



THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

February, 2008

<http://www.sbhumanists.org>

Nuclear Weapons and the Human Future A Presentation by Dr. David Krieger of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation

By Andrew Hankin

Among the topics Dr. Krieger will discuss and about which he will answer questions:

- 26,000 nuclear warheads are still maintained in the world, some on "hair-trigger alert", in violation of non-proliferation treaties.
- The ongoing costs to societies of nuclear weapons in terms of healthcare not provided, students not educated and infrastructure decaying, because tax dollars are being spent on bombs instead of human needs.
- The corruption of otherwise sound public institutions, such as the University of California, to manage nuclear research labs and develop new "Reliable Replacement Warheads" while Cold War weapons age into obsolescence.
- Why existing arsenals provoke other nations into developing their own nuclear weapons programs, as a defense against belligerent administrations (not just the US).

Dr. David Krieger is a founder of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation and has served as President since 1982. He has lectured throughout America, Europe and Asia on issues of peace, security, international law and weapons abolition. The many books published or edited by David Krieger include both non-fiction and poetry, such as *The Doves Flew High*, in 2007; *Today Is Not A Good Day For War*, in 2005; and *Choose Hope - Your Role in Waging Peace in the Nuclear Age*, in 2002.

David Krieger
Saturday, February 16th, 2008, 3- 5 p.m.
In the Patio Room at Vista del Monte
3775 Modoc Road, Santa Barbara, CA 93105

Join us for socializing at 2:30 p.m.
The meeting will start promptly at 3 p.m.



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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.

News About Members By Hope Smith and Mary Wilk

We are pleased to welcome the following new members:

Jerry & Pat Ward
412 Stanley Drive
Santa Barbara, CA 93105
687-8954

Sandra Garcia
301 Oceano Avenue #2C
Santa Barbara, CA 93109
845-7111

Also welcome back to two members who have rejoined our society:

Betty Dickman
623 Pilgrim Terrace Drive
Santa Barbara, CA 93105
687-0132

Shyama Osborne
1027 E. Ortega St., Apt. F
Santa Barbara, CA 93103
884-9240

It is with regret that we report the death of a long-time member, William McCurdy, who joined our group in 2001.

Mark Hamilton (with wife Sally) attended the SBCC President's Holiday Reception in December.

A Letter to the Editor by Merle Betz in the Jan. 6 *News-Press* urged cyclists on bike paths to slow down and carefully go around dog walkers and other pedestrians.

Members attending the first meeting on Jan. 14 of the Adult Ed Winter 2008 class in Literary Classics, on "Lives of the 12 Caesars," included Merle Betz, Art Brody,

Dick Cousineau, Andrew Hankin, Alex Henteloff, and Sydney Smith.

Among members at the screening in the Faulkner Gallery on Jan. 27 of the Michael Moore film *Sicko* were Lou Barsky, Helen Gordon, Andrew Hankin, Tonia Jauch, Birdie Newborn, Hope and Sydney Smith. HSSB was one of the sponsors of *Sicko*.

County Science Fair By Ray Stone

The 53rd annual Santa Barbara County Science Fair will be held this year on Friday, April 18 at UCSB. It is open to both Junior and Senior High School students. Last year, 127 science projects were entered. This year, the Board of HSSB has decided to present awards to the best project in each age division that demonstrates or explains Evolution. The plan is to provide three judges selected from the club's membership. If you would like to be one of these judges, contact Ray Stone at rstone@west.net or 682-2123. Judging will take place from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Friday, April 18. More information about the Fair can be found at: <http://www.sbsciencefair.org/>

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HSSB Bookstore By Ray Stone

Don't forget about the HSSB bookstore, open for business at our meetings. 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.

Notes from the President: Another Threat to Our Freedoms

By Adrian Wenner

In last month's notes, I raised the issue that the House of Representatives passed a resolution: "Recognizing the importance of Christmas and the Christian faith." (HR 847). That resolution passed despite the fact that such a resolution conflicts with what is known as the "Establishment Clause" in the First Amendment of our Constitution and the fact that such a vote violated the oath that Representatives take when they assume office.

Now, Randy Forbes (Republican representative from Virginia) and 31 cosponsors are pushing to repeat that mistake with HR 888 — a resolution to declare the first week of May as "American Religious History Week." Of course, we well recognize that "religion" in the minds of these representatives means to them "Christianity" and that such a resolution would seek to strengthen the erroneous notion that Christianity is "our nation's official religion" as well as that of the Founding Fathers.

Although a resolution is not a statute (law), too many citizens will think of it as such — if it should pass. However, a 1971 majority opinion by the US Supreme Court (*Lemon v. Kurtzman*) has already made it clear that such a resolution would not pass the "Lemon Test" (as found in Google): "(1) it must have a secular legislative purpose, (2) its principle or primary effect must be one that neither advances nor inhibits religion, and (3) it must not foster an excessive entanglement with religion."

