



THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

November 2007
<http://www.sbhumanists.org>

Understanding the Brain: Clues from the Visual System

By Andrew Hankin

Edward Callaway, Ph.D is a professor in the Systems Neurobiology Laboratories, at the Salk Institute in La Jolla, California. Work in his laboratory is aimed at understanding how neural circuits give rise to perception and behavior. Studying the organization and function of neural circuits in the brain's visual cortex may help to better understand how specific neural components contribute to the computations that give rise to visual perception.

The Systems Neurobiology Laboratory employs anatomical and physiological methods, both in living creatures and in the laboratory, to reveal neuronal circuitry and to identify emergent functional properties of the component neurons. Present studies focus on the relationships between local circuits in the primary visual cortex and early parallel visual pathways.

Relating neural circuits to functions in the visual system, where correlations between neural activity and perception can be directly tested, provides fundamental insight into the basic mechanisms by which cortical circuits mediate perception, understanding and thought.

Dr. Edward Callaway earned his Bachelor of Science from Stanford University; his Ph.D from California Institute of Technology; he is a Postdoctoral fellow of Rockefeller University. He heads a team of 14 postdoctoral researchers, graduate students and scientific investigators.
<http://www.sn1-c.salk.edu>

Dr. Edward Callaway
Saturday, November 17th, 2007
3-5 p.m.
FeBland Auditorium, Santa Barbara City College
West Campus, Cliff Drive, Santa Barbara, CA



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Membership Notes

By Mary Wilk

Humanist Society meetings are usually held on the 3rd 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

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.

I'm an atheist, and that's it. I believe there's nothing we can know except that we should be kind to each other and do what we can for other people.

-Katherine Hepburn

News About Members

By Hope Smith and
Andrew Hankin

Membership Roster change:

Bill Edgar - new telephone 682-1011

Letters to the Editor:

Adrian Wenner, Oct. 5, *Los Angeles Times* website, protested President Bush's non-Christian-values veto of the State Children's Health Insurance Program bill.

Neal Rosenthal, Oct. 18, *Independent*, in support of measure A on the City of Santa Barbara's Nov. 6 ballot (to shift City elections from odd- to even-numbered years). In this connection, a paid ad in the *Independent* of Oct. 25 by "Yes on Measure A" listed among individuals supporting Measure A: Neal Rosenthal, Marian Shapiro, and Dr. Marcia C. Sherman.

John and Pat Coppejans recently returned from a two-week visit to Japan.

On Oct. 17 Andrew Hankin was acknowledged in the *Daily Sound*, alongside more than thirty other individuals and organizations, for having helped raise \$4,000 for the Santa Barbara Firefighters Alliance. The Alliance helps raise funds for Santa Barbara county and city firefighters, to buy specialized equipment such as night-vision goggles, thermal imaging cameras, and satellite telephones. Such high-technology equipment, carried on government-issue fire engines, better enables brave men and women to stay safe while fighting fires, dealing with natural disasters, and giving medical assistance. <http://www.sbfirefightersalliance.org>

On Oct. 27 Robert Bernstein took part in a Rally & Walk in downtown Santa Barbara To STOP IRAQ WAR & PREVENT WAR

IN IRAN. This was part of an International Day of Action across the U.S. and around the globe. Robert's photos can be seen at <http://www.swt.org/act/iraq/iraq2007-1027/>

Andrew Hankin encourages you to have fun while supporting another secular and local nonprofit organization, of which he is a member: the Santa Barbara Theatre Organ Society. At 7 p.m. on Sunday, Nov. 11 in the Arlington Theatre (1317 State Street in Santa Barbara), Scott Foppiano will play his favorite music on the Wonder Morton theatre pipe organ (no tapes, amplifiers or speakers - just all the bells and whistles!). Scott was named Organist of the Year at the 2007 National Convention of the American Theatre Organ Society. \$11 general admission; children and students with ID FREE! For more details, phone 805-692-0939 or <http://members.cox.net/sbtos>

More Publicity for Atheists:

The *Santa Barbara News-Press* of Oct. 12, B section, picked up from an Associated Press writer an article headlined "Atheists plan godless getaway." It's about members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) (which the article calls "the nation's largest group of atheists and agnostics") gathering for their 30th annual convention, in Madison, Wis., and there's a photo of FFRF's co-president Annie Laurie Gaylor.

Our HSSB is a lifetime institutional member of FFRF, and on March 15 next year our speaker will be Dan Barker, president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

I told the doctor I broke my leg in two places. The doctor said, "Don't go to those places."

-Henny Youngman

Notes from the President

By Adrian Wenner

Fundamentalism

Should we indoctrinate our children (or grandchildren) with Humanist Principles?

Last month I compared the Golden Rule and its implications to the Principles of Humanism. Fundamentalism, regardless of the religion, can stand in sharp contrast to The Golden Rule and our humanist principles. As an example, consider an extreme Christian fundamentalist statement made in 1993 by Randall Terry, founder of Operation Rescue:

"I want you to just let a wave of intolerance wash over you. I want you to let a wave of hatred wash over you. Yes, hate is good... Our goal is a Christian nation. We have a Biblical duty, we are called by God, to conquer this country. We don't want equal time. We don't want pluralism."

