



# THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

December, 2007

<http://www.sbhumanists.org>

## Winter Solstice Party Saturday, December 15, 2007



By Anne Rojas

Hello Partygoers!

Don't miss the exciting Winter Solstice Party at Sizzler on December 15th at 6 p.m. I am able to take reservations as late as December 8th. Please e-mail me that your check for \$25 is in the mail. Please indicate your entree selection on the check: fish, steak, chicken or veggie.

The dinner price includes wines, hors d'oeuvres, served dinner, salad bar, and dessert and coffee or other drink, tax and tip.

The above price also includes raffle tickets! Also, we are planning on having a mystery guest performer--stay tuned....

Sizzler Restaurant, 5555 Hollister Avenue, Goleta, CA  
Saturday, December 15<sup>th</sup>, starting at 6 p.m. with cocktails  
and hors d'oeuvres. Choice of entrée. Our own private  
room, plus a special mystery guest performer!

## Contact Information

Board of Directors 2007-2008

### Officers:

*President:* Adrian Wenner  
963-8508 [wenner@lifesci.ucsb.edu](mailto:wenner@lifesci.ucsb.edu)

*Secretary:* Hope Smith  
967-5143 [hsmith1923@aol.com](mailto:hsmith1923@aol.com)

*Treasurer:* Richard Martin  
687-3563 [richardmartin@cox.net](mailto:richardmartin@cox.net)

### Board Members/At Large:

Dick Cousineau  
Andrew Hankin  
James Kimberly  
Anne Rojas  
Marian Shapiro  
Ray Stone  
Nancy Wahl  
Mary Wilk

### Committee Chairpersons/Other Contacts

Membership: Mary Wilk  
967-3045 [mwilk@cox.net](mailto:mwilk@cox.net)

Publicity: Andrew Hankin  
965-3739 [green\\_helmet@hotmail.com](mailto:green_helmet@hotmail.com)

Programs: Dick Cousineau  
687-2371 [dkcgeo@cox.net](mailto:dkcgeo@cox.net)

Social Action: Marian Shapiro  
968-0478 [marianshapiro@cox.net](mailto:marianshapiro@cox.net)

First Amendment Defense Fund: Roger  
Schlueter  
962-6316 [drrogers@cox.net](mailto:drrogers@cox.net)

Book Club: Marty Shapiro  
968-0478 [martinshapiro@cox.net](mailto:martinshapiro@cox.net)

Activities Director: Anne H. Rojas  
564-6086 [annehrojas@cox.net](mailto:annehrojas@cox.net)

Corresponding Secretary: James Kimberly  
564-1991 [dr.doboy@gmail.com](mailto:dr.doboy@gmail.com)

Membership Directory: Ray Stone  
682-2123 [rstone@west.net](mailto:rstone@west.net)

Newsletter Editor: Diane Krohn  
[djkrohn@cox.net](mailto:djkrohn@cox.net)

Web Master: Wayne Beckman  
569-5503 [hssbwebmaster@cox.net](mailto:hssbwebmaster@cox.net)

## Membership Notes by Mary Wilk

Humanist Society meetings are usually held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of each month at 3 pm in the Patio Room of Vista del Monte, 3775 Modoc Road, Santa Barbara, CA. More information is available at our web site:

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

or by contacting any of the board members listed in the left-hand column of this page.

If you would like a copy of this newsletter mailed to a friend or someone who might be interested in our Society, please send their contact information to: PO Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130, or call Mary Wilk. Alternatively, all of our newsletters are available at the web address shown above.

If you are not already a member, we encourage you to join our Society. Annual membership dues are \$36 for a single person, \$60 for a couple, and \$100 (or more) for a sponsor. Members receive the monthly newsletter and have the option of attending meetings, outings and special events sponsored by the Society.

Those unable to attend our monthly meetings may subscribe to our newsletter for an annual fee of \$20, but are not entitled to other membership privileges. When attending our meetings, a donation of \$2 from members and \$5 from non-members is appreciated. First or second-time visitors are welcome on a complimentary basis. For more information, please contact Mary Wilk or any member of our Society.

## News About Members by Hope Smith and Mary Wilk

**Speaker's Fund:** Bea Duncan has made a very generous donation to our Speaker's Fund. See the November Secular Circular for information about this fund. Thank you, Bea, for your donation!

