



# The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

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

SEPTEMBER 2023

## Two Events This Month...

### Incels and the Boy Crisis

**Our Program:** With the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers in the news, as well as male lone-shooters (e.g. Elliott Rodgers, Isla Vista, 2014), we might ask: "What is going on with men and boys?" Or maybe you've heard the term "incel" and wondered where that is coming from?

At this talk Dr. Darrel Ray will discuss a range of issues, trends, and statistics that may surprise you: from dating site trends, to college attendance, marriage, and a host of other issues affecting men and boys. The challenges for men and boys have changed dramatically in the last 50 years. What can we do to mitigate the conditions that lead men and boys to feel isolation, mental distress, or illness in this new environment?



Dr. Darrel Ray, Founder of RFR

**Our Speaker:** Darrel Ray is the Founder & President of Recovering from Religion. He has been a psychologist for over forty years and is the author of four books: including *The God Virus-How Religion Infects Our Lives and Culture* and *Sex and God-How Religion Distorts Sexuality*. Dr. Ray has been a student of religion most of his life and holds a Master's Degree in religion as well as a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology/Anthropology with a Doctorate in Psychology. He recently completed a speaking tour of Australia promoting awareness of religious trauma, Recovering from Religion, and its services.



**When:** Saturday September 16, 3:00 pm - 4:30 pm PDT

**Zoom link:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833>



**ALSO, MOVIE DISCUSSION THIS MONTH:** The movie, *Oppenheimer*, raises many moral questions. As a secular humanist, what are our views on the various decisions made and actions taken at that time? Let's discuss this in a comfortable, informal setting.

For example, the bomb was developed to be used against Germany. Why did we drop it on Japan? Was President Truman justified in bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Did it save more lives than it took? Has the existence of nuclear weapons prevented escalation of conflicts into a third world war? What are some parallels in today's world?

**When:** Thursday, September 7, 7:00 – 9:00 PM PST

**Where:** Clubhouse Lounge, Encina Royale, 250 Moreton Bay Lane, Goleta

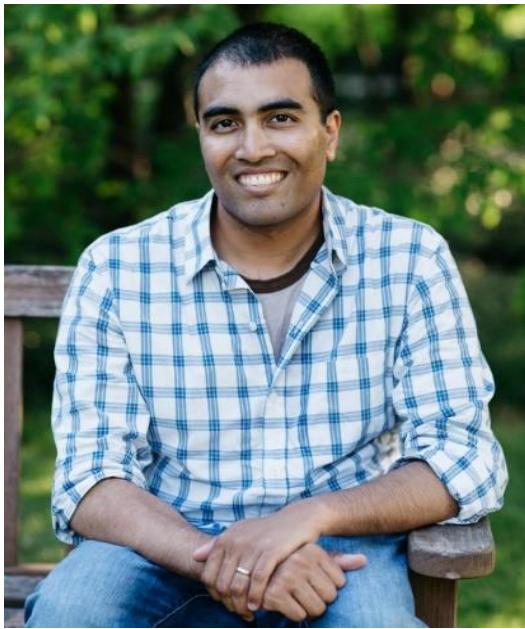
**RSVP to** Judy Fontana 805 280-9175 or [judithannfontana@yahoo.com](mailto:judithannfontana@yahoo.com)

## The HSSB Secular Circular – September 2023

### Hemant Mehta: Why I'm Still Optimistic About Atheist Activism

By Robert Bernstein

Humanist Society President Judy Flattery introduced Hemant Mehta: Mehta is the founder and editor of *Friendly Atheist*, a YouTube creator, and podcast co-host. He is a former National Board-Certified math teacher in the suburbs of Chicago. He has appeared on CNN

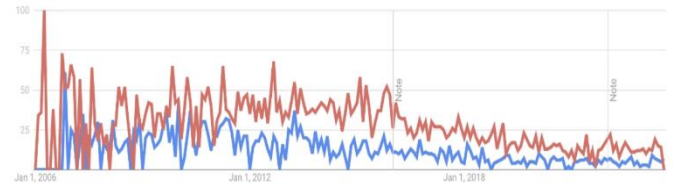


Hemant Mehta,  
The Friendly Atheist

and Fox News and served on the board of directors for GO Humanity and the Secular Student Alliance. His books include *I Sold My Soul on eBay*, *The Young Atheist's Survival Guide*, and *Queer Disbelief* (editor).

