



The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

www.SBHumanists.org

AUGUST 2021

Please join us for our featured speaker event...

American Conspiracy Theories

Professor Uscinski will discuss conspiracy theories in the United States and why so many people believe them. He will also dispel many of the myths that surround modern conspiracy theorizing.

Joseph Uscinski is a professor of Political Science at the University of Miami. He studies public opinion and mass media, with a focus on conspiracy theories and related misinformation. He is coauthor of *American Conspiracy Theories* (Oxford, 2014) and editor of *Conspiracy Theories and the People Who Believe Them* (Oxford, 2018). He is a fellow of the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry. His article, [*“Clear Thinking about Conspiracy Theories in Troubled Times”*](#), is available in the January/February 2021 issue of *Skeptical Inquirer* magazine.



Professor Joseph Uscinski

When: Saturday, August 21, via Zoom. Program begins at 3pm.

Where: Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89852772418>.

COVID-19 Pandemic Models Update

Dave Flattery will present an update on the state of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Delta variant, Epsilon variant and resurgences: What's should we expect in the fall? All are welcome to attend.

When: Sunday August 1 and Sunday August 29 at 3pm Pacific/6pm Eastern.

Where: Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82598900099>



Dave Flattery

The HSSB Secular Circular – August 2021

Bruce Gleason:

Nuclear Power Pros & Cons 7-17-21

By Robert Bernstein

Background information on Bruce Gleason from the event flyer:

"Bruce has been involved in the atheist, skeptic, and humanist communities for 17 years. Founder of the Backyard Skeptics Meetup with over 1300 members, he has placed over 14 billboards supporting the secular community.

"He creates two annual conferences: LogiCal-LA, a scientific skeptics event, and the Freethought Alliance Conference, which is for atheists, agnostics, and church-state separatists.

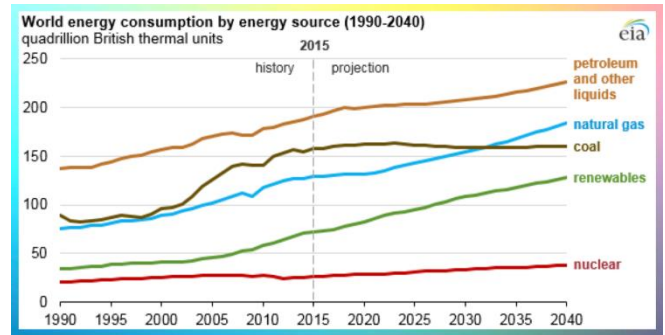
"Bruce is a professional videographer and supplies critical audio-visual equipment for events such as the American Humanist and American Atheists conferences. He worked at ABC Television in Hollywood for several years."

His talk was about the pros and cons of nuclear power. He has kindly shared his slides which are [posted here](#).

He started his talk acknowledging that he is not an expert in this field and is speaking as a layman. He wanted to show that an educated layperson can approach a difficult issue like this by reading up on the subject and asking challenging questions as a skeptic.

"The best way to find the truth is to find the best argument against your current opinion."

He showed this graphic of global energy sources past, present, and projected for the future from the U.S. government's Energy Information Administration (EIA):



What stands out for me is that renewables are rapidly rising while nuclear is flat. Among fossil fuels, coal is flattening out and perhaps declining while natural gas and liquid fuels are rising.

He discussed the three most famous nuclear accidents in history: Three Mile Island in the U.S. (1979), Chernobyl north of Kiev, Ukraine (1986) and Fukushima in Japan (2011).

He claimed that no one actually died from the Three Mile Island incident and that the partial meltdown was fully contained.

Chernobyl was a far larger disaster, affecting much of Europe. Fewer than 100 deaths are directly attributed to the accident, but there may be a total of thousands who died over time throughout the affected area.

In the case of Fukushima, it is hard to separate the tsunami damage from the nuclear disaster from the effects of the massive evacuation. Only one death is confirmed due to the nuclear disaster, but longer term there could be more.

Skeptical Inquirer magazine had an article on the realities of Fukushima in the current July/August 2021 issue which [you can read here](#).

These accidents have pretty much halted construction of new nuclear power plants, with a few exceptions.

Gleason's main point seemed to be that those plants were poorly designed and ran on uranium as a fuel. He claimed that using thorium as a

nuclear fuel is inherently much safer and much more sustainable.

He said that four times as much thorium exists in the world as uranium. Thorium is more widely distributed around the world. He said that far more of the thorium fuel is used up in generating power, making it far more efficient and producing far less waste.

Uranium reactors naturally tend toward a positive feedback loop of getting ever hotter and melting down. It takes active control to prevent this runaway chain reaction.

In contrast, thorium has a high negative temperature coefficient of reactivity. Which means that it naturally stops reacting unless it is continuously activated. Therefore, meltdowns are not possible.

There are two drawbacks of thorium reactors. One is that they use hot liquid salt as a coolant. This is corrosive and requires careful handling.