We are saddened to learn of the death of our member and generous sponsor George Reams, who passed away on May 14, 2007. He was born in Columbus, Ohio, and graduated from Ohio State University with a degree in Language Arts. George served in the Army Air Corps throughout WW II, later moving to California where he spent many years in the aerospace industry. In 1963, he started his own company, Geodynamics, where he remained until his retirement.

Another sad event is the death of Thomasine Orsburn in September 2007. Both she and her late husband were sponsors of our society for several years. Thomasine was born in New York and graduated from Vassar College. She moved with her husband to Pasadena, where she ran two clothing stores, and upon retirement, settled near Carpinteria. She was active in community service, and she belonged to the Women's Auxiliary of the Music Academy of the West.

---

## HSSB Bookstore By Ray Stone

We now have our own Book Store, small as it is. It's a moveable book store, to be open for business at our meetings. Ray Stone is the current proprietor and he encourages you to browse the store's inventory, and buy any that appeal to you.

Books will be both new and used. If you have books of interest to Humanists, and the books are in good condition, please consider donating them to the store. Just bring them to the next meeting, or, alternatively, contact Ray at 682-2123.

+++++

### 3 Beers

This guy went into the bar every Friday night and ordered three beers and always drank them all by himself. Three beers, every Friday night. Not 2. Never 4. Always 3.

Well, the bartender couldn't figure this out. Without fail this guy always came in. The bartender finally said to the guy, "Every Friday night you come in here and have three beers. There must be a story to this."

The guy said, "Yes, there is a story. You see, me and my two buddies always went out for a beer on Friday night when we were in Vietnam. One night while we were drinking we decided that we would continue doing this when we returned to the States. We also decided that if one of us didn't make it, the other two would drink the third one's beer. And if two didn't make it, the third guy would drink the other two beers. The other two didn't make it back so I'm drinking theirs."

Well, the next Friday night the guy came back into the bar as usual but only ordered two beers. The bartender was so puzzled he just had to ask the guy about it.

The bartender said to him, "I notice you've only ordered two beers. There has to be a story here."

The guy said, "Yes, indeed there is a story. You see, I joined the Mormon church and I can't drink beer any more."

## Notes From the President By Adrian Wenner

Unwittingly, some 40 years ago, I saved the government millions of dollars, funds that might have been spent on brain research at the time. Ed Callaway's talk at the November meeting jolted my memory about that experience, but I didn't want to bring up the episode during or after his talk.

In 1965 Jacob Bronowski of Cal Tech invited me to go to the Salk Institute to serve as a "discussant" after a talk to be given there by a bee researcher from Notre Dame University.

No one briefed me in advance about the reason for the talk and my (apparently anticipated) stamp of approval. As I learned later, the Salk Institute was about to launch a massive research program to investigate how the brain functions by focusing on the "instinctual signaling system" of honey bees (their hypothesized "dance language"). That is, the insect brain would be a very simple system compared to ours. A bee caught in the act of signaling another bee could be quick frozen, its brain sectioned, and neural pathways traced.

After the formal talk in 1966 at the Salk Institute, I strode to the front of the room and diagramed an experimental design that supposedly provided proof of bee language. I then pointed out flaws in that experimental design, flaws that apparently few wanted to hear about!

That evening, after a formal dinner meeting (one that included Jonas Salk, Francis Crick, Jacques, Monod, and Jacob Bronowski), I clarified my objections to the concept of bee language. In time, Francis Crick leaned over to Jonas Salk and said, "Perhaps we had better not go ahead." Later I learned that I had quashed the beginning of a major

research project on brain function and that the bee researcher from Notre Dame didn't get the job.

As Ed Callaway emphasized in his talk, studies on brain function back then rested upon a quite naïve understanding of how a brain might function. Ed countered that idea early in his talk by indicating that brain function is actually very complicated and that we know very little about what goes on in there.

Ed's talk may have gone over the heads of some in the audience, but for me it obviously had special significance. For full details of my Salk Institute experience (one a colleague labeled "high drama") see: <http://www.beesource.com/pov/wenner/aoac.htm>

\*\*\*\*\*

On another note, in an effort to encourage earlier arrival at our events, the Board decided to have a brief social gathering before the start of talks. Starting with the **January** meeting, we will have light refreshments at 2:30 p.m., and then will start the presentation promptly at 3 p.m.

