



The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

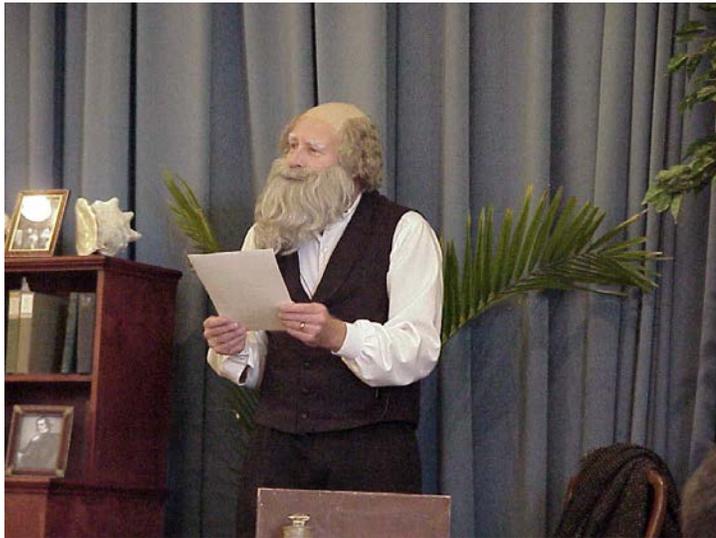
www.SBHumanists.org

FEBRUARY 2014

February Program:

Floyd Sandford as Charles Darwin in *Darwin Remembers* (A One-Man Play)

Born in New York state, Floyd Sandford received a B.S. degree from Saint Lawrence University and an M.S. degree in Wildlife Management from Southern Illinois University. He joined the Peace Corps and



taught secondary school in Ibadan, Nigeria for two years in the 60's. Returning to the U.S., he received his Ph.D in Zoology from the University of Oklahoma, and then taught biology at Coe College, a private liberal arts college in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, for 35 years, formally retiring in 2005.

Mr. Sandford has published articles in refereed science journals dealing with his research on marine symbiotic associations involving marine sponges, hermit crabs, and polychaete worms, and is an authority on the Florida hermit crab sponge.

Although trained as a scientist, Mr. Sandford is interested in the arts. He has been active in theatre and opera productions. He wrote *Darwin Remembers* with the assistance of a grant from Iowa Humanities. The first performance was at Coe College in 2002, and he continues to give performances upon request. The play, *Darwin Remembers: Recollections of a Life's Voyage*, is his personal tribute to Charles Darwin, one of the greatest scientists who ever lived, and, in addition, was a fine and decent human being.

When: Saturday, February 15th, 2014

Where: Fe Bland Auditorium, Santa Barbara City College (entry is the West Campus Entrance, from Cliff Drive)

Time: Doors open at 2:30pm. Program begins at 3:00 pm

Cost: \$2 members/\$5 non-members

Dinner: Gourmet Dining Room at Santa Barbara City College. See details on page 2. \$27 includes tax and tip. RSVP judithannfontana@yahoo.com or 967-7911.

For More Info: Activities@SantaBarbaraHumanists.org or call 769-HSSB

Activities

Judy Fontana

Please join us for a very special dinner following the Darwin Presentation at the Fe Bland Auditorium on Saturday, February 15. Dinner will be in the Gourmet Dining Room, located on the main campus of the Santa Barbara City College, just a short walk over the bridge or short drive to the main campus. Dinner will be at 5:00 p.m. Cost is \$27 which includes tax and tip. Dinner consists of baby mix green salad, fresh berry Napoleon or vanilla ice cream, coffee, decaf and ice water. You must choose from the following entrée options: Chicken Piccata, Grilled Salmon, Grilled Filet Mignon or Three Cheese and Spinach Ravioli.

In addition, a wine and cheese reception will be held at the Fe Bland Auditorium immediately following the program.

Please RSVP to judithannfontana@yahoo.com or call 967-7911. Reservations MUST be received by February 10.

President's Column:

Our Narrow Definition of Science

Sam Harris

(For this month, our President, Richard Martin, has submitted this essay, published by Sam Harris on his blog samharris.org and on the website edge.org in January, 2014, and is reprinted here with his permission. Richard will follow up with his own essay in the March Secular Circular, and will connect with some ideas in Harris' essay as well as some ideas in the previous January Secular Circular -Ed.)

