



The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

www.SBHumanists.org

DECEMBER 2025

Humanist Society Winter Solstice Dinner

Please join us for our annual winter solstice celebration featuring a delicious professionally catered buffet meal and the warm and engaging company of your fellow Humanists. This event will be held at the home of Board Members, Diane Krohn and Wayne Beckman, and is limited to 25 attendees.

The catered menu includes appetizers, rosemary-lemon chicken breast, grilled salmon, pasta salad, sauteed green beans, green salad, and rolls. Dessert includes chocolate-pumpkin brownies, fudge brownies, and fresh fruit tartlets. Non-alcoholic beverages will be served. Guests are welcome to bring other beverages of their choice. Walker and wheelchair friendly.



When: Sunday December 14, 1:00-4:30 pm
(meal served at ~2:00 pm)

Where: 180 Nogal Drive, Santa Barbara

Parking: is available on Nogal Drive and at Vieja Valley School, about 3 blocks away from the house. ***Please do not park on the private road in front of the house.***

Cost: \$20 per person payable at the door or via PayPal or Zelle. HSSB members may bring a non-member guest.

What to Bring: Bring a sweater or jacket in case we sit out on the patio in nice weather. You are also welcome to bring the beverage of your choice.

RSVP is required since attendance is limited to 25 people.

RSVP by 12/12/25 to Judy Fontana at judithannfontana@yahoo.com or 805-280-9175



The Misinformation Trap and Changing Minds: My Journey from Creationist to Biologist - Melanie Trecek-King

10-12-25- By Robert Bernstein

From her LinkedIn page, Melanie Trecek-King is a science educator/communicator and the creator of *Thinking Is Power*, an online resource that teaches critical thinking, information literacy, and science literacy skills.

Trecek-King is an Associate Professor of Biology at Massasoit Community College, where she teaches a general-education science course designed to teach “skills, not facts.”



Melanie Trecek-King began her talk explaining that this topic is personal to her. She grew up as a young Earth creationist. She has been teaching biology for many years. She knows from experience that bringing facts doesn't necessarily work.

She wanted to tell us what it is like “on the other side.” She grew up in rural



western Iowa. There were only 39 students in her high school graduating class. It was hard to

find people to date; she knew many of them since preschool! Someone would tell your mother whatever you were doing.



Her family owned a diner. Her mother burned it down the first day she owned it. Trecek-King shared photos of herself, of their family restaurant, and of the town.

She said that in many ways it was a great place to grow up. The number of bars was the same as the number of churches. It is a joke, but true. The church is the center of the community. The town park has a nativity scene at Christmas, even now. Kids were sent to church to become good people. Everyone was brought up to be:
Christian
Conservative
Republican
in that order.

They grew up believing that Democrats just want to raise your taxes and take your guns. And that Democrats believe in evolution.

The church she attended taught that the Bible is the literal word of God and God created the world about 6,000 years ago in six days.

Before the Flood, there was a canopy of water above the earth. Everything was perfect. No rain was needed. All animals were herbivores. Everyone lived hundreds of years. The Flood explained the Grand Canyon and fossils.

They were also taught that there was plenty of evidence against evolution:

- No transitional fossils
- Irreducible complexity in organs like the eye
- Radiometric dating was flawed
- Evolution violates the laws of thermodynamics
- Micro evolution is real, but macro evolution is not
- Frauds like Piltdown Man discredit evolution.

Worse, evolution comes from the devil. It is a conspiracy. Life is too perfect to be random. Evolution has never been observed, so it also requires faith. And of course, if we evolved from monkeys, why are there still monkeys? And that evolution is “just a theory”.

Trecek-King asked us to reflect on how we form beliefs. She has empathy for people who fall for misinformation, because she did. We all have biases, emotions, intuitions, and use pattern detection. Our inputs are personal experiences and received wisdom.

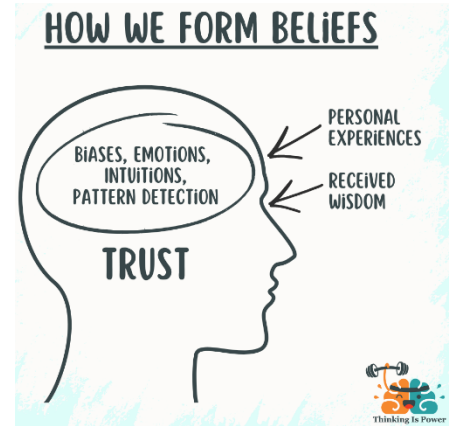
She talked about “cargo cults” that formed during WWII. Military aircraft would land on remote Pacific islands like Vanuatu. Amazing goods would come from these alien craft. The local cultures developed the idea that they could bring forth more cargo through various rituals involving U.S. flags, blue jeans, and bamboo guns.