---

Truth does not demand belief. Scientists do not join hands every Sunday, singing, "Yes, gravity is real! I will have faith! I will be strong! I believe in my heart that what goes up, up, up must come down, down, down. Amen!" If they did, we would think they were pretty insecure about it.

-Dan Barker

## Upcoming Events

By Dick Cousineau and  
Andrew Hankin

**Saturday, December 15th** is the Winter Solstice Party, starting with drinks and hors d'oeuvres at 6 p.m. We have a private room at the Sizzler, 5555 Hollister Avenue at South Kellogg Avenue in Goleta. Members and their guests only, \$25 per person. Please contact Anne Rojas at 805-564-6086 or e-mail Anne at [annehrojas@cox.net](mailto:annehrojas@cox.net).

**Sunday, December 30<sup>th</sup>** is the monthly Sunday Brunch, 10 a.m. at Cody's Cafe, 4898 Hollister Avenue, in the Turnpike Shopping Center, Goleta. There's no cover charge, no reservations and HSSB Membership is not needed, so feel free to bring your friends and family.

Our meeting for **Saturday, January 19th, 2008**, will be a presentation by Professor Theodore Drange, at 3 p.m. in the Patio Room at Vista del Monte, 3775 Modoc Road, Santa Barbara. Ted Drange taught Philosophy from 1966-2001 at West Virginia University, then retired to live in Ventura, CA. His philosophical interests were the philosophy of language and theory of knowledge, later shifting to the philosophy of religion. *Nonbelief and Evil: Two Arguments for the Nonexistence of God* was his second book, published by Prometheus in 1998. Ted was raised in Brooklyn, NY and was confirmed in the Lutheran church in 1948, but became an atheist a year later.

\*\*\*\*\*  
If God is God He is not good, if God is good  
He is not God; take the even, take the odd.

-Archibald MacLeish, American Poet

## What is the Real Meaning on the Christmas Season?

Excerpts from Austin Cline

Modern Christmas celebrations have little or nothing to do with Jesus, the Feast of the Nativity, or the Incarnation. Consider some popular Christmas traditions: erecting and decorating a tree, hanging wreaths, sending cards, drinking eggnog, giving presents, hanging mistletoe...where is Christ in all of this?

If people give it a religious meaning, it will be a religious holiday for them. If they fill the day with other meanings (gifts, family, etc.), then it will have those instead. Because the meaning of Christmas depends upon what people do with it, the only way for Christians to reclaim a religious meaning for Christmas is to personally eschew secular, pagan, and consumer activities in favor of religious ones. Give to the poor instead of to Wal-Mart. Go to church instead of a mall. Pray instead of gathering around a lit-up tree.

What they cannot do is insist that the wider culture endorse this and also shed pagan, commercial, or secular aspects of the season. They can't turn the tide of commercialization and secularization. They might convince individual Christians to turn away from it all and focus on religious aspects of a holy day, however. If enough Christians change, perhaps the culture will as well, but the focus should be on what Christians do as individuals.

Trying to force the culture to change by attacking greetings like Happy Holidays is silly. There is something profoundly wrong with the behavior of Christians using Christmas in their Culture War against modernity.

For the rest of this article, see <http://atheism.about.com/od/christmasholidayseason/p/ChristmasWars.htm>

## November Meeting:

### Edward Callaway on Understanding the Brain

By Robert Bernstein



*Photo of Edward Callaway by Robert Bernstein*

"Nature seems unaware of our intellectual need for convenience and unity, and very often takes delight in complication and diversity." Edward Callaway gave us this 1906 quote from Nobel Laureate Santiago Ramon y Cajal on the challenge of understanding the brain.

Callaway gave us a good appreciation of the challenges of understanding the human brain while informing us of the current techniques that are making progress possible.

We are reaping the benefits of research investments made decades ago and the work done today will pay off in perhaps another 20 years.

Since 30% of the brain does vision, this was a good place to start. No machine can match the brain's ability to seek and find features.

David Hubel and Torsten Wiesel pioneered this research in the late 1950's and early '60's recording from the brains of anesthetized cats. They were able to show that neurons in the visual cortex responded selectively to

bars of light at a particular angle while neurons at earlier stages in the visual system responded to center-surround patterns. In 1981 the pair received the Nobel Prize for this work which revealed how the cortex transforms visual information.