Search your mind, or pay attention to the conversations you have with other people, and you will discover that there are no real boundaries between science and philosophy - or between those disciplines and any other that attempts to make valid claims about the world on the basis of evidence and logic. When such

claims and their methods of verification admit of experiment and/or mathematical description, we tend to say that our concerns are "scientific"; when they relate to matters more abstract, or to the consistency of our thinking itself, we often say that we are being "philosophical"; when we merely want to know how people behaved in the past, we dub our interests "historical" or "journalistic"; and when a person's commitment to evidence and logic grows dangerously thin or simply snaps under the burden of fear, wishful thinking, tribalism, or ecstasy, we recognize that he is being "religious."

The boundaries between true intellectual disciplines are currently enforced by little more than university budgets and architecture. Is the Shroud of Turin a medieval forgery? This is a question of history, of course, and of archaeology, but the techniques of radiocarbon dating make it a question of chemistry and physics as well. The real distinction we should care about—the observation of which is the *sine qua non* of the scientific attitude—is between demanding good reasons for what one believes and being satisfied with bad ones.

The scientific attitude can handle whatever happens to be the case. Indeed, if the evidence for the inerrancy of the Bible and the resurrection of Jesus Christ were *good*, one could embrace the doctrine of fundamentalist Christianity *scientifically*. The problem, of course, is that the evidence is either terrible or nonexistent—hence the partition we have erected (in practice, never in principle) between science and religion.

Confusion on this point has spawned many strange ideas about the nature of human knowledge and the limits of "science." People who fear the encroachment of the scientific attitude - especially those who insist upon the dignity of believing in one or another Iron Age god - will often make derogatory use of words such as *materialism*, *neo-Darwinism**, and

reductionism, as if those doctrines had some necessary connection to science itself.

There are, of course, good reasons for scientists to be materialist, neo-Darwinian, and reductionist. However, science entails none of those commitments, nor do they entail one another. If there were *evidence* for dualism (immaterial souls, reincarnation), one could be a scientist without being a materialist. As it happens, the evidence here is extraordinarily thin, so virtually all scientists are materialists of some sort. If there were *evidence* against evolution by natural selection, one could be a scientific materialist without being a neo-Darwinist. But as it happens, the general framework put forward by Darwin is as well established as any other in science. If there were *evidence* that complex systems produced phenomena that cannot be understood in terms of their constituent parts, it would be possible to be a neo-Darwinist without being a reductionist. For all practical purposes, that is where most scientists find themselves, because every branch of science beyond physics must resort to concepts that cannot be understood merely in terms of particles and fields. Many of us have had “philosophical” debates about what to make of this explanatory impasse. Does the fact that we cannot predict the behavior of chickens or fledgling democracies on the basis of quantum mechanics mean that those higher-level phenomena are something *other* than their underlying physics? I would vote “no” here, but that doesn’t mean I envision a time when we will use only the nouns and verbs of physics to describe the world.

But even if one thinks that the human mind is entirely the product of physics, the reality of consciousness becomes no less wondrous, and the difference between happiness and suffering no less important. Nor does such a view suggest that we will ever find the emergence of mind from matter fully intelligible; consciousness may always seem like a miracle. In philosophical circles, this is known as “the hard

problem of consciousness”—some of us agree that this problem exists, some of us don’t. Should consciousness prove conceptually irreducible, remaining the mysterious ground for all we can conceivably experience or value, the rest of the scientific worldview would remain perfectly intact.

The remedy for all this confusion is simple: We must abandon the idea that science is distinct from the rest of human rationality. When you are adhering to the highest standards of logic and evidence, you are thinking scientifically. And when you’re not, you’re not.

*Neo-Darwinism refers to the correction of Darwin's theory of evolution to incorporate the mechanisms of genetic transfer discovered since his time.

Pastor Tries Atheism, Loses Job, Gains \$27,000

In the past, at times like these, when his life foundered and frayed around the edges, Ryan Bell often prayed for help. But this year, at least, the pastor has resolved not to.

For the next 12 months, Bell says he will live as if there is no God.