The other is that thorium itself cannot be used directly to create fission energy. It requires an external source of neutrons to convert it to U-233 which is the actual source of the fission nuclear energy.

Thorium reactors have been known for many decades. A thorium reactor ran safely at Oak Ridge National Laboratory from 1965 to 1969.

The obvious question: If this technology has been known for so long and is so safe, why isn't it in widespread use? Or at least in some use?

One answer is that the bad publicity from the uranium nuclear disasters has made it difficult to get support for any nuclear projects. It may not be fair, but it is a reality. It would take a government and/or investors with very deep pockets to fund this. That is not happening, except for a few possible exceptions.

China and India are looking into this type of reactor. Bill Gates is promoting his own take on nuclear power. A key to making nuclear power practical is to make it modular and mass produced. This is a goal that so far has not been achieved.

Fusion nuclear power is a goal that has been worked on for decades, but never quite seems to happen. It always seems to be another 5 -10 years away.

Historically, the military preferred uranium-235 nuclear power because it would produce by-products that could be used in nuclear weapons. That is now seen as a bad thing, not a benefit!

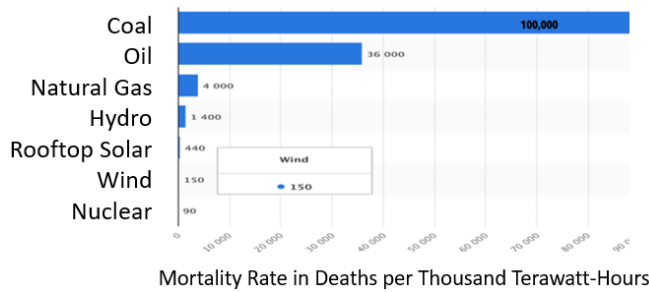
It may be that if thorium had been chosen back in the 1950s or 1960s as the way to go, we might be getting much of our energy from that source. My cursory search after Bruce's talk indicated that the thorium train left the station long ago with no one on board.

Right now, solar photovoltaic is so cheap that it undercuts most fossil fuels even with the massive subsidies for fossil fuels. Wind is also very cheap and quite abundant.

The biggest challenge for such sustainable sources of energy is storage. However, the explosion of electric vehicles is making such battery storage ever cheaper. A combination of smart grids and storage may succeed before safe nuclear gets its boots on.

Gleason did raise some valuable points. He showed that nuclear power could be made safe if that were a priority. He showed that much of our fear of nuclear power is distorted relative to other risks.

He showed the following graph indicating how much safer nuclear is than fossil fuels. It shows coal-related deaths as 100,000 per thousand terawatt-hours compared to 90 for nuclear, 150 for wind and 440 for rooftop solar.



The Climate Crisis is very real and very urgent. It is important for us to look at any, and all options to replace fossil fuels and to reduce energy consumption.

We need a carbon tax or Cap and Trade system to incentivize innovation. The July talk at the Science and Engineering Council was about Direct Air Capture of Carbon from the atmosphere. We have dumped so much carbon into the atmosphere already that even if we achieve net zero new emissions, we still may need to remove existing carbon from the atmosphere. Someone will have to pay for that.

Gleason correctly noted that the most efficient transportation ever invented is the bicycle. A huge fraction of all trips by car could easily be replaced by bicycle.

I think it is always good to ask challenging questions. To be a good citizen means being able to think about big, important issues even if we are not experts, but we also must be sure to base our decisions on good data. And not all data is about science and engineering. Some of it is about economics and other social realities.

Clarifications on Gender Talk Terms

By Marian Shapiro, MSW

Thanks to Robert Bernstein for the detailed write up of our June program on *Gender: How Things Have Changed Since We Were Kids*.

I'd like to correct a couple of points in the article which I may not have explained as well as I should have during the talk:

- The article stated “Cis-gender is when all four dimensions of gender align”. I say that Cisgender is when a person’s *sexual anatomy* (a.k.a. biological sex) and their *gender identity* match or align. I don’t believe the definition of cis-gender involves a person’s sexual orientation or gender expression, although gender expression usually matches gender identity.
- A Demisexual is a person for whom having sex is only desired AFTER a strong emotional connection or commitment exists. A demisexual relationship is the *opposite* of casual sex, a one-night stand, or a ‘friends with benefits’ relationship.
- Pansexual is being sexually attracted to a person based on their individual characteristics, regardless of their gender.
- A more accurate definition of polyamorous is having ongoing sexual relationships with more than one person, rather than “having multiple sexual partners.”
- The article stated that “cross dressers are usually gay men, whereas transvestites may cross dress for fun, erotic, or comfort purposes.” Our slide stated that cross-dressers are usually gay men who dress as women for fun or activism, while transvestites cross dress for erotic or comfort purposes (not for fun). I haven’t heard the term transvestite used much anymore but it used to be used for men who wear women’s lingerie as help to get aroused. This kind of cross dressing is very different from a trans woman wearing women’s clothing. That is because the trans woman identifies as female, while the gay men dressing in drag or the men using the lingerie to help get an erection do not see themselves as women, nor do they want to BE women/change their bodies.