The first of those points is known as the "separationist" clause, one that "prohibits Congress from aiding religion in any way even if such aid is made without regard to denomination." The second is known as the "accommodationist" interpretation that "prohibits Congress from preferring one religion over another..."

Clearly, such a resolution does "foster an excessive entanglement with religion." Let's hope cooler heads will prevail.

Before the talk at our January meeting, we enjoyed a half-hour social period with light refreshments arranged by Anne Rojas. That brief time permitted a more orderly signing in by Mary Wilk and a prompt start of the talk. We also had a good turnout for the dinner afterwards at Jake's Restaurant on De La Vina Street. I felt that, together, those of us who participated gained additional sense of community.



Dick Cousineau finds a new friend in New York City! For the story, see page 7. Photo provided by Ray Stone.

Social Scene

By Anne Rojas

Many thanks for your participation in Dining Out at Jake's Cafe after the January meeting. I had mixed, but mostly favorable, reviews from you diners. Jake is very willing to design any menu we want, and I have visited with him 2 times since our dinner. I believe we should give him another try. The service, separate checks and nice room are a bonus.

This month we are back to our old favorite, Ming Dynasty, located in the K Mart Shopping Center on Hollister Avenue. **Reservations are necessary**, so please let me know if you are coming.

Your Darwin Day Committee is working on a venue for the Feb. 8th, **2009** event. We are currently researching sites for our banquet and speaker program. If any of you have any ideas for a good venue, please let me know, and I will check it out. Ideally we would like a place that would give us a "free" room in exchange for about 100 dinners that we would purchase. We expect the dinner price and program to be around \$30 per person.

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Upcoming Events

By Dick Cousineau

David Krieger, founder of the Nuclear Peace Foundation, will address our Society on February 16th. Mr. Krieger is the recipient of The Peace Writing Award of the Peace and Justice Studies Association in 2007 and numerous awards and recognitions from peace organizations around the world. Under his leadership, since 1982, the NPF has initiated many projects for building peace, abolishing nuclear weapons, and educating the next generation of peace leaders throughout the world.

Of special interest is his participation as panel chair of the Citizens' Hearing on the Legality of the U.S. Actions in Iraq, held in Tacoma last year. He is a graduate of Occidental College in L.A. and obtained his M.A. and Ph.D in political science from University of Hawaii, as well as a J.D. from the Santa Barbara College of Law.

The Program Committee is considering revisiting "Movie Night," a monthly event to highlight a controversial and/or classic movie with a discussion afterward. All who are interested are encouraged to contact either Marcia Sherman (687-7218) or Dick Cousineau (687-2371). If we get enough interest we start our planning soon.

Book Club

By Marty Shapiro

Greetings, all!

Our book club, by several requests, has chosen to go off our beaten path for our February selection. The book is *Creating a World Without Poverty*, a book of public affairs and the winner, for its author, of the Nobel Peace Prize. The celebrated author, Muhammad Yunus, spoke at UCSB recently. I wish I had known.

When: Wednesday, February 20th, 1:30 p.m.

Where: Art and Elaine Brody's house

1125 Camino del Rio (off Cathedral Oaks, between Tucker's Grove and Highway 154)
692-8898

brodybiz@cox.net

BTW (by the way), our March book selection is *The Happiness Myth*, a brand new study by Jennifer Hecht, the author of the substantial *Doubt, A History*. She spoke to our group in July, 2005.

January Meeting: Ted Drange on Non Belief

By Robert Bernstein

Professor Theodore Drange brought us a shopping list of the ways not to believe. And he engaged us in lively discussion as an integral part of his talk.

As a modern philosopher, Professor Drange spent much of the discussion offering definitions: not to tell us the True Definitions from Above, but to show us how these words are used in common communication, to highlight subtle and important distinctions, and to introduce new concepts.

At www.swt.org/hssb/drange/ you can see his Definitions handout.

Prof. Drange makes the case that “atheist” should be defined as one who believes that God does not exist, finding that other definitions conflict with actual usage. He notes that “atheist” is always relative to a specific definition of God. One can be an atheist by one definition, and an agnostic (or even a theist) by another.

He introduces a more fundamental distinction of cognitivist vs. noncognitivist. The former claims the sentence “God exists” to be a valid proposition (something that is true or false, and can be believed or disbelieved). The noncognitivist claims that the sentence “God exists” does not even express any proposition at all. Such a person considers it equivalent to saying, “bflspk exists,” where “bflspk” is a nonsense word.

Unlike many philosophers, Drange argues that it is possible to prove the non-existence of something. Or, at least, beyond a reasonable doubt. He points out that it is

possible to prove the non-existence of an ordinary elephant in our meeting room.