Whereas we can readily recognize that some organizations in this country embody outspoken Christian fundamentalism (as in the above example), Islamic fundamentalism does not readily fall into discrete categories — as in a definition found in Wikipedia:

"Although a fundamentalist may also be an Islamist, a Fundamentalist is "a political individual" in search of a "more original Islam," while the Islamist is pursuing a political agenda. ... Islamic fundamentalism "is at best only an umbrella designation for a very wide variety of movements, some intolerant and exclusivist, some pluralistic; some favorable to science, some anti-scientific; some primarily devotional and some primarily political; some democratic, some authoritarian; some pacific, some violent."

Successful recruitment to fundamentalist (and other) religions depends mostly upon indoctrination, beginning with the very young. In Islamic countries religious schools indoctrinate subjects that give more power and control to the leaders. Much the same happens with religious fundamentalism in this country, but we have largely managed to keep religion out of the schools. To do so requires that we wage a never-ending struggle in that fight. For an interesting essay on these matters, check out:

<http://www.bidstrup.com/religion.htm>

On a lighter note, at our last meeting Ray Stone at his book table had for sale copies of a small publication, "Humanism for Kids." I believe our children and grandchildren could well benefit from reading this informative booklet, as it provides them with information that can counter some of the fundamentalist dogmatism that they may well encounter in school.

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Moral certainty is always a sign of cultural inferiority. The more uncivilized the man, the surer he is that he knows precisely what is right and what is wrong. All human progress, even in morals, has been the work of men who have doubted the current moral values, not of men who have whooped them up and tried to enforce them. The truly civilized man is always skeptical and tolerant.

-H.L. Mencken

Social Scene

By Anne Rojas

Hello!

We are now accepting reservations for the Winter Solstice Party on Saturday, Dec. 15th at Sizzler. This is our usual 3rd Saturday. I do not have an exact price as the manager has been on a prolonged absence. I expect it will be around \$25 for the complete served dinner with private salad bar and a cocktail hour with wines prior to the dinner. All raffle prizes are included as well as the tip. No extras!

We always have an outstanding meal with a choice of chicken, fish, veggie, or beef. I will get your selections and checks later, when exact cost is determined. Please e-mail me your reservations. We are limited to 60 persons so members get first priority. Guests are allowed, space permitting.

Ming Dynasty was another hit last month. We always have the maximum attendance there.

For November, after the program at Fe Bland, we will be at Sizzler as the count is a bit vague and it is not a problem there. It would be helpful if you let me know if you plan on attending.

November brunch at Cody's is scheduled for Sunday, November 25th, at 10 a.m. Cody's is located at 4898 Hollister Ave., in the Turnpike Shopping Center, Goleta.

I am working on a Theatre Night as several of you have expressed an interest in going as a group. Getting the best night for all is the trick. This might have to wait until January.

I look forward to seeing you all soon!

Upcoming Events

By Dick Cousineau

On Nov. 17th, we will present a talk by **Dr. Edward Callaway**, "Understanding the Brain - Clues from the Visual System and other Challenges." Ed Callaway is professor of Neurobiology at the Salk Institute in La Jolla, California, where one of his mentors was Francis Crick of DNA fame. Ed is a graduate from Dos Pueblos High School in Goleta, in addition to his advanced degrees. His talk will be directed to educated lay persons interested the latest developments in the biological sciences. The event is being enthusiastically co-sponsored by SB City College Biological Sciences Department, and will be held at Fe Bland Auditorium on the West Campus of City College.

December's Solstice Celebration, to be held at Sizzler, is described in the Social Scene column.

January 19th will bring **Theodore Drange**, Professor of Philosophy of Religion, to our meeting at Vista Del Monte. Ted, who now lives in Ventura, received his BA from Brooklyn College and his Ph.D from Cornell University, and taught philosophy at West Virginia University from 1966 until his retirement in 2001. His most notable book has been one on the philosophy of religion titled *Nonbelief and Evil: Two Arguments for the Nonexistence of God*. His talk to us will concern "Just who are we?" Consideration will be given to such terms as atheist, agnostic, freethinker, ignostic, nontheist, rationalist, skeptic, secularist, and humanist; with a view towards formulating the best definitions for each and which capture common usage. His insights will of particular interest to us who find differentiation among the various descriptions challenging and personal. Plan to come!

October Meeting: Mark Manning: Caught in the Crossfire By Jim Balter

There are two kinds of journalists in Iraq: embedded, those who have been vetted by the State Department and the military, have signed contracts limiting what they can report on, travel with the military and report from their perspective; and unembedded, those who operate independently, move on the ground, can observe and speak to the civilian population and report from different perspectives. Mark Manning was one of the latter. A former deep sea diver who has spent time in oil fields and fish camps, Mark put his experience, talent, social conscience, and courage into service to bring the effects of warfare on Iraqi civilians to light.