Thanks everyone for being interested in understanding how differently people may feel and act about gender.

Meet New Board Member, Jules Bender

We welcomed three new members to our HSSB Board of Directors for the 2021-2022 fiscal term: Jules Bender, Hugh Smart, and Judy Fontana.

Here is how Jules describes himself:

“I was born and raised in Brooklyn. I have an undergraduate degree in Industrial Engineering from NYU. I was an officer in the army and earned an MBA from Stanford University. I worked for Exxon in developing computer systems.



HSSB Board Member,
Jules Bender

“I have 2 adult children; one is a movie producer and the other has a web site called [Awkward Family Photos](#).”

“I have 4 grandchildren ranging in age from 7 to 16. We moved from New Jersey to Santa Barbara in 2000. I have never felt comfortable with organized religion and that’s what drew me to the Humanist Society.”

Book Discussion Group

New HSSB Board member, Judy Fontana, has volunteered to explore interest in conducting a HSSB book club. If you are interested in participating, please let Judy know.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights – Articles 26 - 30

Inspired by the celebration of Human Rights Day last December, this newsletter elected to republish

the 30 articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, five at a time, so that HSSB members could familiarize (or re-familiarize) themselves with the rights enumerated in this historic document. Here are Articles 26-30.

Article 26

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.
3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Article 27

1. Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.
2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary, or artistic production of which he is the author.

Article 28

Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

Article 29

Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.

In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of

securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order, and the general welfare in a democratic society.

These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 30

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group, or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.

HSSB Picnic at Tucker’s Grove

The 2021 HSSB summer solstice picnic was held at Tucker’s Grove Park on Sunday, July 25. We were not sure how many fully vaccinated people would be willing to come out given the pandemic. We secured a location for ~40 people, which is about 1/3 of our membership.

Thanks to those who organized and ran the picnic: Nan Cisney, Anne H. Rojas, David Echols, Dave Flattery, Josette and Louis Barsky. And thanks to Robert Bernstein and Marian Shapiro for providing these photos.

It was a beautiful day under the trees with catering provided by Cody’s Café and desserts supplied by attendees. We played a couple of games, provided by Anne H. Rojas: identifying up to 30 people in the news and captioning two cartoons.

Anne announced that actor, John Stamos had just completed a podcast about her husband, Barry Keenan, and the events surrounding his plot to kidnap Frank Sinatra Jr. from a Lake Tahoe hotel room back in 1963. The 10-episode podcast is entitled *The Grand Scheme: Snatching Sinatra*.

The photos at right were submitted by Robert Bernstein and those on the following pages by Marian Shapiro.









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

- August 11: *Speaking of Humanism: Hope in the Fight of Child Literacy.* American Humanist event. [The Fight for Child Literacy](#)
- August 12: Critical Minds with Sidewalk Science: UFO's are All the Rage! American Humanist event. [UFO's Are All the Rage!](#)
- August 13: *The 2021 Friggatriskaidekaphobia Treatment Center Opening August 13th.* An on-line Friday the 13th superstition bash! SoCal Secular

HSSB Contact Information

Officers:

President: Judy Flattery, sbhumanisteditor@gmail.com

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

Treasurer: David Flattery,
david.flattery@post.harvard.edu

Board Members at Large:

Wayne Beckman, Robert Bernstein, Mary Wilk, Nan Cisney, Jules Bender, Judith Fontana, Hugh Smart

Newsletter Editor & Submission Deadline

Judy Flattery, sbhumanisteditor@gmail.com

Deadline for submissions to the Secular Circular is midnight, the last day of each month. Our web site, www.SBHumanists.org, 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 mwilk@cox.net.

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

Like our page on Facebook. Join our Facebook Group.



Watch our videos on YouTube.

Coalition event. [Friday the 13th superstition bash](#)

- August 21: *Evolution in Public Schools: Progress is Possible*, with Glenn Branch. SoCal Secular Coalition event. [Evolution in Public Schools, with Glenn Branch](#)



Humanist Society of
Santa Barbara
P.O. Box 30232
Santa Barbara, CA 93130

HSSB Calendar

Sunday August 1, 3:00pm. Dave Flattery. *COVID-19 Pandemic Models Update.*

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82598900099>.

Tuesday August 17th, 5:00 pm. HSSB Board Meeting. Join as early as 4:45pm for dinner & socializing. Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667>. Members always welcome to attend.

Saturday August 21st, 3:00 pm. Professor Joe Uscinski. *American Conspiracy Theories.*

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89852772418>.

Sunday August 29, 3:00pm. Dave Flattery. *COVID-19 Pandemic Models Update.*

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82598900099>.

Tuesday September 14th, 5:00 pm. HSSB Board Meeting. Join as early as 4:45pm for dinner & socializing.

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667>. Members always welcome to attend.

Saturday September 18th, 3:00 pm. Professor (Emerita), Ann Taves. *The Nonordinary Experiences of Nonbelievers.* Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84740760019>.