The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

www.SBHumanists.org **JULY 2024**

Judy & Dave's Prison Adventure

Our Program: Join us as Judy and Dave Flattery recount their journey from being 'essentially oblivious' to the world of prisons to being keenly interested in and committed to supporting their evolving transformation for the benefit of all.

Learn how California compares to other states and countries, as well as the personal interactions they've had with hundreds of incarcerated men and women over the past year. It all started with a letter written to HSSB by one of our members, currently incarcerated in a California State prison. This further inspired them to become educated, and HSSB co-sponsored the *Behind Bars: Compassion and Reform* conference in November 2022. Then, moved and inspired by what was learned at the conference, and provided opportunities to make a difference with two local prison support groups, Judy and Dave participated in programs inside 8 of the 33 California State prisons over the past year—a life changing year for them.

Our Speakers: Judy Flattery has been President of HSSB since July 2019. She has a B.S. in Chemical Engineering (U. of Rochester), an MBA (UC-Irvine), and a certificate in Interior Design (SBCC). Retired from a 36-year career in DuPont in various technical, marketing, management, and staff roles, Judy is now a certified interior designer in the state of California. She spends the bulk of her time working with clients and leading HSSB, which includes engaging speakers, publishing the HSSB newsletters and its YouTube videos.

Dave Flattery has been Treasurer of HSSB since July 2021. A chemist and Six-Sigma Black Belt, Dave is currently the Strategist Initiatives Director for a DuPont business. During the pandemic, Dave supported HSSB by sharing regular, statistically-based updates on the progress of COVID-19 in our world, country, state, and county, providing listeners with a detailed view of its progress. Judy and Dave have been married for over 39 years, have 3 grown children and 1 grandchild.

When: Saturday July 13, 3:00 – 4:30 pm PST.
On Zoom: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833

Dr. Peter Compo
Albert Einstein, Charlie Parker, or Charles Darwin: Who Got Human Innovation and Creativity Right?

By Gary Noreen, Chat GPT & Judy Flattery

Who would we most expect to know the answer of how best to innovate?

Albert Einstein, the most famous physicist of the 20th century and perhaps one of the most famous people of our times, OR Charlie Parker, a legendary jazz musician, OR Charles Darwin, a 19th Century biologist?

This is the question posed by Dr. Peter Compo in his April 20, 2024 presentation to the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara.

Peter Compo is a musician, composer, chemical engineer, corporate veteran, and author of the book *The Emergent Approach to Strategy: Adaptive Design & Execution*. He hails from a multi-generational family of musicians in New York. Pete spoke to HSSB in November and December 2020, then worked on his music and his book, which was published in 2022.

Dr. Peter Compo

All of us in attendance were familiar with Albert Einstein, but some of us were not familiar with the innovations of Charlie Parker, who created a style of jazz called Bebop.

To illustrate the innovation of Bebop, Pete played clips of a musical piece entitled *Cherokee* written by Ray Noble in the 1930s. He first played a recording of Ray Noble's version. He next played a version of it as interpreted by Charlie Parker and recorded about 15 years later.

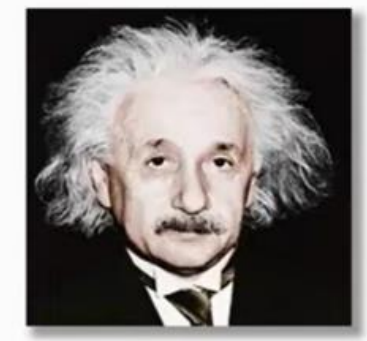
The Charlie Parker version was startlingly different. Listeners found it challenging to discern the original *Cherokee* melody in Parker's complicated and exquisite interpretation. Compo went on to compare Charlie Parker's Bebop version to the same piece played 40 years later by Wynton Marsalis, which far more closely resembles the Bebop version than the original Ray Noble version.

Here are links to the three pieces. Listen to the similarities and differences:
Ray Noble *Cherokee,*
Charlie Parker *Cherokee,*
Winton Marsalis *Cherokee*

Compo stated that in the Jazz world, the innovation and creativity of Charlie Parker, is comparable to the innovation and creativity of Einstein in the world of physics (special relativity, brownian motion, $E=mc^2$ quantum mechanics, and general relativity). As both a musician and an engineer, Pete can claim the 'standing' to make such a statement

What is there to learn about innovation and creativity from these two masters, Einstein and Parker? How did Einstein and Parker each explain their creative process?

