggested that Gaudi, as designer, directed people as a conductor directs musicians; Compo

counters by proposing an experiment: Suppose you pull 80 people off the street. Give them good instruments and the parts to the Brahms 4th Symphony. Could any conductor make good music with them? Obviously not.

The conclusion was that the third option is the predominant source of cultural innovations: A selection process in the mind. People create then destroy unfit variations.

Over and over Compo showed that what we think of as planned and envisioned is, in fact, always Darwinian despite our habitual way of interpreting that foresight and planning is responsible for everything new. What is unknown is the next innovation, just as in biology.

The implications for society are widespread. We need a new approach to strategy. Our current linear and predictive methods are not useful. We would like to have a planned future that gets us from A to B, but that's just not the way it works. The reality of getting from A to B is messy and convoluted.



Businesspeople would love to have the perfect formula for success, but no one ever "intelligently designed" a billion-dollar business, even if they think they did. Compo briefly mentioned his *Emergent Approach* to strategy development which seeks to recognize and incorporate the Darwinian characteristics of non-linear cultural evolution. This will be covered in his follow-up talk in December.

Note: HSSB has scheduled a follow-up presentation/discussion meeting with Peter Compo at 3pm on Saturday December 19 to delve further into this material and its implications for creating and driving positive change in the world. Here is the Zoom link: <a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88064662945">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88064662945</a>

After Compo finished his talk, I reflected on my passion for trying to understand consciousness. He gave me a valuable new insight. We like to think of consciousness as the homunculus in the driver's seat of our body. But most of what we do has no conscious driver. Ask a great musician, artist, or scientist where their great ideas come from. They may have a story of deliberate planning. But it is almost certainly inaccurate; an "after the fact" narrative that has the process make more sense, even to themselves.

Compo has given us the first step to progress: Recognizing that natural selection/natural destruction is what drives even the best-planned designs. He has also left us with a challenge: How can we improve on that "destructive" process?

Dr. Compo also suggested additional reading on this topic. His own book on the emergent approach to strategy development, is expected to be published in mid-2021:



The Evolution of Technology – George Basalla
How Innovation Works – Matt Ridley
Emergence (and his other books) – Steven Johnson
From Chaos to Order – John H. Holland

#### Secular Student Alliance Scholarship Opportunity

By Judy Flattery

The Secular Student Alliance (SSA) has a scholarship program for supporting secular student activists. Our HSSB Board has approved initiating a fundraising effort to support an SSA scholarship. Our goal is to raise at least \$1000.

SSA manages the program (promotion, application process, due diligence on the entries, disbursements, handling W-9/1099s, etc.) and scholarship providers (such as HSSB) get to do the fun part: selecting the winner from among 30-40 worthy, qualified regional applicants. The application process begins in the summer and winners will be announced next Fall. Students



submit a 2-3page application covering: how they grew up, pivotal moment of non-religion, and their activism. HSSB will also receive contact information for  $\sim \! 100$  applicants for our outreach efforts to support growth and renewal of our society and to provide a secular humanist landing spot for students after graduation.

Will you help? If you are willing to contribute to the scholarship fund please contact our Treasurer, Sondra Wikman, at <a href="mailto:Sondra.wikman@gmail.com">Sondra.wikman@gmail.com</a>.

If you are interested in being part of the fundraising effort or being on the selection

committee, please contact Judy Flattery at <a href="mailto:sbhumanisteditor@gmail.com">sbhumanisteditor@gmail.com</a>.

This years' Student Activist Scholarship winners are an impressive and diverse group of student activists. Get to know the 2020 secular student scholarship winners <a href="here">here</a>.

