

THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

April, 2005

Evolution Explored

By Robert Bernstein

Glenn Branch, Deputy Directory of the National Center for Science Education, gave us a history of "Assaults on Evolution: From Darwin to Today" at the SB City College Fe Bland Auditorium.



Dick, Nancy and Glenn Branch

Photo: Robert Bernstein

The idea of evolution has been around for a long time, actually pre-dating Darwin. Darwin and Alfred Russell Wallace formalized the scientific theory of evolution by natural selection and thus get credit for its introduction. But this theory did not, as you might expect, receive immediate acceptance.

For example, in the 1800's Thomas Huxley was called "Darwin's Bulldog" for defending Darwin against attacks by Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, among others. Later, Louis Agassiz of Harvard was the last great scientist to reject Darwin's theory. Asa Gray, a contemporary of Agassiz, and a devout Christian also at Harvard did embrace Darwin's theory.

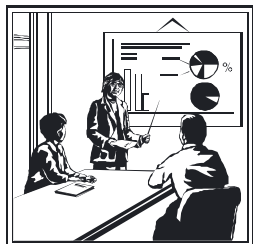
However, in the United States, the early 1900's was a period of strongly anti-evolution activism with William Jennings Bryan at the forefront of the movement. This led to the infamous Scopes trial which was triggered when the ACLU recruited Tennessee schoolteacher John Scopes to challenge anti-evolution teaching law. Clarence Darrow was the lawyer for the defense who challenged Bryan's advocacy for the prosecution. Interestingly, expert testimony for evolution was excluded except for that of Johns Hopkins zoologist Maynard Metcalf.

Bryan's case against Scopes claimed:

- 1) Evolution is unsupported by science
- 2) Evolution is incompatible with religion
- 3) It is only fair that local citizens decide their own science curriculum

(See **Branch**, Page 4)

Humanist Society of Santa Barbara



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2004-2005

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Board meetings are scheduled on the Monday preceding the Saturday general monthly meeting of the Society and are usually held at the home of one of the board members. HSSB members are welcome to attend these meetings. Contact any board member for more information.

Membership Notes

by Mary Wilk

Humanist Society meetings are 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.

(See **Membership**, Page 3)

(Membership, continued from Page 2)

We are pleased to welcome the following new members to our Society:

Helen Conly
753 Colina Vista
Ventura, CA 93003
746-0199
conlyhelen@yahoo.com

Ron & Judy Egenolf
130 East Carillo
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
963-8906
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Robert Murphy
203 Hitchcock Way, # 220
Santa Barbara, CA 93105
682-2025
jazzbobob@yahoo.com

Activities Scene

by Anne H. Rojas

We've had a busy month. Fifteen people came to The Ming Dynasty restaurant after our February meeting. The buffet, round tables and Mongolian BBQ - complemented by very nice service and reasonable prices - make it a good choice for our group.

A few of us went to Comedy Night on March 5th at Hornblowers in Ventura. We were

treated to fair to good comedians, but one of the biggest laughs of the evening was a witty response by member Wilma Kronenberg to a comic's "egging."



Anne Rojas Activities Chair

Our next activity was the last Sunday brunch at Crocodile. We had 13 present, and welcomed new member Bob Murphy to the group. The Crocodile looks to be a favorite for our monthly brunches. They feature good food, nice surroundings and separate checks. Hopefully, more of you will join us at future brunches. The lucky winner of the See's candy was Micki Stern. (She is one of the few who can afford the calories.)

At the suggestion of Bob Murphy we will be trying a new place for dinner after the April meeting. Spice Avenue offers Indian dinners for approximately \$15.00. The address is 1027 State Street, (between Figueroa and Carrillo) with the city parking lot right around the corner. Since I must guarantee that at least 12 will show up, I encourage you to support this activity. Please let me know if you plan on coming. (This is non-binding, but helpful for a rough count.) Mary Wilk and Diane Freeman will be your hostesses in my absence.

As always, your suggestions are always welcome. Your Social Committee is planning a new member reception (for those who have been members less than six months) and a singles' reception. Please let me know if either of these activities interests you.