He, in fact, has written a book that gives two different evidential arguments of the non-existence of God. One argument comes from the existence of evil in the world, and the other one comes from the existence of non-believers. Drange argues that the god called God is such that neither of these should be expected.

God is supposed to be all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving. If God has all of these qualities, then there is no explanation for evil in the world, especially those natural disasters called “Acts of God.” Some theists have offered explanations, but none have held up.



Professor Drange at our meeting. Photo by Robert Bernstein.

Drange makes a distinction between a weak and a strong agnostic. The former says, “I do not at present have a view on the matter.” The latter says, “No one can ever know whether or not God exists.” But, in his view, people who say, “God probably does not exist,” should be called atheists rather than agnostics.

Several questions were variations of why humans seem to invent or need God. In Drange’s view, children ask, “Where did this or that come from?” The parent needs a quick reply and so says, “God did it.”
(See **Bernstein**, page 7)

(Bernstein, continued from page 6)

Whenever there is something that at present cannot be explained, people are strongly inclined to appeal to the God-hypothesis. This is called “the God of the gaps.” Usually, though, science eventually comes up with an explanation.

Professor Drange left many of us thinking, (to paraphrase Elizabeth Barrett Browning) “How do I not believe? Let me count ways.” And for that, we are grateful!

The Secular Society and Its Enemies: A Trip Report

By Ray Stone

On a weekend last November, Dick Cousineau and I traveled to New York for a conference on “The Secular Society and its Enemies.” Sponsored by The Center for Inquiry, the conference was attended by an overflow crowd of about 300, and featured as presenters many well-known authors of recent secularist books.

The proceedings began with an awards ceremony Friday night, principally honoring Matthew LaClair, the New Jersey student who exposed his public high school teacher for teaching Christian doctrine and creationism in his history class. The next day and a half were devoted to sessions featuring an all-star cast of presenters, including (but not limited to) Richard Dawkins, Alan Dershowitz, Ann Druyan, Michelle Goldberg, Tawfik Hamid, Christopher Hitchens (on videotape), Rebecca Goldstein, Jennifer Michael Hecht, Susan Jacoby, Wendy Kaminer, Paul Kurtz, Peter Singer, Victor Stenger, and Eddie Tabash.

Most of the one-hour sessions were dedicated to a specific topic, including: Secularism Through History; Science

Education and the Public; Religion and Politics in America; Secularism and the Next Generation; Secularism and Islam.

I especially enjoyed the “Secularism Through History” session in which Goldstein (*Spinoza*), Jacoby (*History of Freethinkers*) and Hecht (*Doubt: A History*) presented ideas from their recent books and fielded questions on their specialties. A later session with Dawkins, Stenger, Druyan and Tyson focused on the concerns of Science educators.

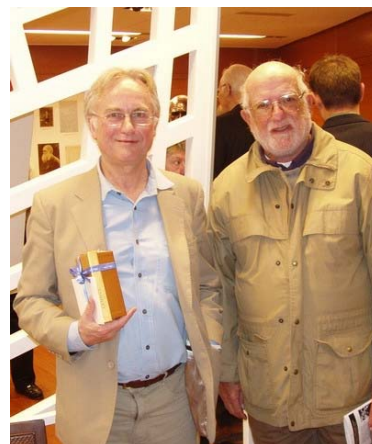
If you’re interested in more conference details and impressions than we have space for here, check out one or all of the following online blogs:

<http://nattvadams.blogspot.com/2007/1/1/secular-society-and-its-enemies.html>

<http://www.daylightatheism.org/2007/1/1/secular-society-2007-day-one.html>

http://anexerciseinfutility.blogspot.com/2007_11_01_archive.html

I should tell you that Dick and I arrived in New York a few days early to see some shows and museums, eat (too much) good New York food, and trod the exciting streets of the Big Apple. But that’s another story.



Ray Stone(r) with Richard Dawkins. Photo provided by Ray Stone.

Charles Darwin: Then and Now

By Diane Krohn

Charles Darwin was born on February 12th, 1809. In honor of this 199th anniversary of his birthday, the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History is presenting a program on “Charles Darwin, Then and Now,” with UCSB Professor Mike Osborne. Professor Osborne will present an illustrated lecture on the life, ideas, and legacy of Darwin. Nearly two centuries later, his most popular work, *The Origin of Species*, written in 1859, is still causing controversy. Come find out why Darwin still matters, and enjoy cake to celebrate his birthday.

Tuesday, February 12th at 7 p.m., at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, 2559 Puesta del Sol, Santa Barbara, CA, 93105. Members: \$8; non-members: \$10. Reservations: 805-682-4711, ext. 170.

“Probably all organic beings which have ever lived on this earth have descended from some one primordial form, into which life was first breathed. There is grandeur in this view of life that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved.”

-Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*



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