He will not pray, go to church, read the Bible for inspiration, trust in divine providence or hope in things unseen. He’s taking the opposite of a leap of faith: a free fall into the depths of religious doubt.

Bell’s “intellectual experiment,” which began January 1, has already borne dramatic consequences.... But just as the man of God began to despair, he found help from an unlikely source: atheists. Read more:

<http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2014/01/08/pastor-learns-the-price-of-atheism/>

January Speaker:

Susan Gerbic: Tales of a Wikipedia Editor and Crowd-Sourced Activism Robert Bernstein

The Humanist Society may not be representative, but Wikipedia is the “go-to place” for information for most people. If you Google almost anything, the Wikipedia entry is likely to be at or near the top of the list. Sometimes it will be above the “official” site for the topic.

As a result, what appears on Wikipedia (WP) is “the truth” for most people. And Susan Gerbic has been eager to make sure that the truth is what people find, rather than myths and superstitions.

She created a group called Guerrilla Skepticism on Wikipedia. They have many volunteers who watch certain topics and stand ready to make corrections.

She showed us the Homeopathy page on WP. “You all know what that is? Yes, water.”

Homeopaths can edit the page, too. But WP only allows the scientific consensus to stand. Anyone can write anything. But humans and bots are watching and will take down false changes within seconds.

The top area of a WP page is the lead. It is what most people read. The lead for Homeopathy explains that: It is no more effective than a placebo. It is widely considered to be a pseudoscience. It is criticized as unethical.

The WP entry notes: “The scientific community regards homeopathy as nonsense, quackery or a sham and homeopathic practice has been criticized as unethical. The axioms of homeopathy are long refuted and lack any biological plausibility.”

Seems like strong wording. But Gerbic points out that after each strong word is one or more reference to scientific citations. It was hard to get in “quackery” because the homeopaths honestly did not seem to understand what “evidence” means.

Professors warn students not to use WP. Students and news reporters do go there.

She and her Guerrillas need to be out in front of situations where reporters are about to go there. In particular, when someone is about to die, it is important to update his or her page. As an example, this was the case for prominent humanist and skeptic Paul Kurtz. Getting corrections in newspapers later is fairly useless.

Guerrillas not only have to be sure WP entries are updated with factual information. They also must be vigilant to stop later changes to incorrect information. Sometimes this involves using WP arbitrators who mediate

conflicts. WP is good at allowing valid edits and stopping malicious or inaccurate edits. There are 400,000 WP editors, mostly men 25-40 years old.

Gerbic talked of her recent battle with cancer, which seems to be going well. She was dressed very fashionably and at times removed her hat to reveal the effects of chemotherapy, that thankfully, are over.



Left to right; HSSB Program Committee member Roger Schlueter and January speaker Susan Gerbic. Photo by Robert Bernstein.

She said we have all had the experience in such situations of getting advice from well-meaning friends and relatives to try treatments that are really just nonsense.

“You won’t reach them telling them they are stupid. Speak kindly about evidence. Let them save face. Let them feel they have checked it out and decided for themselves.”

They will Google it and will get WP first. They know that page is safe. And that is why it is so important that it is also correct!

Jenny McCarthy is a former Playboy bunny who reaches millions of followers, telling them not to vaccinate their children. Because of McCarthy, 126,180 preventable illnesses and 1,299 deaths are attributed to this campaign from 2007-2013. Her WP page lists her as a “menace.” Not by Gerbic.

Gerbic’s Guerrilla Skeptics page is: <http://guerrillaskepticismonwikipedia.blogspot.com/>. It shows many “before and after” improvements made to WP pages by the Guerrilla Skeptics. She took us through some of them: Tom Flynn, Robert Ingersoll birthplace, Vashti McCollum, Indigo Children, and Ruth Hurmence Green.

The latter once said, “There was a time when religion ruled the world. It was called the Dark Ages.”

“Don’t go after people like a honey badger,” Gerbic said. It is best to start with a different topic they agree on. Like Bigfoot. If you find common ground on a silly belief it can make them more open to the idea of homeopathy or religion as a flawed belief lacking in evidence.

And what helps? Making sure the WP Bigfoot page is updated!

More pages they have updated? Examples included spontaneous human combustion, and

pages of speakers that we have had for HSSB: Indre Viskontas, Jason Torpy (Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers) and Eddie Tabash. Also updated is the page for Kendrick Frazier, an upcoming speaker for HSSB.