Mehta began with his own history of coming to atheism. In high school he began questioning his religious belief and in college he started his own chapter of the Secular Student Alliance.

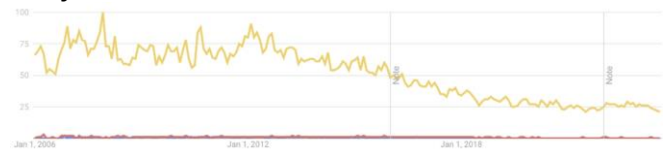
He showed a series of valuable slides, which he kindly allowed us to share. He used Google Trends to generate some of the graphics, starting with the frequency of searches for the term "New Atheists" and "New Atheism". The



Note decline in worldwide Google searches for the terms "New Atheism" (upper curve) and "New Atheists" (lower curve) from 1/1/06 to 8/18/23.

use of those terms peaked in early 2006 and have declined since.

Searches for "Atheism" peaked a bit later and lasted longer, but these have also declined over the years.



He showed a list of books on atheism on Amazon. There are a few newer ones by Andrew Seidel and Seth Andrews, but most are from the era of the New Atheists (Dawkins, Dennett, Hitchens, and Harris) who first wrote atheism books in the mid-2000s.

Shouldn't we have moved forward? He showed a photo of Dawkins speaking to the Reason Rally on the Washington, DC Mall in 2012. The crowd was estimated at 20-30 thousand. Perhaps the largest atheist gathering in US history.



Richard Dawkins Addressing the 2012 Reason Rally

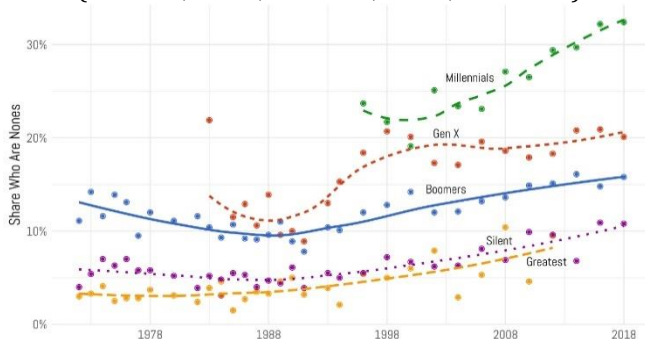
The 2016 Washington DC Reason Rally was much smaller.

David Silverman was president of American Atheists from 2010 to 2018. He appeared on Fox News providing an atheist perspective. That doesn't happen anymore.

So, why is Mehta optimistic? Because of what has been called "the rise of the Nones." American adults are ever more likely each year to say "None" when asked their religious affiliation. About a third now say they have no religious affiliation.

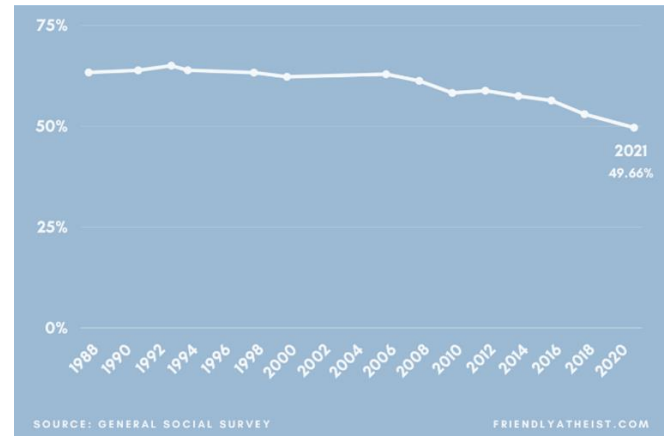
Even more interesting is to see how religiosity has declined by generation as well as over time. Each generation is less religious than its preceding generation and each generation is getting less religious over time.

The Share of Each Generation That is Religiously Unaffiliated – 1973 to 2018  
(Greatest, Silent, Boomers, Gen X, Millennials)



In high school Mehta felt alone as an atheist. One reason he started the atheist group in college was to be able to meet fellow atheists. Now, that is not really necessary because so many students are non-religious. Not everyone who believes in God belongs to a religion. It is interesting to see the downward trend in people who say "Yes" to the statement "I know God exists and I have no doubts about it". **For the first time ever, this has dropped below 50%.** This does not mean they are non-believers, but that seed of doubt is important.