Einstein said:



"Imagination is more important than knowledge."

And

"I didn't arrive at my understanding of the fundamental laws of the universe through my rational mind."

Whereas Charlie Parker said:

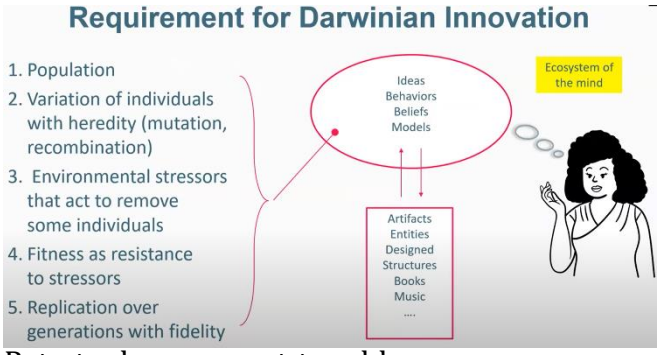
"I put some study into the horn."

And

"You've got to learn your instrument. Then you practice, practice, practice. And then, when you finally get up there on the bandstand, forget all that and just wail."

Compo then explored the question of Einstein's 'high level' inspiration and imagination vs. Parker's 'low level' practice, discipline, and hard work within the realm of strategic planning. He summarizes the difference as 'Imagining' vs. 'Internalizing'. Internalizing can also be expressed as, "getting it into your gut so that something new can emerge, before you imagine."

Compo spoke of the *Selectionist Theory of Human Creativity* (blind variation and selective retention) advanced by Donald T. Campbell, which states that cultural selection is a Darwinian process, which in turn led to the concept of *Universal Darwinism*, that states that the Darwinian concept of innovation can occur in any domain, including within the human mind and, presumably, with artificial intelligence (A.I.).



Pete took a moment to address some common misconceptions about Darwinism, such as that it is a slow process, or that it requires DNA, or the oft repeated phrase "survival of the fittest" or that it requires competition or selfishness.

These misconceptions have slowed the application of Darwinism from the realm of biology to the realm of culture.

Compo returned to the question of how variation occurs in the human mind. He shared several scholarly references discussing how human memory works: memories are not stored 'whole' but are reconstructed when needed. This is analogous to the mutation and recombination system needed for Darwinian innovation. False memories are an example of this variation and recombination.

Another view claims that interpersonal transmission is the key to innovation as ideas move from person to person, picking up bias and variation along the way. Compo doubts that this process explains the Einstein and Parker type of innovation which were far outside the realm of what most others were doing. He acknowledges that transmission plays an important role, but doubts it is the most critical element of extraordinary innovation.

Gary Noreen brought up the example of the propagation of conspiracy theories as a Darwinian process largely based on transmission from person to person through the medium of social media.

Pete then compared diagrams of the lineage of the horse to the lineage of the iPhone showing how the original evolved with certain species (called iphone 'generations' by Apple) going extinct, while other branches continued to evolve and thrive. The reports of Apple engineers of their individual technical challenges and struggles reinforces the point that the ecosystem of an individual's mind is a critical component of creative innovation. Pete doubts that one can "just deliberately be creative and…have Eureka moments and have sudden emotional insights without 'having

worked your ass off' for a long time…" He claims that Eureka moments are actually outcomes of the hard work.

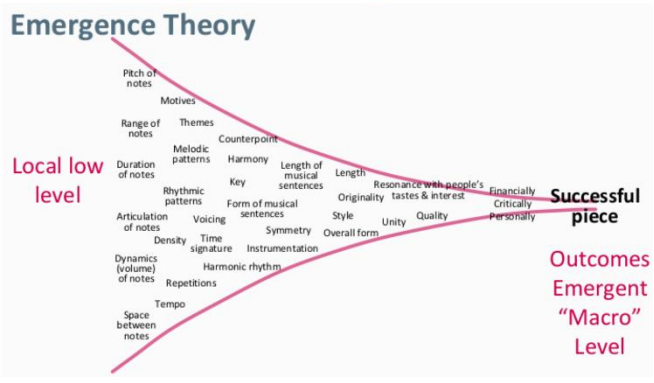
Dean asked about the ability to challenge existing assumptions and suggested that new ideas may arise when the existing explanations fall short.