Some of these cargo cults are still waiting after 90 years, most notably on February 15, “John

Frum” day. This may seem silly until it is compared to Christians who are still waiting for Jesus to return after more than 2000 years.

We live in a sea of trust. We become confident we are right. It is a feeling. Overconfidence is a barrier to learning.

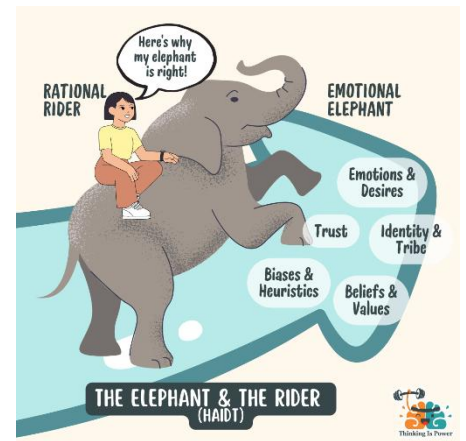
She contrasted two possible systems for how we come to believe things. One is the Information Deficit model. The other is the Web of Belief model of Quine.



We interpret through our web. It is uncomfortable to have an inconsistent web. Consider a student who doesn't accept evolution.

You can't just pull out one node in a web of belief. It must be replaced by something else.

She went on to talk about



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the Elephant and the Rider. We are riding the elephant and think we are in charge. But maybe it is the elephant that really is in charge. Being smart makes us better at rationalizing what we already want to believe.

Peanut butter ice cream is her weakness. Her elephant really wants it. She finds excuses for eating it...perhaps it's a reward for something she has done.

Trecek-King went on to distinguish between misinformation and disinformation. Disinformation is deliberate. She advises against using the term unless you are sure of the intent.

In the community in which she grew up, believing in evolution meant losing being a part of the community.

She noted that it is nearly impossible that all our beliefs are true. The focus of her talk was science misinformation. And there are two forms this takes:

- Pseudoscience: Pretends to be scientific, but it doesn't follow the proper process. This includes homeopathy and astrology.
- Science Denial: Refusal to accept well accepted science, including Climate Crisis denial, evolution denial, and anti-vaccine fears.

Science misinformation is often tied to motivated reasoning; that is, wanting something to be true regardless of the evidence. This is often the case with Climate Crisis denial, which is motivated by hatred of government.

The main misinformation technique is to throw out enough confusion and doubt to block action.

In the same way, creationism is motivated by wanting to believe in God.

Pseudoscience and Science Denial are two sides of the same coin and feed on each other.

One root of misinformation: Conspiracies. There would seem to be no other way to explain how most scientists agree on climate change or on evolution other than a conspiracy.

At this point Trecek-King paused to give a quiz! She gave us four technical questions involving evolution. She said she took these from her biology class for non-majors.

I grew up with a research biologist father, and I took Advanced Placement Biology in high school. My college lady friend was also a pre-med biology major. I only got two of the four questions correct (In all fairness to me, my failure was more about understanding unfamiliar terms than about failing to understand concepts).

Nevertheless, her point was that even those of us who believe in evolution don't know as much about it as we may think we do. Belief is largely about trust. Who do you trust?

She returned to her personal story. The Garden of Eden story is about a woman causing sin to exist in the world.

Her town had just 1,400 people. Church roles for women were limited to cooking and cleaning. Her own mother was very strong and colorful. Her mother said women can do anything a man can do except pee standing up. ("She was wrong about the peeing standing up!")

Trecek-King went on to explain how her own mind changed. She wanted to attend veterinary school, which included the usual college classes including a first course in world civilization.

She learned that different civilizations had different gods. Stable civilizations had peaceful gods. Civilizations in harsh conditions had wrathful gods.

She felt a mushroom cloud explode over her head! "Holy shit! Man created God in his own

image!” Her realization was instantaneous and complete.

Her religion had taught her as a woman she was less of a person. She had been prepared to argue against evolution. But she was not prepared for this realization. She started to question everything.

This was before social media, but she knew she had to find a secular community to connect to. She realized they would not be sexist.

She realized that changing beliefs is not about facts. It is about what it implies. If you realize your tribe is wrong, then there is too much to lose.

She went on to say what does not work when it comes to changing beliefs: Telling someone they are stupid. Which led to: How should we talk to people. Which gets back to the elephant and rider and our web of beliefs.

Facts hit a wall of our web of beliefs. Your elephant is talking to their elephant.

her past self. She would not call out her past self. She would call her in.