Neil de Grasse Tyson is re-doing Carl Sagan’s *Cosmos* series, which is already creating a lot of WP hits for him. They are updating his page.

Rupert Sheldrake is a British version of Deepak Chopra, who believes that plants talk to each other. He is upset by Gerbic, but Gerbic is letting others update his page. He claims WP is under threat. He says their side needs their own Gerbic. She is flattered!

Fortunately, the pseudoscience crowd, the Holocaust deniers, etc., just don’t understand WP rules – that you need evidence and citations.

It takes someone who is high energy and who is okay speaking in public. And who will work for nothing. WP does not allow its editors to take any compensation.

Finally, Gerbic was asked about her cancer treatment. “It is coming along fine. Science is awesome!” Indeed! So, it seems, is Gerbic!

Susan Gerbic can be reached at susangerbic@yahoo.com and would be happy to hear from you!



Ricky Gervais 
@rickygervais

Remember kids, if you don't sin,
then Jesus died for nothing.

29/12/2013 12:34

Letters to the Editor

(Note: The following letter pertains to the Winter Solstice party. -Ed.)

Dear friends,

With all the hard work and goodwill especially and primarily on Judy's part, I think it is fair to say that the self-catered affair was not successful. I don't eat supermarket food and don't know if any other would have been better than Von's, but even had that been the case, the timing was impossible to handle properly. As ever, if something sounds too good to be true it usually is and I, for one, would have been delighted to pay more for a really nice and festive meal.

The games and company and the program were fortunately as good as ever and I had a good time, but let's not have a repeat.

Cheers,

--Claudia Sole

.....

You could argue that intelligence and self awareness is just an illusion, developed by the human brain through evolution, as Stephen Pinker seems to say, although trying to read him gives me a headache.

There may not be any proof of intelligent life in the universe because at a certain point civilizations disappear due to nuclear war or ecological disaster.

Attributing intelligence to only humans has religious overtones. For example, I was raised to believe that God only gave intelligence to humans and this was proof that humans were created by God. On the other hand, I think my beagles are pretty intelligent, depending on what interests them, like cats, treats or finding out where another dog has already peed. I

prefer the Buddhist viewpoint of compassion for all sentient beings, although some have argued that this does not include chickens.

Based on the science fiction of a graduate of my high school, Greg Bear, as well as Lewis Thomas, it is possible that living things evolve symbiotically/concurrently, and the hybrid system is what works, either with separate or integrated organisms. Thomas seems to argue that humans are a composite of organs/organisms. As the Borg say in *Star Trek*: "You will be assimilated."

--Merle Betz



Update from A Year Without War Joe White

Happy 2014!! WE now have 6 years before 2020! WE are indeed closer today to making 2020 a year without war. A year and a half ago, WE were just launching our website and Facebook page to begin building our global AYWW community. Eleven months ago, AYWW sponsored its first SBCC campus-wide activity showing the film, "Hotel Rwanda," an example of the power of one individual fighting against the social forces of war and strife. Today, AYWW has thousands of followers from around the globe on not only OUR website and Facebook but also Instagram, Tumblr and

Twitter. This past November, AYWW actually hosted Mr. Paul Rusesabagina, the man whose life "Hotel Rwanda" was based upon. Within nine months of AYWW's first campus-wide event, AYWW is partnering with the Hotel Rwanda Rusesabagina Foundation along with a long list of other upcoming Partners. AYWW's motto for 2014 – Stability With Viral Growth. Here are OUR basics.

First, a robust Internship Program - <http://ayearwithoutwar.org/sponsorintern> To stabilize our fast growing community, AYWW now needs daily, on-going administrative support. This can be achieved with Interns working 10 hours a week, at \$12.00 an hour for 10 months – an academic year. The student volunteers maintaining and building AYWW have been full time students often with two part time jobs. Out of necessity, AYWW is their last priority. WE must now move AYWW to its next level of growth and sustainability. If everyone following AYWW donated at least \$20.20, AYWW will secure its much needed internships. The AYWW goal is to give voice from the grassroots of the world by asking a little from a lot. If WE come together, WE will make 2020 a year without war. Customized, personalized internships are also available. Donations beyond \$20.20 most welcome.