Compo critiqued the common dichotomy in strategy literature that suggests alternating back and forth between creative, intuitive approaches and disciplined, analytical methods. Instead, Compo argued that strict, disciplined, operational and analytical frameworks are prerequisite for creativity and innovation. How might this happen?

Compo explained this dynamic using concepts from the theory of emergence and self-organization. He introduced the "flute diagram" to illustrate how disciplined, low-level activities and choices can lead to high-level emergent innovative outcomes.

In the context of music, making the appropriate choices and taking the appropriate actions such as are shown on the left side of the diagram (choices of key, melody, articulation, tempo, etc.) lead to the macro level emergent outcome of a succesful piece of music on the right side of the diagram. One can't just choose to create a successful piece of music; the choices and decisions have to be made at the low levels shown on the left.

The Flute Diagram and Emergent Innovation



Jazz musician Charlie Parker developed Bebop not by aiming to create a new genre, but through deep, disciplined study and practice.

Compo drew parallels between this concept and the way social insects, like ants, organize complex societies despite having simple, low-level interactions based on pheromone cues. This idea extends to natural selection, where incremental changes over vast time periods lead to significant evolutionary advancements, such as the development of a wing or an eye.

This analogy underscores Compo's central thesis: true creativity emerges from a foundation of rigorous learning and disciplined practice, not from spontaneous, unstructured inspiration.

Compo emphasized that breakthroughs and creative insights are outcomes of extensive learning and internalization of knowledge. He contrasts this view with the popular notion of spontaneous 'Eeureka!" moments, asserting that such moments are rare without a deep foundation of prior knowledge and lots of practice.

This perspective does align with Einstein's development of general relativity and Darwin's formulation of evolutionary theory, both of which required years of meticulous study and practice.

Why does any of this matter?

Well, in any domain of life if you want to get from A to B, (to improve something, change something, invent something, etc.), then developing and articulating a strategy supports groups of people in coordinating their actions and collaborating to get from A to B.

Compo critiqued traditional strategic planning processes, which often resemble stepwise recipes or checklists. He argued that these methods are insufficient for fostering true

innovation and creativity. Instead, he proposed a paradigm shift towards puzzle-solving, guided by design principles rather than rigid steps. This approach acknowledges the incomplete and evolving nature of strategic planning, where not all pieces are known upfront, and continuous learning and adaptation are crucial.

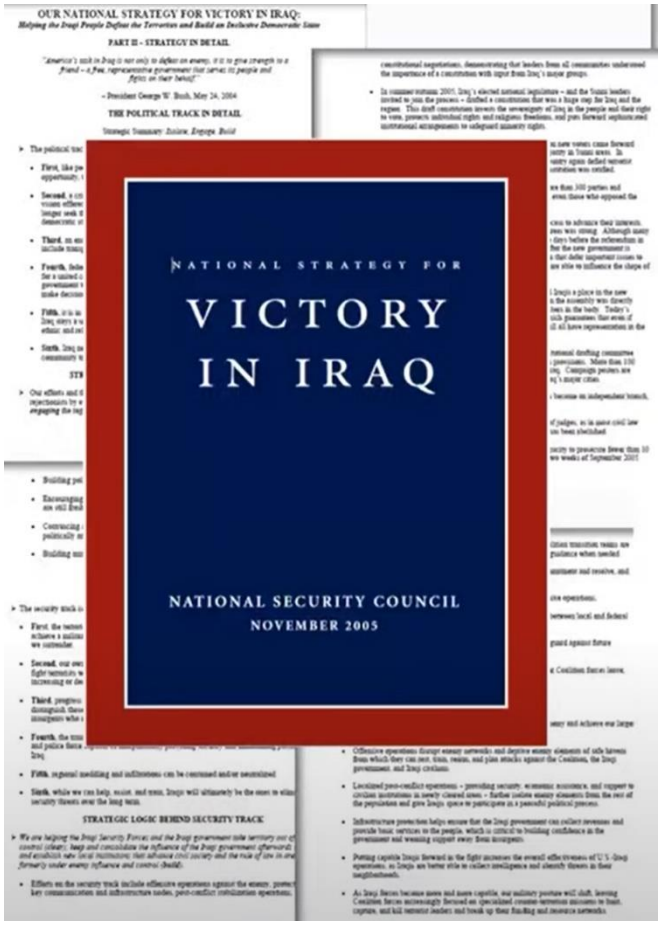
He outlined a comprehensive Strategy Framework (or Strategic Plan) that goes beyond traditional strategic planning processess. This framework guides the countless actions and decisions that will need to be made to get from A to B.