If you see someone posting something false on social media, private message them rather than publicly shame them.

Misinformation appeals to our elephant. The best defense is self-awareness. Be part of a community built on inquiry and kindness.

At this point she ended her talk and invited people to follow and communicate with her on social media. She then took questions and comments.

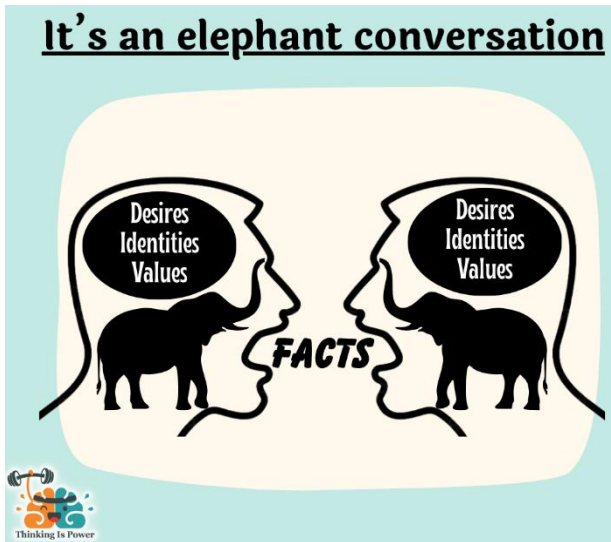
Rhett shared that he also grew up as a young Earth creationist. He noted many parallels with her story, but without the small-town upbringing.

Trecek-King answered a question from Christopher at UCSB. She said the first step is to consider if a belief is falsifiable. She noted that most God beliefs are not harmful. But some pseudoscience beliefs are harmful, such as nonsense beliefs about cancer causes and cures.

Ethan is currently a young Earth creationist. He said that if belief is about tribes, then the same is true for those of us in the pro-evolution tribe.

She said that is a good question and praised him for coming to her talk. She went on to explain that not all communities are the same. Some are organized around trying to understand reality through inquiry. Evolution has been scrutinized more than any other part of biology, for over 150 Years and these beliefs can be tested. God beliefs cannot be tested. In some cases, they can be tested and confirming evidence is not there.

For example, the Great Flood would have left specific traces that simply don't exist. And even if that evidence existed, it could not be tied to be caused by God.



She imagined going back to talk to her past self. She wouldn't talk about evolution. That is too tied to her identity. Instead, she would find the roots of her belief and say something like, "Let's investigate this together." She would not lecture

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Rhett noted that many evolution believers also believe in God. Evolution doesn't disprove God. Trecek-King agreed, giving Francis Collins as a notable example. He led the Human Genome Project and was director of the National Institutes of Health from 2009 to 2021. Yet he believes in God.

I will note that I saw him give a talk many years ago when he affirmed his God belief and wrote a book about it. His evidence? He realized that altruism could not have evolved, because it means putting others' interests ahead of one's Own which would diminish one's own chance for survival and passing on one's genes.

At that moment I had a realization: That one of the most powerful biologists in the world had never heard of Google. This man wrote an entire book without ever doing a search for how evolution and altruism are compatible. Hint: It is not hard to find explanations of how they are compatible.

Etienne said he is living in the Midwest. He said that religion is a vehicle for something else: White supremacy and patriarchy. He is Black. Maybe that is a root issue worth discussing? Trecek-King agreed, noting that her childhood religion was a cover for sexism. Steve King was a Republican congressman from her district who was censured for his racist comments. She noted that her husband is a Black man. She said that you have no responsibility to fight those battles if you don't want to.

She said that our core tends to be unfalsifiable. You can argue forever with such beliefs and get nowhere, because you can't test them.

She said you have to drill down to what we have in common. Most people are good and care about their families, community and other people. Get to talking to their elephant.

Marian talked about the need to build trust with those you disagree with. Find common ground.

But she doesn't know where to start with Trump supporters. Do they really think that is how a president should behave?

Trecek-King suggested asking them how sure they are of their position. Get a numerical value. You can then ask why they aren't more sure. They then will come up with reasons for their doubt.

How would you feel if you were wrong? Separate beliefs from identity as much as possible. How would you know you are wrong? How would you test it? "Let's explore together."

Jeremy is a neuro-social psychologist. He suggested asking the other person if they are just willing to listen to what you have to say, without any pressure to change their view.

Trecek-King gave the example of The Dress. People really saw it differently. They are not stupid or evil.

Jeremy noted that after a car crash police might ask many people what they saw and might get many different answers. Trecek-King noted that the answers may depend on how the questions are asked.

Dino said that religion serves a purpose for people.