Share of American Adults Who Say "I Know God Really Exists and I Have No Doubts About It" - 1988 to 2021



Sociologist Phil Zuckerman wrote an article in Salon in 2021 showing that staunch atheists show higher morals than the proudly pious. He looked at a number of key ethical issues.

NEWS & POLITICS CULTURE FOOD **salon** SCIENCE & HEALTH LIFE STORIES

COMMENTARY

### Staunch atheists show higher morals than the proudly pious, from the pandemic to climate change

When it comes to the most pressing moral issues of the day, hard-core secularists exhibit much more empathy

By PHIL ZUCKERMAN PUBLISHED AUGUST 21, 2021 6:00AM (EST)

In terms of who supports helping refugees, affordable health care for all, accurate sex education, death with dignity, gay rights, transgender rights, animal rights; and as to who opposes militarism, the governmental use of torture, the death penalty, corporal punishment, and so on — the correlation remains: The most secular Americans exhibit the most care for the suffering of others, while the most religious exhibit the highest levels of indifference.

Atheists express support for: Helping refugees, affordable health care for all, accurate sex education, death with dignity, gay and trans rights and animal rights. Atheists tend to oppose: militarism, government use of torture, the death penalty, and corporal punishment.

57% of all Americans support abortion rights. But 87% of atheists do. Only Unitarians support abortion rights at higher rates than atheists.

One Pew survey asked people if they believed one's gender is determined at birth, which is a measure of whether they believe trans people really exist. 71% of atheists/agnostics are open to the possibility that gender can change from



birth, while only 15% of white evangelicals believe this.

65% of atheists oppose the death penalty for murder, while only 23% of white evangelicals oppose it.

In February 2021 Pew surveyed attitudes toward possible COVID vaccines. None yet existed and there was no organized opposition to them at that time. 90% of atheists said they would take the vaccine while only 54% of white evangelicals said they would.

It is important to remember that in the past, atheists were just an asterisk in such surveys. Usually lumped in with “Other”. Now, atheists appear as a separate category because of our numbers.

Numbers have grown so large that there are now specialized atheist organizations: groups for Black atheists, for LGBTQ+ atheists. And, most notably, for ex-specific religions.

Lloyd Evans has a [YouTube channel for ex-Jehovah's Witnesses](#) with over 100K subscribers and a video entitled *Everything You Need to Know About Jehovah's Witnesses in 5 Minutes*.



Such specificity is very valuable for people in such religions. They know that the speaker knows what they are going through. Jehovah's Witnesses who are questioning their religion will watch his videos, even if they are less interested in generic atheist writers and organizations.

The same goes for John Dehlin who hosts a [podcast for ex-Mormons](#). He grew up in Mormonism and still has family in it. He knows what they are going through as they question their religion.

[Ex-Fundie Diaries](#) is a YouTube channel hosted by someone named “Elly” to connect with ex-fundamentalist Christians. There are ever more platforms for these people to connect.

There is a new Amazon Prime series *Shiny Happy People* about the Duggar family who are Independent Fundamentalist Baptists who follow the Institute in Basic Life Principles (IBLP).



Reddit not only has an Atheism sub-Reddit. It has a sub-Reddit for people who have left several different religions.

*Fundie Snark Uncensored* is a sub-Reddit Mehta finds especially fun to browse.



Ex-Muslims of North America placed billboards advertising that one in four Muslims in the U.S. have left Islam.

Big atheist groups have shifted focus away from theological discussions and toward strategizing on critically important practical matters, notably, reproductive rights for women following the Dobbs decision at the Supreme Court, a Court packed by Republicans with religious extremists with no regard for the secular nature of our Constitution. Strategizing involves creating alliances between atheist organizations and progressive religious organizations.

The January 6, 2021 insurrection raised awareness of Christian Nationalism as a force trying to overthrow our secular system of government.

Political candidates are coming out of the closet about being atheists. They are not making atheism their central focus, any more than gay or trans candidates have done so. But they are normalizing atheism.



He gave the examples of Megan Hunt in Nebraska and Sarah Henry in Florida. He also gave the example of Mallory McMorrow in Michigan who is a progressive Christian and an ally.

Mehta loves solving crossword puzzles, particularly the NY Times crossword puzzle, which is the king of crossword puzzles. There is a database of NY Times puzzle entries and clues. He looked up “God” to see how it was clued

1994-1999. The clues at that time were all very respectful.