A Strategic Plan includes:
- Values
- Aspirations (Visions, Mission, Goals)
- Diagnosis (Proposition, External Constrainsts, Scenarios, Bottleneck)
- *Strategy: The core component guiding all decisions and actions.*
- Tactics: Specific actions taken to implement the strategy.
- Metrics: Measures to assess progress and effectiveness.
- Learning and Adaptation: Continuous improvement based on feedback and new information.

Compo argues that ironically, most strategic plans lack a clear, actionable strategy component, often presenting long lists of bullet points without coherent, guiding principles.

Compo shared his view of a particularly egregious so-called 'strategic plan', the 2005 *National Strategy for Victory in Iraq,* which did not actually include a strategy. It is 35 pages of 318 bulleted items of sub-goals, tactics, and end states. Not a strategy.

Adding to the confusion is the overuse of the word 'strategic' as in 'strategic values', 'strategic priorities', etc. Compo made the point that there is no such thing as a strategic priority



because there is no such thing as a non-strategic priority. Using the word 'strategic' may sound impressive but is generally meaningless and gets in the way of really understanding and communicating what they are trying to do.

So what is a real strategy?

Compo defines strategy as a "central rule that guides choices and actions," meaning those low level choices and actions at the left side of the flute, the choices and actions that are actually available to us. "What you can do is not what matters. You need a theory of what's in the way (bottlenecks) between what you can do and your aspiration."

Identifying what's in the way (the bottleneck or critical constraint) is key to defining the strategy, and overcoming bottlenecks is the point of an effective strategy.

A bottleneck can be anything: a culture, a missing capability, insufficient capital, complexity, emotions, etc. Compo reminds us of the Charles Kettering quote, "A problem well-defined, is half-solved." Similarly, defining the bottleneck clarifies the needed strategy.

Compo provides several examples from business, illustrating how focusing on critical constraints can drive significant improvements. He speaks of these in terms of the *Triad*: *Aspiration, Bottleneck, and Strategy*.

Henry Ford is one example. Ford's *aspiration* was to 'Lead large-scale automobile adoption'. His *bottleneck* was the difficulty of offering both low prices and high availability. His *strategy* was 'Never prioritize style and options over price and throughput'. This strategy led to the introduction of the assembly line in 1913, five years *after* the Model T introduction in 1908.

Ford's strategy was *not* designing, building, and commissioning assembly lines.

His strategy was *not* a long list of bulleted actions and desired future states.

His strategy was 'Never prioritize style and options over cost and throughput' which led to the development of the assembly line, supportive of the aspiration and impacting the bottleneck.

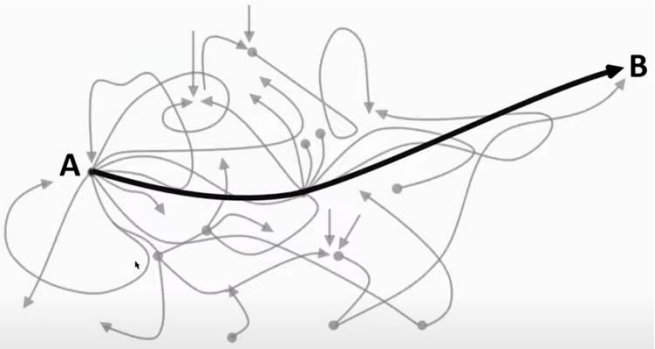
Compo noted that in the 1920s the bottleneck changed when consumers wanted more automobile style and option choices. Ford stuck to his initial strategy and lost share as a result.

Compo also shared a household finance strategy example developed by celebrity financial adviser, Dave Ramsey. The *aspiration* was, 'To get out of debt'. Ramsey identified the *bottleneck* as the debtor's feeling of being 'overwhelmed' by all of their indebtedness to many creditors. Ramsey's *strategy* to address the feeling 'overwhelmed' bottleneck was to have them 'pay off small loans first'. Note that it was not to pay off the highest interest loans first, which might make more sense from an analytical perspective. Since the bottleneck was overwhelm, achieving small successes and having to deal with fewer creditors was more effective in reducing overwhelm. And then perhaps they were better able to focus and work their way out of debt.