Trecek-King agreed you don't have to take on the beliefs of your grandmother. Many of these beliefs are not harmful. There are other battles to fight.

Rhett noted that the Unitarians are a welcoming community for those who leave a more conservative church community.

Upcoming Events of Interest to Humanists

Submitted by Diane Krohn, Melanie Jacobsen, Meredith McMinn, Margaret Downey & Gary Noreen

Dec. 7th, 10:00am - Holiday-Themed ACTION Sunday: After the morning service, Live Oak Lay Leaders will facilitate a variety of "choose-your-own-spiritual-adventure" activities, including tree trimming, caroling, card-writing to UU's in prison, Chase the Chill social justice project preparations, and more. [Live Oak UU](#). 820 N. Fairview Road, Goleta, CA

Dec. 10th, 5:30 pm - Winter Contemplative: In the midst of what can be an overwhelming holiday season, we invite you to step back and join us for a Winter Contemplative Service. All are welcome to restore your spirit with this special evening gathering. Drew Carter & Megan Moyer will facilitate this time of communal silence and reflection, walking the labyrinth, candle-light, and singing. We will gather to share where we are, not where we need to be. [Live Oak UU](#). 820 N. Fairview Road, Goleta, CA

Dec 13th, 3:00 pm – Gary Noreen: *End The Genetic Lottery*. Futurist and HSSB Board member, Gary Noreen shares what he has been learning about emerging opportunities and implications of writing the human genome. Additional details on page 9. [This is the Zoom link](#) Meeting ID: 876 5808 2990, passcode ENDDisease

Dec. 14th, 10:00 am - The Grinch Returns - Rev. Jonathan Young: We will reflect on a classic holiday story to draw guidance on how to deal



HSSB Contact Information



Officers: *President & Editor:* 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

To Join or Donate to HSSB: Annual Membership dues \$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 or QR code below). At the PayPal site, select 'Send' then log into your PayPal account to complete the transaction. Or
- Zelle (HSSBpayments@gmail.com) or
- Checks made out to *Humanist Society of Santa Barbara* and mailed to Mary Taylor, HSSB, P.O. Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130.
- Please include your name and contact information when submitting payments.
- Membership questions? Contact Mary Taylor at HSSB.Membership777@gmail.com

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

with the festive season. [Live Oak UU](#). 820 N. Fairview Road, Goleta, CA

Dec. 20 & 21, 2:30 pm – The Christmas Revels: *The Celestial Fools ~ A Magical Winter's Tale*. HSSB's Meredith McMinn performs with a cast of players in this annual Santa Barbara holiday tradition. Mystical visitors from the East – the Sun, Moon, and Stars – visit a mythical village somewhere in Europe, bringing vibrant color, music, and story along with a glimpse of life and

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a world view unimagined by these simple folks. Hearts and minds are opened to a new perspective and the light of a New Year is restored. [Lobero Theater](#), 33 East Canon Perdido, Santa Barbara

Dec. 21st, 10:00 am - Multigenerational Spirit Play: Religious Exploration Coordinator, Christina Boardman. Join us for a special intergenerational holiday pageant, "The Screaming Latke." Join the fun! [Live Oak UU](#).

Dec. 24th, 5:00 pm - Journey of the Magi - a Christmas Eve Service - Rev. Jonathan Young - We will open to the wonder of the Holy Day by reflecting on the story of the three wise men bringing gifts. [Live Oak UU](#).

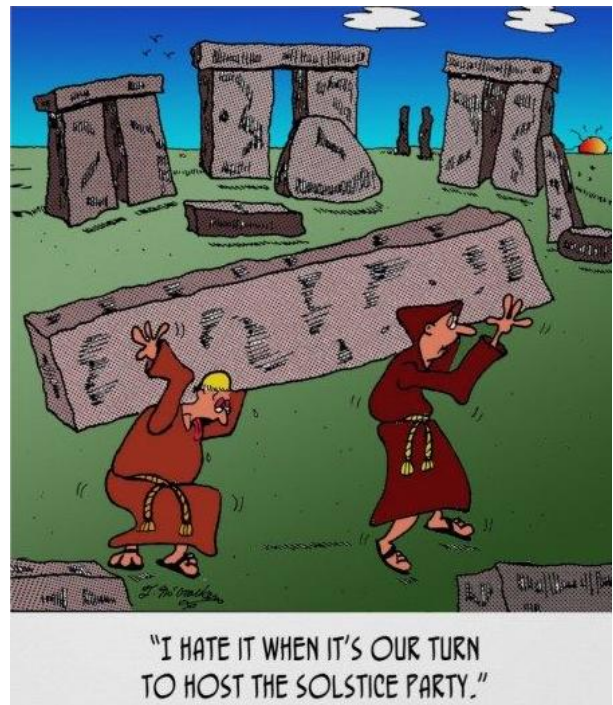
Dec. 31st, 10:00 am - Turning of the Year Service: The Live Oak Worship Ministry - This interactive service asks us to look back at our year and to look forward, like the two faces of Janus, letting go of the "detritus" of our personal past, and setting intentions for the new year. [Live Oak UU](#). 820 N. Fairview Road, Goleta, CA