#### **Volunteer Opportunities in HSSB**

- 1. We are looking for a Publicity Chairperson. This individual would be responsible for coordinating publicity activities including HSSB Facebook posts, Meet-Up posts, ads in local papers, press releases and regular reminders sent via email to members and interested non-members. Several people currently support the Publicity efforts; we are in need of a tech-savvy leader/doer to pull it all together. If you are looking to grow and develop your publicity and leadership skills while supporting the promotion of a humanistic worldview, please contact Judy Flattery (sbhumanisteditor@gmail.com).
- 2. We are also looking for a volunteer to edit our Zoom speaker meeting videos, upload them to our YouTube channel, and manage the channel. If you have these skills and are interested in having these valuable speakers and their humanist ideas be more widely available via YouTube, please contact Judy Flattery (sbhumanisteditor@gmail.com).

#### In Memoriam – Corinne Gallagher by Robert Bernstein

I was very saddened learn of the passing of long time Humanist Society member Corinne Gallagher. She was an HSSB member 2004-2017, from making her one of longest-term our members.



Corinne Gallagher

I originally knew Corinne from our local Sierra Club hikes. She was a regular on the hikes for many years. I would also see her at all of the good cause events, like rallies for justice and peace.

When I read her obituary in the Independent I realized how little I knew of her. She was almost the same age as my parents, born in 1933, but she seemed so much younger, healthier, and energetic than others her age.

Most interesting to me is that Corinne majored in mathematics at the University of Colorado in Boulder. It was quite rare for women of that generation to major in math or hard science. I wish I had known that. I would have loved to talk to her about that and how it was for her as a woman to major in math at that time.

In addition to honoring this good person from our Humanist Society, I would like to take the opportunity to make a larger point: If you have known someone for many years, be sure to make the effort to learn more about them while you have the chance!

Her obituary can be found <u>here in the Independent</u>. In addition to hiking, she was, a master gardener, a volunteer at the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden, a self-employed tax preparer, a seamstress, a weaver, and a world traveler.



Submitted by Diane Krohn

#### Humanist Association of San Diego Presents: A History of Atheism

By Judy Flattery

On October 25, the Humanist Association of San Diego presented Dr. Joseph McKenna, a lecturer in the Religious Studies Program at UC-Irvine, speaking on *A History of Atheism*. You can listen to the lecture at this website. His talk begins at about the 20-minute mark. The talk is well worth listening to in its entirety; however, here are a few gems I picked up in the first portion of his fascinating talk:

- Early humans and proto-humans were undoubtedly atheist; certain evolutionary developments of the brain are required before our earliest ancestors could create the explanations and narratives that form the core of religious beliefs.
- Christianity is the first religion that required belief and promulgated an orthodoxy. The first apostacy and heresy laws were enacted in the Eastern Roman Empire in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century under Thedosius II. At this time Roman pagan temples were destroyed, skepticism was suppressed, and religious debate was forbidden.
- Scriptoriums (the room in a monastery where scribes write, copy, and illuminate old manuscripts) were undoubtedly key in preserving the ancient classic texts, which eventually pulled us out of the Dark Ages... but what classical writings might have been discarded under the heresy and blasphemy laws? There was no new skeptical writing for 1000 years under this oppressive system.
- The problem of evil: If god is all powerful and all good; and, given all the evil and suffering in the world, god is either **not** all powerful or **not** all good. Theists have had to find a way to explain this and have written countless volumes justifying the inconsistency.
- 14<sup>th</sup> century universities in Europe adopted one of Aristotle's technique called "Education by Disputation" whereby the student devises the best argument against their thesis and sometimes discovers that the anti-argument is stronger than the pro-argument. This was a key step towards the Enlightenment.