Compo states that strategies are counter-intuitive; they must have some terrible trade-off, they must not be obvious.

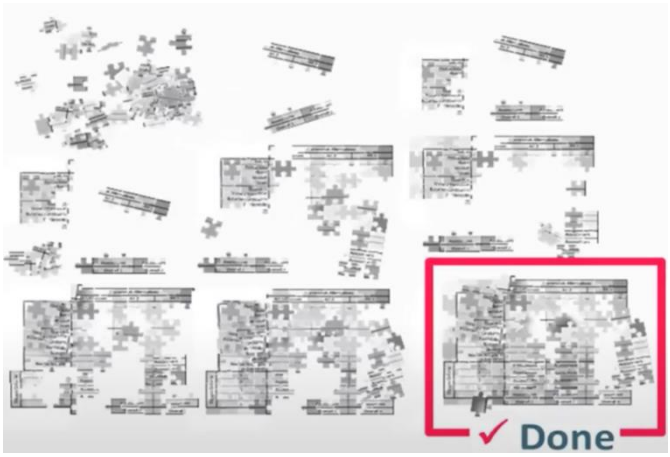
Compo notes that lists are not always bad: they are appropriate in other aspects of strategic plans, such as in lists of actions to take, tactics to deploy, and metrics to track progress.

How should strategy be deployed? Compo notes that despite numerous examples in the strategy literature outlining a logical, stepwise recipe process moving from A to B (and then feedback checks and revisions from B to A), the actual deployment experience is more chaotic as shown here.



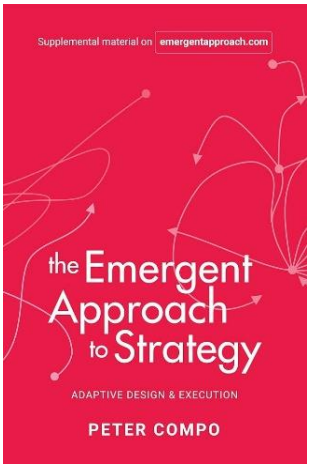
Pete suggests an alternative paradigm.

Consider that the actual process more closely resembles putting together the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle: "These pieces fit. This piece is missing. Where does this fit? How do we connect this to that? Where are the edges/boundaries? etc." A puzzle is assembled by design principles, not by the order of steps.



He connected this to the ecosystem of the mind (logic, study, variations developed over a long period of time) wherein a person notices whether the incompletely assembled picture is making sense, which in turn invites imagination and creative mental processes to fill in the gaps, not unlike the process of assembling a memory from fragments and filling in the gaps creatively and sometimes sub-consciously (e.g. false ememory process).

Compo mentioned some of the techniques he recommends to support the development of a strategy framework, which are available in his book, *The Emergent Approach to Strategy*.



Compo concluded by affirming that his vote is for Charlie Parker getting the essence of the creative process right and that Parker intuited that the creative process is Darwinian.

Compo also stated that he didn't think Einstein *really* believed that imagination was more important than hard work and practice. Compo doesn't think Einstein was a believer in his own words; he worked too hard for too many years on general relativity with incredibly complicated concepts and math. Compo thinks it was more likely that Einstein's anti-establishment, anti-conformist personality made the statement about imagination.

During the Q&A, Dean confirmed that Einstein worked cooperatively with leading mathematicians at the time (e.g. tensor calculus), which supports the view that hard work and practice is necessary for true innovation to arise.

Judy Fontana commented on how Darwin and Wallace developed similar theories of evolution and that both were a product of the culture and learnings of that time. Pete commented that there was also a Scottish 'tree guy' who had published something along the same lines a decade earlier. This 'tree guy' was irritated with Darwin, who was unaware of the articles in the specilaized tree journal. Pete also commented that the eye developed independently "something like 40 times... The same environment can drive variation to go to the same places."

Lynda wondered how old Einstein was when he made his statement about imagination being more important than hard work. Maybe, she mused, when he made that statement, it had been so long since he wrote his papers that he forgot, minimized, or romanticized how his inspiration actually occurred.

Dean reminded us of the classic expression that creativity is 99% perspiration and 1% inspiration. Pete quipped "Isn't it ironic that these creative breakthroughs occur in fields they have studied for so long?"