However, in recent years the clues have become more daring. For example, “God” was the answer to the clues: “Word in the Declaration of Independence, but not in the Constitution” and “Mars but not Earth”.

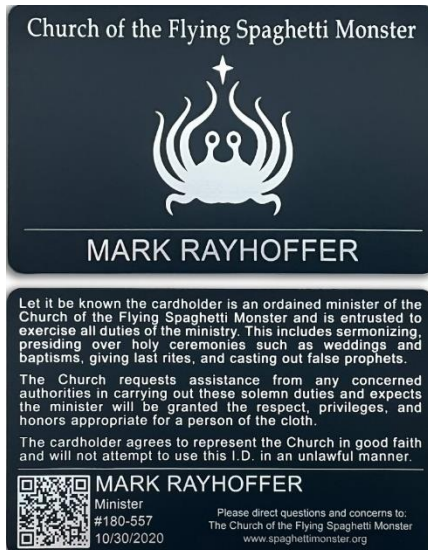
He joked that most people solving puzzles are about 90 years old, plus himself. I will note that I have been solving puzzles since my brain injury from being hit by a car in 2002. Solving puzzles was recommended by my speech therapist, but I concur that most puzzle people are older, meaning that this challenge to “God” is notable.

Mehta then took questions. Judy Flattery noted that she can’t remember the last church wedding she attended. People are being married by a close relative, or by the person who introduced the couple to each other, or by a good friend. Wedding officiant has become a new position of honor in the bridal party. These officiants are doing a great job coming up with truly personalized and meaningful ceremonies.

Mehta said that some states require people with a religious ordination to perform the weddings and sign the certificates (unless you want a government official to do it for you). That can exclude Humanist celebrants. There have been lawsuits about this.

There are also “religions” created specifically for this purpose. You can be ordained by mail! The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster will ordain you. You’ll get a paper Certificate of Ordination, a wallet card (example below) and two vinyl car decals for only \$59.

[Note: For other options regarding Humanist Celebrants see [this video](#) by Margaret Downey who spoke on this topic at our 2021 SoCal Secular Coalition Conference. Her talk on secular celebrants starts at 1:18:41 - .ed]



I thanked Mehta for his optimism and for his vision of how atheism is evolving. I made a comparison with feminism.

When I was growing up, feminism was making big changes. it

seemed that once key rights had been secured, people got lax about identifying as a feminist. The sentiment was, "That was something our mothers had to do" then the Dobbs decision woke people up.

Mehta answered by saying that people have shifted to joining the progressive organizations promoting the causes they care about. This can be frustrating for Humanist organizations like ours, but they are promoting Humanist principles in these organizations.

Judy Fontana is the activity organizer for the Humanist Society. She noted that the Surgeon General has identified alienation and loneliness as a health issue. Religion historically was a way to create community and she tries to do this through HSSB.

Mehta agreed this is a challenge. He said it is OK if people meet up through organizations that are trying to achieve specific, concrete results. It is OK to have many events at different times and people can attend the ones that interest them and that are convenient. Here is Mehta's Friendly Atheist page!

<https://www.friendlyatheist.com/>

### And Then What Happened??

By Judy Flattery

The week after Hemant Mehta spoke to HSSB, he spoke at BAHACon (Bluewater Atheists, Humanists, and Agnostics Conference in Sarnia, Ontario, Canada). I was curious to hear how it went so tuned in to Mehta's [Friendly Atheist livestream News Roundup on 9/1/23](#).

Mehta reported that as he drove home (and gave author, activist, and podcaster Aaron Ra a ride to the airport), he checked in on one of the fundamentalist preachers whose video clips Mehta sometimes shares in his talks showcasing Christian extremism. He was surprised and delighted to discover that Pastor Jonathan Shelley had just published a new sermon entitled *Hemant Mehta is a Fool* which Mehta listened to with amusement during the drive.



**Hemant Mehta is a Fool**, the title of a sermon uploaded August 27, 2023, by Pastor Jonathan Shelley of Pure Words Baptist Church

Among the provocative claims made by Shelley in this sermon:

- "Atheists are the least scientific people, and they're the dumbest people on the planet. There is no one that is less intelligent than an atheist. Every single atheist is the dumbest person that we have in the universe... 'cause the atheist is literally dumber than mentally handicapped people."
- "Why would we even want to allow those people to exist in our society? As American



policy, if you reject God, you should be rejected from America.”