Second, WE will continue developing AYWW's relationship with the United Nations' Special Envoy for Youth. The AYWW plan presently is to host Mr. Ahmed Alhendawai in March 2014 for a visit to Santa Barbara. While hosting his visit, AYWW also plans to further discuss the Special Envoy's support for AYWW and AYWW's two petitions to the United Nations' General Assembly. Please sign AYWW's petition to the UN.

<http://www.change.org/petitions/recognize-the-day-the-world-outlawed-war>

Third, AYWW plans to organize a series of 2014 "Conversations" with Prof. John Arquilla, Chair Dept. of Military Analysis, US Naval Post

Graduate School and Prof. Joe White, Chair Dept. of Philosophy, SBCC and Executive Director of AYWW. The popularity of the original November 2013 "Conversation," which is available at www.ayww.org, has encouraged both Prof. Arquilla and Prof. White to explore sharing their "Conversation" on the feasibility of AYWW. Invitations will be or have been extended to other academic settings as well as the Leon Panetta Institute for Public Policy and the United States Institute of Peace. If you have possible venues, please contact Melisa at melisa@ayww.org

Fourth, AYWW has submitted its application to participate in the Clinton Global Initiative University this March 2014 at Arizona State University. Keep your fingers crossed for AYWW selection.

Fifth, new partnerships with two major veterans groups in 2013: The National Veterans for Peace Foundation and The National Veterans Foundation. Also in 2013, The Greenheart Foundation and its willingness to donate a part of its Asian art collection to AYWW. The Dianna Basehardt Foundation, The Church of the Beatitudes, The Center of the Heart, The United Nations Association for Santa Barbara, Ventura and San Luis Obispo Counties and our developing, global program with the Peace Crane Project. Developing satellite communities in Jordan and Afghanistan. This is an incomplete list. Please see www.ayww.org for a more complete listing of Partners. Please JOIN the website, LIKE AYWW on Facebook to keep up on new developments.

Finally, 2020 A Year Without War can continue its amazing growth curve only with a stable, student administration at this time. Please support the AYWW Internship Program - <http://ayearwithoutwar.org/sponsorintern> . Please donate <https://rally.org/ayearwithoutwar/donate#> - at least \$20.20 and WE can make 2020 a year without war. Thank you.

Firms Have No Business in Religious Cases

Reg Henry

(excerpted from *The Pittsburgh Post Gazette*)

I don't know about you, but when I consider secular, for-profit corporations, my mind becomes bathed in a warm light and turns to thoughts of religion. Yes, the Almighty. That would be the Almighty Dollar in this context.

Ever since the Citizens United case, when corporations were deemed to have the First Amendment rights of actual people for purposes of political campaign financing, it was inevitable that disembodied corporate entities that exist only in law would be recognized for the soulful beings they really are...

Indeed, it is in respect of one of their most cherished commandments -- "Thou Shalt Not Have Any Regulations Before Thee"-- that some corporations have challenged the Affordable Care Act and its requirement that insurance plans cover contraception.

One such corporation is Hobby Lobby, a national chain owned by a family whose members seek to run it on Christian principles. To be fair, the company does not object to all contraception, just those forms its owners believe induce abortion.

Hobby Lobby and another firm challenging the health care law, a Mennonite-owned cabinet-maker from Pennsylvania, appear not to be the gross corporate stereotypes mentioned above, which I shamelessly concocted to keep you reading -- and you can't say it hasn't worked. The plaintiffs can be credited with good and sincere intentions on a principle that is

devilishly difficult, if you will pardon the expression.

The problem is that both cases are now before the U.S. Supreme Court (motto: "The Best Legal Minds That Politicians Can Find to Match Their Political Prejudices"). And, given their recklessness in Citizens United, the justices may come up with a rule benefiting not only sympathetic plaintiffs but also the stereotypical big corporations I caricatured above -- corporations about as religious as my left foot...

If that happens, it's Katie bar the contraception cabinet door. You may think that's fine, but what if business owners are empowered to impose their Muslim or Mormon or Episcopalian principles on the people of other faiths who work there?