Andrew wondered about the role of raw talent: an existing aptitude is recognized, then supported and worked to high levels of performance. Pete speculated on why would anyone work so hard and suggested it arises from early life experience that have a particular subject become so important to an individual.

Judy Flattery asked about Pete's view on free will, wondering if we humans are really only responding to cues in our internal and external environment (similar to ants' pheremonic resposes) via our brain's highly complex algorithms? Pete said he was not up-to-date on all the latest neuroscience, but believes that neither Parker nor Einstein had any choice but to work in their respective fields. He reminded us of the quote from Edward G. Bulwer-Lytton, "Talent does what it can; genius does what it must."

Meredith, a theatrical director and actor, commented that, in her experience, knowledge alone is insufficient; someone can have a lot of knowledge and not be able or inspired to do anything with it. Sometimes talent is not enough (say, if an actor is resistant to direction), although talent is certainly helpful. Pete responded that it is a combination of factors: talent, knowledge, personality, how hard one works, the place and times in which one lives. There are those geniuses so far ahead of their time that they are only recognized long after their death.

If you missed this talk, the video is available on YouTube: Compo: Einstein, Parker & Darwin

The Unusual Evolution of The Last Article

Gary Noreen graciously volunteered to write an article summarizing Pete Compo's talk. He decided to experiment with some of the new Artificial Intelligence Large Language Model (LLM) bots to assist in writing the article.

First, Gary needed to provide Chat GPT good information. He downloaded and edited the transcript of Pete Compo's talk, and provided it and Pete's slides to two versions of Chat GPT, which quickly spit out articles.

Gary, under tight time constraints and heading off on an international trip, sent these two AI versions to Pete and to Judy (who was then editing the video of Pete Compo's Zoom presentation). Judy started with the Chat GPT-created article and re-listened to Pete Compo's edited Zoom talk (now on YouTube) to ensure that the article accurately represented Pete's perspective and the Q&A discussion.

Chat GPT's summary was a little misleading. For example, it said that the assembly line was Henry Ford's 'strategic innovation' to address the bottleneck, whereas Pete said that Ford's strategy was 'Never prioritize style and options over cost and throughput' and not the assemby line, as commonly understood. Pete also cautioned about using the adjective 'strategic' as it is largely meaningless, and would likely object to the phrase 'strategic innovation'.

Although this first attempt was a bit challenging and time consuming, going forward Chat GPT holds the promise of simplifying our writing and editing tasks.

A Game At The Solstice Picnic
Telestrations

One of the games played at the HSSB Summer Solstice picnic was *Telestrations*, which is similar to the classic party game, *Telephone*, except using words and drawings sketched under a tight time crunch.

In the classic *Telephone* party game, a sentence or phrase is whispered from player 1 to player 2, then from player 2 to player 3, and so on, until the last player reports what they heard—which is usually remarkably different from what was said initially.

The *Telephone* party game reminds us to be skeptical that what we hear is a reliable expression of what was actually initially expressed, and to consider the reliability of the source, the path, and potential biases the information may have encountered on its journey from source to us.

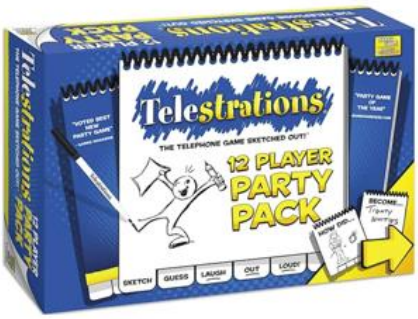
One of the HSSB solstice picnic *Telestrations* party game results:

'Father Time' becomes 'Shakespeare in Love' passing through 12 intermediate steps.

Each person in the chain looked only at the prior page and either sketched what was written or wrote what they saw in the sketch.

In this example, the steps from 'Father Time' to 'Shakespeare in Love' passed through Santa Barbara hetero dating options stats, unhappy relationships, gossip, and loving same sex relationships.

Illustrative of the challenge of accurate speaking and listening, and of messaging gone awry.



Telestrations is similar in concept. A portmanteau of 'telephone' and 'illustrations', *Telestrations* starts when player 1 selects a word or phrase from a card and writes it on the first page of their game book, then passes it to player 2 who attempts to sketch what was written, under tight time constraints. Player 2 passes their sketch along to player 3, who looks only at that drawing and writes down in words on the next page what they think it is. Play proceeds with the book moving from player to player, alternating between drawing and guessing, until the book returns to player 1.