- “They’re the most unhealthy, typically, the most ... just, they just do nothing for their own bodies. Usually, they’re just these fat slobs that just drool over a keyboard; they just don’t even take care of themselves...”
- “If we lost Hemant Mehta, no one would care. NOONE WOULD CARE! The guy spends his whole life advocating against God and for sodomy. He just defends queers all day long.”

To his credit, Hemant Mehta shared that this impassioned 2-hour long sermon/diatribe amused him and his passenger. It made his day. And for the record, to Shelley’s last point, **HSSB and I would care. Thank you, Hemant Mehta!**

### Upcoming Events of Interest to Humanists

*Submitted by Diane Krohn*

- September 9: Humanist Studies Program: [Humanist Worldview: Then and Now](#). 14-week Zoom course, sponsored by The American Humanist Association.
- September 13: *Speaking of Humanism: Transitions in Transportation: Getting to Zero with Behavioral Change*. American Humanist Association Zoom event. [Transitions in Transportation](#)
- October 13-14: Freedom From Religion Foundation 46th Annual Convention, Madison, WI. [FFRF 46th Annual Convention](#)
- October 17: Jeff Goodell. Author of *The Heat Will Kill You First: Life and Death on a Scorched Planet*. UCSB Arts & Lectures event. [Jeff Goodell](#)
- October 24: Jill Lepore: *Amend: Rewriting the Constitution*. A discussion of the Supreme Court and the looming crisis of the U.S. Constitution’s un-amendability. UCSB Arts & Lectures event. [Jill Lepore](#)
- October 26-29: *Center for Skeptical Inquiry Convention*, (CSIcon) Las Vegas, NV. [CSI Conference 2023](#)

### HSSB Contact Information

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*Secretary:* Diane Krohn, [DJKrohn1@gmail.com](mailto:DJKrohn1@gmail.com)

*Treasurer:* David Flattery,

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#### Board Members at Large:

Wayne Beckman, Robert Bernstein, Judith Fontana, Gary Noreen, Mary Wilk

#### Newsletter Editor & Submission Deadline

Judy Flattery, [sbhumanisteditor@gmail.com](mailto:sbhumanisteditor@gmail.com)

Deadline for submissions to the Secular Circular is midnight, the last day of each month. Our web site, [www.SBHumanists.org](http://www.SBHumanists.org), archives current and past issues of the *Secular Circular*. 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 or Donate to HSSB:** Annual Membership dues are \$36 for an individual, \$60 for a couple, \$100 for a Society Supporter, and \$300 (or more) for a Society Patron. Dues payments and other donations can be made via PayPal ([Paypal.me/SBHumanists](https://www.paypal.com/US/merchstore/SBHumanists)) or check. Include your name and contact information when submitting payments. Make checks out to *Humanist Society of Santa Barbara* and mail to Mary Wilk, P.O. Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130. [mwilk@cox.net](mailto:mwilk@cox.net). Dues, donations, and payments can also be remitted via this PayPal QR code. Once at the site, select ‘Send’ then log into your PayPal account to complete the transaction.:



Watch our speaker videos on [YouTube](#). Subscribe to our [Meetup](#) page to be notified of upcoming events.





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

## HSSB Calendar

**Thursday, September 7, 7:00-9:00pm. Humanists discuss the movie, *Oppenheimer*** at the Clubhouse Lounge, Encina Royale, 250 Moreton Bay Ln, Goleta. **RSVP** to Judy Fontana 805 280-9175 [judithannfontana@yahoo.com](mailto:judithannfontana@yahoo.com)

**Tuesday September 12. 5:00 pm. HSSB Board Meeting.** Join as early as 4:45pm for socializing. Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667>. Members always welcome to attend.

**Saturday September 16. 3pm. Dr. Darrel Ray**, Founder and President of Recovering from Religion, *Incels and the Boy Crisis*. <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833>.

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

**Saturday October 21, 3:00 p.m. Kalli Joslin.** Americans United for Separation of Church and State. <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833>.

**Tuesday November 14. 5:00 pm. HSSB Board Meeting.** Join as early as 4:45pm for socializing. Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667>. Members always welcome to attend.

**Saturday November 18. 3:00 pm. Prof. Gregory A. Daddis, SDSU. *Comic Books, Cold War, Communists & Atheists*.** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833>.