## Upcoming Events of Interest to Humanists All of these events are online:

- December 8: <u>Nikole Hannah-Jones</u>, Pulitzer Prize winning creator of *The 1619 Project*. UCSB Arts & Lectures virtual event.
- December 10: Human Rights Day. Southern California Secular Coalition, together with the United Nations Association, celebrates the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. 6:00-7:30 pm. On Zoom. Watch this excellent 3 minute YouTube video on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- December 10: Speaking of
   Humanism: Humanist Holiday Delights and
   Disputes. Janey Rizvi shares how he
   celebrates the season and navigates the
   holiday sensibilities of his religious family
   and traditionally conservative community
   in his home state of Texas. Humanist
   Holiday Delights and Disputes
- January 12, 2021: Ta-Nehisi Coates, author and essayist. UCSB Arts & Lectures virtual event. <u>Ta-Nehisi Coates</u>
- January 26: Isabel Wilkerson: Caste: The Origins of our Discontents. UCSB Arts & Lectures virtual event. <u>Isabel Wilkerson</u>
- February 9: Yvon Chouinard: Protecting Public Land. UCSB Arts & Lectures virtual event. <u>Yvon Chouinard</u>

#### **CHRISTIANITY**

The belief that a cosmic Jewish Zombie can make you live forever in a magical cloud land if you symbolically eat his flesh, drink his blood, and telepathically tell him you accept him as your master, so he can remove an evil force from your soul that is present in humanity because a rib-woman was convinced by a talking snake to eat from a magical fruit tree.

MAKES PERFECT SENSE

Adapted from a T-shirt ad Submitted by Dave Flattery

#### **HSSB Contact Information**

#### Officers:

President: Judy Flattery, <a href="mailto:sbhumanisteditor@gmail.com">sbhumanisteditor@gmail.com</a>

Secretary: Diane Krohn, <a href="mailto:djkrohn@cox.net">djkrohn@cox.net</a>

Treasurer: Sondra Wikman, sondra.wikman@gmail.com

#### **Board Members at Large:**

Wayne Beckman, Robert Bernstein, Dave Flattery, Mary Wilk, Nan Cisney

#### **Newsletter Editor & Submission Deadline**

Judy Flattery <a href="mailto:sbhumanisteditor@gmail.com">sbhumanisteditor@gmail.com</a>
Deadline for submissions to the Secular Circular is midnight, the last day of each month.

Our web site, <a href="www.SBHumanists.org">www.SBHumanists.org</a>, archives current and past issues of the Secular Circular.

Annual HSSB membership dues: \$36 for an individual, \$60 for a couple, \$100 for a Society Supporter, and \$300 (or more) for a Society Patron. Non-members may subscribe to hardcopy of this newsletter for an annual fee of \$20. E-mail copies provided to members and interested non-members at no charge.

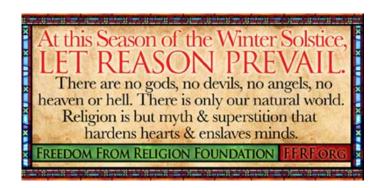
**To join HSSB:** Send your contact information and a check for your membership dues made out to *Humanist Society of Santa Barbara,* to Mary Wilk, P.O. Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130. For further membership information contact Mary Wilk at <a href="mailto:mwilk@cox.net">mwilk@cox.net</a>.

For more information about HSSB, contact any of the officers at the email or P.O. Box addresses shown above or call 805-769-4772.

Like our page on Facebook

Join our Facebook Group.







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

#### **HSSB Calendar**

**Sunday December 6th, 3:00 pm**. Dave Flattery. *Update on COVID-19 Pandemic Models.* Zoom link: <a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82598900099">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82598900099</a>

Thursday December 10<sup>th</sup>, 6-7:30 pm. Celebration of Human Rights Day. Please register in advance at this link. Here is the program Zoom link to use on Dec 10. Educational, inspirational, celebrational!

**Tuesday December 15th. HSSB Board Meeting.** Click on the following link *as early as 4:45pm for dinner & socializing, meeting begins at 5:00.* <a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667</a>

**Saturday December 19th, 3:00 pm. Dr. Peter Compo** returns to deepen our understanding of his talk and its implications for creating a better world. **Voices of Reason Atheist Choir** will make an appearance, too! Zoom link: <a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88064662945">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88064662945</a>

**Sunday January 10th, 3:00 pm**. Dave Flattery. *Update on COVID-19 Pandemic Models.* Zoom link: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82598900099

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