Sylvelin and Marian play *Telestrations* at the Solstice picnic. *Photo credit: Robert Bernstein*

To make it even more interesting and challenging, EACH player gets a book and selects their own initial word or phrase so that multiple games are occuring simultaneously, passing books at the same time, then writing down what they see at the same time, until all books make their way back to their original player.

When all books complete the circuit, the results are shared. It's an amusing opportunity to see how well intentioned interpretations can lead to propagating misinformation.

With some of the books, once a particular phrase evolved into a drawing of something easily recognized and easily sketched, it persisted for the remainder of the round.

In one case an initial phrase was sketched and passed along through a couple of players until it was misinterpreted first as an Amish man and next as a sketch of President Lincoln. This misinterpretation as President Lincoln persisted, passing through several 'sketch it/draw it' cycles until the end of the round. Note that the sketch was a good match for its environment: everyone in the game (all Americans aware of U.S. history) could recognize a sketch of Lincoln, and Lincoln can be quickly and reliably reproduced (tall figure, stove pipe hat, etc.).

Enjoying the HSSB Summer Solstice picnic at Stow Grove Park *Photo Credit: Robert Bernstein*

This echoes the features of successful Darwinian Innovation (see pg. 3). Thanks to Judy Fontana, Phil Holland, Anne H. Rojas, the Flatterys, and others who helped organize and run this event.

Board Election Results

Board elections were held this spring. All of the 2023-2024 Board Members agreed to run again. Noone else offered to run and all Board members were re-elected for the 2024-2025 term. Approximately 20% of the ballots were returned, several with comments appreciateing the Board for all the work they do and time they put in to making HSSB be a positive contribution to our community. Thank you to all Board members for their on-going willingness to serve.

Upcoming Events of Interest to Humanists

Summitted by Diane Krohn

- July 20: Unmasking Christian Nationalism: A virtual event sponsored by Americans United for Separation of Church and State and Mayflower Congregational United Church of Christ. Speakers include Rachel Laser, Dr. Samuel Perry and Rev. Lori Wake. Unmasking Christian Nationalism
- July 26-28: Skepticon 2024, St. Louis, MO. A celebration of science, social justice and dinosaurs! Skepticon 2024
- September 26-29: Freedom From Religion Foundation National Convention, Denver, CO. Speakers include Katherine Stewart, Ron Reagan, Michelle Goldberg, Bradley Onishi, and many others. FFRF National Convention 2024
- October 5: Salman Khan: Brave New World: How AI Will Revolutionize Education (and Why That's a Good Thing). UCSB Arts & Lectures event. Salman Khan
- October 22: Dr. Jennifer Doudna: CRISPR Gene Editing and the Future of Human Health. UCSB Arts & Lectures event. Dr. Jennifer Doudna
- October 24-27: CSICon 2024, Las Vegas, NV. Speakers include Brian Cox, Neil deGrasse Tyson, Banachek and Michael Mann. CSICon 2024

HSSB Contact Information

Officers:

President: Judy Flattery, sbhumanisteditor@gmail.com

Secretary: Diane Krohn, DJKrohn1@gmail.com

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

Board Members at Large:

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

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.* 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**), check or credit card. 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. mwilk722@gmail.com. Dues, donations, and payments can also be remitted via this PayPal QR code. At the PayPal 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.

Meetup YouTube

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

HSSB Calendar

Tuesday July 9. 5:00 pm. HSSB Board Meeting. Zoom link: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667. Members always welcome to attend.

Saturday July 13. 3:00 pm. *Judy & Dave Flattery's Prison Adventure*. What have they discovered over a year volunteering at 8 California State Prisons? https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833 .

Tuesday August 13. 5:00 pm. HSSB Board Meeting. Zoom link: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667. Members always welcome to attend.

Saturday August 17. 3:00 pm. Seth Andrews. *Seth Andrews vs. God: Who is the Better Intelligent Designer?* Co-sponsored by The Freethought Society. https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833 .

Tuesday September17. 5:00 pm. HSSB Board Meeting. Members always welcome to attend. Zoom link: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667.

Saturday September 21. 3:00 pm. David Orenstein. *An Anthropologist Looks at First Contact*. Co-sponsored by The Freethought Society. https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833 .

Tuesday October 15. 5:00 pm. HSSB Board Meeting. Zoom link: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667. Members always welcome to attend.