Perhaps you might see, depending on the sect, mandatory head coverings for women, no coffee or caffeinated soft drinks and, in the case of the Episcopalians, dismissal over use of the wrong fork in the staff cafeteria.

So while corporations have their rights, so do people, and people should not be confused with corporations, even though there is a law -- the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 -- that suggests otherwise....

Those who set up secular, for-profit corporations for protection under the law should respect the law. And, yes, rendering unto Caesar sometimes means walking a fine line between everybody's rights.

Read more:

<http://www.post-gazette.com/opinion/reg-henry/2013/12/04/Firms-have-no-business-in-religious-case/stories/201312040115#ixzz2s1l502VQ>

Non-HSSB Events of Interest

Upcoming Events in California:

- February 10: Heidi Boghosian: *Spying on Democracy: Government Surveillance, Corporate Power and Public Resistance*. New Vic Theater, 33 W. Victoria St., Santa Barbara.
<http://www.cappscenter.ucsb.edu/news/upcoming-event-calendar/>
- February 16: Cameron Smith: *The Evolution rEvolution*. Center for Inquiry West, Costa Mesa.
<http://www.cfiwest.org/calendar/FeedYourBrain.htm#3>
- February 16: Dr. Charles Adler: *Wizards, Aliens, and Starships: Physics and Math in Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Skeptics Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena.
<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/>
- March 2: Sam Singleton: *Cats, Sheep, and Goats: The Taxonomy of Atheists, Believers and Preachers*. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles.
<http://www.cfiwest.org/calendar/FeedYourBrain.htm#3>
- March 2: Dr. Svante Pääbo: *Neanderthal Man: In Search of Lost Genomes*. Skeptics Society, Cal Tech, Pasadena.
<http://www.skeptic.com/upcoming-lectures/>

Upcoming Events Outside of California:

- April 17-20: American Atheists National 2014 Convention. Speakers include Chris Kluwe, Greta Christina, Brian Keith Dalton, Rev. Barry Lynn, PZ Myers, and many others. Salt Lake City, UT.
<http://www.atheists.org/convention2014>

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Q: Why does god love atheists?

A: Because they're not always asking for stuff!

---Bonnie B. (Wayne's sister)

HSSB Contact Information

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Mary Wilk

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Newsletter Deadline:

Deadline for submissions to the Secular Circular is midnight, the last day of each month.

HSSB meetings are held on the 3rd Saturday of each month at 2:30 pm, usually in the Patio Room of Vista Del Monte, 3775 Modoc Rd., Santa Barbara. More information is available at our web site: www.SantaBarbaraHumanists.org. At meetings, a donation of \$2 from members and \$5 from non-members is appreciated. First-time visitors are welcome on a complimentary basis.

Annual HSSB membership dues are \$36 for a single person, \$60 for a couple, and \$100 (or more) to become a Society Supporter. One may subscribe to our newsletter only for an annual fee of \$20.

To join HSSB, please send your contact information and a check for your membership dues to HSSB, PO Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130, Attn: Mary Wilk. For membership information contact Mary Wilk at 967-3045, or mwilk@cox.net.

Copies of this newsletter are posted on the HSSB website. Photos are on the website and available via the link <http://picasaweb.google.com/Humanist.Society.of.Santa.Barbara>



See us on Facebook::

HSSB Calendar

Tuesday, February 11: Board Meeting, 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

Saturday, February 15: Monthly Meeting : Floyd Sanford, "Darwin Remembers", Fe Bland Auditorium at Santa Barbara City College, 2:30 p.m. Dinner after the talk at the Gourmet Dining Room at SBCC.

Sunday, February 23: (and the last Sunday of every month), 10 a.m., **Secular Sunday Brunch** for humanists, atheists, agnostics, skeptics, freethinkers, singles, couples and families without religion. No cover charge; membership not required. Pay only for your food, drink and tips. Cody's Cafe, 4898 Hollister Ave. in the Turnpike Center, Goleta in the room to the right as you enter the restaurant. For information phone Board member, Mary Wilk at 805-967-3045.

Tuesday, March 11: Board Meeting. 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

Saturday, March 15: Monthly Meeting: Roy Speckhardt, Executive Director of the American Humanists Association, the Patio Room at Vista Del Monte, 2:30 p.m.



Humanist Society of
Santa Barbara
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