But the really interesting progress will come, not from understanding individual neurons, but from understanding the complex connections among the neurons.

Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) provides a way to see the location of activity in a living brain performing various tasks. However, location is not the same as function and the resolution of fMRI is crude compared with individual neurons.

What we really want is a way to probe an individual neuron and have all of the neurons connected to that one neuron "light up" in some way. By probing in this way, it would be possible to begin to create circuit diagrams of a brain at the level of individual neurons.

The "lighting up" part is possible with a gene that literally allows a luminescent jellyfish to glow. But how to get this tag to happen only as a result of neural connections to a single neuron? Well, the rabies virus spreads from neuron to neuron. Wickersham, Callaway and others published a technique this year that modifies the rabies virus so: 1) it will initially infect just one cell; and 2) it then spreads from this one neuron to the thousands of neurons connected to it and then stops spreading. Also: 3) The luminescent gene is inserted so that the spread can easily be seen.

*(See Bernstein, page 7)*

*(Bernstein, continued from page 6)*

So far, the technique has been applied to a slice of a rat brain that has been kept alive for days in a dish. This is the proof of the technique that will next be used to reveal the "connectome" - a map of the mouse brain circuitry. The idea will be to take a reductionist view of the brain and map microcircuits, then move up to modules and finally entire areas of the brain.

To understand how these circuits work, it will be necessary to identify cell types and circuits, then correlate circuitry to function. And, finally, test models by manipulating specific components of the neural circuits.

We were very fortunate to hear the cutting edge of brain research from Edward Callaway, who is actually doing this research. While it was not possible to understand it all in an hour, we were able to come away with a greater appreciation of the challenges. A greater understanding of where we are on the path of progress. And, an actual understanding of some of the cutting-edge techniques.

Understanding the science of the brain is vital to many issues of interest to Humanists, both practical and philosophical. We thank Dr Callaway for his vital research and for sharing it with us.

#####

## **Book Review** **By Marcia Sherman**

*A Peace to End All Peace*  
By David Fromkin

I'd like to recommend a book I've been reading about World War I, that I have found to be extremely enlightening, especially regarding our current involvement

in the Middle East. In the history books, World War II grabbed most of the attention because the issues were easier to define and the United States was more involved, so I never really understood the various machinations of world politics from that other period of time; nor was I interested.

David Fromkin has gone to great lengths to ferret out tens of thousands of documents in order to authenticate his assertions about the incompetence of the British military and political leaders of the time as well as the scheming of the French, Russians, Arabs, Turks and Germans. The unethical behavior of the British was so out of control that even heroes like the revered Lawrence of Arabia grabbed every opportunity for self-promotion that they could find, regardless of the truth of the situation. The real victims of English greed and rampant narcissism appear to be the countries of Armenia, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan, not to mention all the people who were trying to exist in the entire region. And while this insanity was going on, the British were losing *millions of soldiers a year* in the trenches of Europe.

Due to the lack of effective communication as well as political intrigue, hardly anyone in the entire British government or the military really knew what they were doing. But even the people working on the mainland didn't communicate with each other or agree on the same policies themselves. Every minister was giving out different instructions to their underlings all over the world, most of it in conflict with everyone else. The political leaders in England had no idea of the needs of the people of the various territories; their sole purpose was to tighten their grip on the entire region as a gateway to their other holdings in India, Australia and New Zealand. They had barely begun to understand the significance of oil.

*(See Sherman, page 8)*

*(Sherman, continued from page 7)*

Some of the various world leaders realized the pretense by the British and others didn't; some, like Wilson, cared but were naive while most leaders were double-dealing with everyone else. The French finally got taken along with the Russians who were going through their own revolution at the time. The Turks lost a huge amount of territory because they couldn't compete with the thousands of British governmental

underlings that swamped the former Ottoman Empire which spread from Egypt to India; however, but they finally outsmarted the Greeks and the English who planned to completely destroy their country. To finalize the entire farce, the British, when they finally captured most of the Middle East, didn't have the ability to govern it leaving the chaos that the whole world has since been trying to resolve.



The Humanist Society of  
Santa Barbara  
PO Box 30232  
Santa Barbara, CA 93130