Chairmans Chat by Dick Cousineau

I read that there has been yet another attempt by a religious spokesperson to attempt to shackle the human mind. Recently an Italian priest, of a rank never achieved by his reputed founder, has decreed that other humans should not read a certain book. In what century has this mental troglodyte been living? Such dogmatism should be regarded as anathema to all thinking men and women the world over.

I suppose that we should be thankful that he did not declare a "fatwa" against the author. After all, it is a work of fiction! If it weren't so serious, the whole report would be laughable in this day and age. Are such clerics as this just paranoid or do they actually believe that their docile and sheep-like congregants need protection from words on a piece of paper? Or has the author touched a sensitive nerve and/or non-defensible support that could undermine the foundation of a house-of-cards called Christianity.

Do people still give their minds away to arrogant, self-important, fossilized priests spouting 14th century rhetoric? Who, besides the fearful and the ignorant, give a dry burp to these frozen gargoyles of times past? What is with the mystery religions of the Mediterranean area that assert that they, and only they, speak for the silent, unknowable, creative force of the universe? Their numerous representatives often confuse Things, with Things That Matter, like words in a book and pedophiliac abusers.

No one has said it better than Jefferson; "I vow eternal vigilance against any tyranny over the minds of men."

(Branch, continued from Page 1)

These same arguments have been repeated by each successive generation of anti-evolutionist activists.

The Creationists won the trial, but the effect was mixed. The period 1925-1960 was an "intermission" in Branch's terms. There were no more prosecutions and science curricula were regionalized. Evolution was taught in some places and not others. However, the 1957 launch of Sputnik upturned this complacency. Americans realized teaching evolution along with the rest of science was a matter of national security.

1961-1987 was the next phase of the battle as "Creation Science" attempted to slip religious anti-evolution teaching through as "science". John Whitcomb and Henry Morris developed a theory of a 6,000-year-old Earth, evolution limited to "kinds" and that Noah's flood was an historic event explaining some of the fossil record.

Challenging this theory in 1968, Arkansas biology teacher Susan Epperson used the Otto and Towle banned book "Modern Biology" that contained references to evolution to bring another challenge to creationist thinking. This led to a Supreme Court case overturning all laws against teaching evolution. But this was not, of course, the end of the contention.

The next generation was labeled "neocreationism" and began in 1987 with the notion of "teach the controversy." By teaching that there is a debate between creationists and evolutionists, it legitimizes creationism. This, and related, controversies mark the state of biological education today.

Getting to Know You:

Wayne Beckman

by Diane Krohn

Wayne was born in Chicago (the smooth part of Chicago, as opposed to the rough part of Chicago), but his family moved to Santa Barbara when he was about 10 years old, practically making him a Santa Barbara native.

Wayne attended the local schools, including Peabody, Goleta Union, Hollister, La Colina, San Marcos High School, and UCSB. In the UCSB Mountaineering Club, he met the



illustrious author of this microbiography, his companion for the last 30 years.

He received his degree in Electrical Engineering, and then a Master's in S c i e n t i f i c Instrumentation. He has worked for only

three companies over the past 30 years: Oceanographic Services, Inc.; Sloan Technology; and MariPro. Although he focused on biomedical engineering while in college, he ended up working as an oceanographic engineer for both OSI and MariPro. With both of these companies, he has ended up traveling quite a bit over various parts of the world, including the north slope of the Alaska, Taiwan, Australia, Chile, Diego Garcia, and most recently, Ascension Island.

Wayne's hobbies include hiking and backpacking, woodworking, recumbent bicycling, and, more recently, motorcycling and sailing. You might spot him around town

on the "funny-looking" recumbent, with feet first and handlebars below the seat.

A born skeptic, Wayne never believed in the claims of religion. However, he and his two sisters attended Sunday school regularly, though not necessarily willingly. Right around the time that he was confirmed at church, Wayne's father took him aside and told him, " You know, you probably don't want to believe all of this." After confirmation, Wayne attended church services at the Lutheran church, run by a hip, young pastor – a self-avowed "Hindu-Christian-Mystic-Humanitarian." These evening services were unique in that the pastor would give communion and discuss different religions..