January 29, 2026 4:00 pm Pacific: *The Times That Tried Men's Souls: Thomas Paine's Service During the Revolutionary War.* U.S. Representatives Jamie Raskin and Victoria Spartz will deliver opening words. Little known facts about Paine's military service will be disclosed and Jack Kelly, author of *Tom Paine's War* will be the keynote speaker. Actor Ian Ruskin will read excerpts from Paine's *The American*

Crisis papers, which were often written in battleground locations. Gene Jones from Florida Veterans for Common Sense will talk



about Paine's heroism and how the government repaid his service. This online presentation celebrating Thomas Paine is sponsored by the Thomas Paine Memorial Association (TPMA), Black Nonbelievers, Thomas Paine Historical Association, Freethought Society, Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers, American Atheists, Freedom From Religion Foundation, Thomas Paine Society, and Center for Inquiry. On-line. [A Celebration of Thomas Paine](#)



MERRY or HAPPY

Generic, Secular
 Inclusive, Gender-Neutral
 Non-Fat, Gluten-Free, Vegan
 Multicultural, Non-Offensive
 Day or Morning or Night
 of CELEBRATION
 or NON-CELEBRATION!

END the Genetic Lottery!



A Zoom Presentation by Gary Noreen

Human reproduction has always been a game of chance. We pass on our genes in a random “shuffle,” hoping our children inherit the best of us and avoid the worst. We accept genetic disease, early mortality, and suffering as “natural” — the luck of the draw.

But what if we could stack the deck?

Join Gary Noreen on **Saturday, December 13, 2025 at 3 PM** for a provocative presentation

about the future of humanity. A member of the HSSB Board of Directors and retired JPL/Caltech Systems Architect, Gary will argue that we are rapidly approaching a technological tipping point — one where humanity may begin to move from merely reading the human genome to actively *writing* it.

In this presentation, Gary will explore:

- **The Cruel Arithmetic of Nature:** What the “genetic lottery” is and why it results in suffering for billions of people.
- **From Chance to Engineering:** Heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, Alzheimer’s, cancer and most other diseases have genetic roots. The emerging technologies of polygenic DNA editing (tweaking many genes at once), directed meiosis (controlling recombination), and synthetic genomes may eventually enable us to engineer human genomes that greatly reduce the burden of most of today’s genetic diseases in newborns — potentially within a generation.
- **The controversy:** Gary will examine the fierce ethical debate surrounding these technologies — some scientists call them ‘imprudent’ or ‘insane’, while others view them as a moral imperative.
- **It’s starting NOW!** On October 30, 2025, two independent startups, both founded by experienced geneticists, announced separately that they intend to pursue human germline editing (DNA changes passed on to future generations).

Gary brings a big-picture view to biotech, showing how we may move from natural selection to engineered, disease-free babies.

Date & Time: Saturday, December 13, 2025, 3:00–4:00 PM

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87658082990?pwd=dP8y3H2qsyL5HuacTvBgRZiVusbicg.1>
Meeting ID: 876 5808 2990, passcode ENDdisease

For more information, contact Gary Noreen at (818) 424-5084, YODA@ardio.com



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

HSSB Calendar

Tuesday December 9. 5:00 pm HSSB Board Meeting. Members always welcome to attend.

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667>.

Sunday December 14. Winter Solstice Dinner for HSSB Members at the home of Wayne Beckman and Diane Krohn, 180 Nogal Drive, Santa Barbara, CA. 1:00 – 4:30 pm. \$20/person catered meal. Limited to 25 attendees. RSVP required to JudithAnnFontana@yahoo.com or 805-280-9175.

Tuesday January 13. 5:00 pm HSSB Board Meeting. Members always welcome to attend.

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667>.

Saturday, January 17, 3:00 pm. Dr. Michael O. Emerson: *The Religion of Whiteness*. On Zoom. <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833>.

Tuesday February 10. 5:00 pm HSSB Board Meeting. Members always welcome to attend.

Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667>.

Sunday February 15. 3:00pm Thomas Dixon: *How Valentines Day Became Secular*. On Zoom. <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833>.