Mark showed film clips from the battle of Fallujah ("Operation Phantom Fury") that took place in November, 2004, seven months after four Blackwater contractors were killed in the city. While working in Jordan, Mark met Iraqi aid worker Rana Al Aiouby, who asked him to help her get supplies through American checkpoints and to document what was happening to the civilians of Fallujah.

Fallujah, an ancient city that was a center of trade in Iraq, had a population of about 350,000. The U.S. military ordered evacuation a couple of days before the battle began, but up to 50,000 people stayed in the city (soon to become a "live fire zone") having never ventured out before, or terrified to pass through the invading army. Those who did leave were not given anywhere to go, food, water, or electricity -- some people were living in school buildings or cars, others dug holes and lived in them before commandeering abandoned UNICEF tents.

The people were tossed out of their city into the cold of winter with no humanitarian planning.

Afterwards, there wasn't much of a city to return to. The images we saw showed the results of intense artillery fire, resulting in virtually every building destroyed, including medical facilities; the main hospitals were sealed off, while the children were sick from lack of clean water. Getting back into the city was not easy; to this day it is completely sealed off by checkpoints; everyone is fingerprinted and retina scanned, and deadly force is authorized. To get in, people need an ID card that identifies them as a resident of Fallujah, which marks them as a "potential terrorist", restricting their travel elsewhere in Iraq.

We saw a soccer field turned into a mass grave with three thousand buried there; there are at least seven mass graves. We saw a film of massive cluster bomb strikes; these bombs break into fragments, and each of the fragments breaks into smaller fragments in turn. It is illegal to use cluster bombs against civilians.

Only in the U.S., those fighting against American troops are known as "insurgents"; elsewhere in the world, and especially in the Middle East, they are known as "the resistance." When asked why they are fighting, they spoke of defending their religion and avenging the rape of their women, burnings, detentions, Abu Ghraib -- but never about destroying the U.S. or western culture. Many interviewees say that life was better under Saddam.

One of Mark's goals is to make members of the military aware of the effects of war on civilians.

(See *Balter*, page 7)

(*Balter*, continued from page 6)

He interviewed several military people for the film, including a Marine sniper who thought the battle needed to happen, but even he said that nothing good came of it. There was general agreement that there was no humanitarian planning. Rather than shutting down the “insurgency,” the battle bred hatred and led to sectarian violence and thousands of Iraqi deaths.

During the presidential primary debates, no one has spoken of the Iraqi people, only about what various factions of Americans want. But during the Q&A, members of our humanist society demonstrated a different concern, asking about humanitarian aid and what people can do to help. Mark responded that it's difficult now because Iraq is in chaos. His final comment, in response to a question of what we can do to prepare for when the U.S. finally pulls out, was to remind us that the Iraqis are a strong people who can take care of themselves if we get out of the way.

Look for Mark's upcoming film, "The Road to Fallujah," at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival next year and hopefully in wide theater distribution at some point. See Mark's web site:

www.conceptionmedia.net



Mark Manning and partner Rona, at our after meeting dinner

Book Club By Marty Shapiro

Seasons' Greetings:) Because the annual holiday *mishegas* (craziness) will soon be upon us, the Book Club will have just one more meeting in 2007, in December.

The highly recommended book is:
[Monkey Girl: Evolution, Education, Religion, and the Battle for America's Soul](#) by the Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Edward Humes.

Reviews of *Monkey Girl*:

Why Americans continue to pit religion against science... is the question at the heart of Edward Humes' compelling **Monkey Girl**... Clearly based on exhaustive reporting that takes the reader from the hard benches of a Harrisburg, Pa., federal district courtroom to the kitchen tables of Dover families whose children were taunted as 'monkey girls,' Humes' fast-moving, richly detailed book reads like a suspense novel.... Humes may be the most successful so far in making a complicated issue accessible and in putting human faces on both sides of the evolution divide.

-*The Chicago Tribune*

Humes, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, has opened my eyes. I only wish I could close them again. **Monkey Girl** is full of vivid descriptions and interesting facts... Humes especially shines in his careful explication of the history of this larger fight over how human beings arose and what God's role - if any - was in their creation.

-*The Los Angeles Times Book Review*

When: Wednesday, Dec. 5, 1:30 p.m.

Where: Art and Elaine Brody

1125 Camino del Rio

(off Cathedral Oaks, between Tuckers Grove and Highway 154)

692-8898

brodybiz@cox.net

HSSB Board Issue

By Dick Cousineau

A proposal has been put forth by two Board Members to ask whether the membership would financially support a Special Speaker's Fund. This fund would help pay for bringing National Class speakers to our Society. The Program Committee in the past has been very fortunate (and persuasive) in obtaining some wonderful National Class speakers, who have charged us only a minimum, or nothing at all. Others we couldn't afford. There are many more top-notch speakers available but they require a substantial fee for their talks. Are there any specific speakers that **you** would especially like to hear and would **you** contribute to a fund to help pay for them coming to Santa Barbara? Please contact Dick Cousineau or Richard Martin if you are interested in this proposal.



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