Wayne was of draft age during the Vietnam War, and he found that contemplating conscientious objector status without any religious beliefs to be an interesting situation. He couldn't truthfully claim to be Quaker, or Lutheran, or any other religion. But, he ended up with a high lottery number and the whole issue became moot.

As with many of our members, Wayne attended his first Humanist Society meeting because of the speaker. This one was Paul Kurtz, and Wayne was familiar with Paul's writings that have appeared in *The Skeptical Inquirer*, a magazine that he has subscribed to since 1979.

As a new motorcyclist, Wayne has found that being an atheist is similar to being a motorcyclist – you are a small minority of the population, you are invisible, and you are threatening and scary to most people.

Program Notes

by Nancy Wahl

On Saturday, April 16 at 3 pm Professor Edward J. Larson, winner of the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for his book on the famous Scopes Monkey Trial, "Summer for the Gods," will discuss today's anti-evolution movement in...

"Scopes Monkey Trial, Part II?"

In the Fleischman Auditorium at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, 2559 Puesta del Sol Road. Please note this alternate location differs from our usual meeting place. *[Ed.Note: I assume that you know how to get to the Museum of Natural History. Fleischman Auditorium is the large meeting room just inside the entrance. Just follow the crowd...or call any Board member if you have questions.]*

How far have we come since the scopes trial in 1925? According to Gallup, only about a



Professor Larson

third of Americans believe that Charles Darwin's theory of evolution is a scientific theory that has been well supported by the evidence. Forty-five percent of Americans believe that God created human beings pretty much in their present form about 10,000 years ago.

Professor Larson will discuss new insights to the famous Scopes "Monkey Trial" based on previously unexamined papers, including the archives of the ACLU, William Jennings

Bryan and Clarence Darrow. He will also discuss today's intensified attacks on evolution in our public schools. Currently, 19 states are weighing proposals that question the science of evolution.

The Verdict



July 22, 1925

SUN

The following is a link to a great article on the subject of the battle going on about teaching evolution in 19 states across the country. The religious right is well funded and organized and winning the battle in many states. This is quite terrifying.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A32444-2005Mar13.html>

[Ed. Note: Thanks to Marian Shapiro for the above link]

Future Programs

By Nancy Wahl

May Program

Date: May 21 – Our Big 10th Anniversary Celebration!

Speakers: Tom Flynn, author and Editor of Free Inquiry magazine
Eddie Tabash, Civil Rights attorney and Honorary Chair for CFI-West

Topic: The Future of Humanism

Location: Holiday Inn in Goleta
5650 Calle Real, Goleta

Reserve your place today by responding to the formal invitation you received. If you have any questions, please call Mary Wilk at 967-3045.

June Program

Date: June 18

Speakers: Peter Conn (and a possible respondent)

Topic: New Universal Health Care Bill – A Better Alternative?
A look at California Senator Sheila Kuehl's proposed single-payer system that would cover all Californians.

Location: Patio Room, Vista Del Monte (our usual meeting location)

July Program

Date: July 16

Speaker: Jennifer Hecht, author of
A History of Doubt and The End of the Soul

"A sweeping survey of how unbelievers have shaped religion, science, and society through the ages." – Kirkus Reviews

Location: SBCC Fe Bland Forum

Note and Comment by Roger Schlueter

- It is quite apropos that Wayne Beckman is our featured Humanist this month since he has volunteered to become our new Web Master. Welcome aboard the HSSB team, Wayne!
- The Board has authorized the formation of a Social Justice Committee which will take members' suggestions and evaluate issues that our committee may decide to promote to our members. This committee will be lead by Marian Shapiro. They will select issues that fit the values of Humanism such as efforts to support improved health care

for all Americans. If you would like to help us promote our values by taking a more active role, we *need* members on the committee. We hope to keep meetings to a minimum by providing information and polling our members by email. Call Marian at 968-0478 to get involved.

- Terri Schaivo and the Pope have died. I cannot remember a time when the deaths of such individuals have so obscured the underlying issues that we should *really* be focused on such as what the “culture of life” means in practice or what role the Catholic Church plays in undermining the values that we Humanists hold dear.