



THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

February, 2009

<http://www.sbhumanists.org>

Charles Darwin is Coming to Santa Barbara!

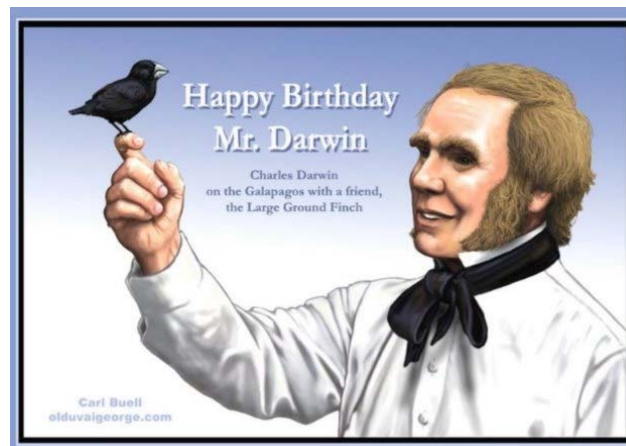
By Andrew Hankin

To commemorate Charles Darwin's 200th birthday and the 150th anniversary of publication of *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara and the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History proudly present a series of events during February 2009. The presentations will be in Fleischmann Auditorium at the Natural History Museum, 2559 Puesta del Sol, Santa Barbara. Each event will be \$10 for the general public. Please call HSSB President Roger Schlueter (805-962-6316) for details of HSSB member pricing.

The events include (but are not limited to!) the following presentations. For full details, see the insert with this newsletter, or the HSSB web page:

<http://www.santabarbarahumanists.org/Calendar/Darwin%20Week.pdf>

- ❖ **Sunday, February 8th, 3 p.m.:** "Darwin Remembers," an historical re-enactment of the life and work of Charles Darwin by biologist and Darwin impersonator Floyd Sandford.
- ❖ **Tuesday, February 10th, 7 p.m.:** A panel discussion about teaching Evolution in the 21st century, featuring prominent scientists and educators and moderated by the Executive Director of the Natural History Museum.
- ❖ **Saturday, February 14th, 2 p.m.:** "Judicial Independence," featuring Judge John Jones III and Pulitzer Prizewinning author Ed Humes. Judge Jones delivered the ruling in the Dover trial that ousted "Intelligent Design" from Pennsylvania classrooms; Ed Humes wrote the book *Monkey Girl*, the definitive account of the case.



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The mystery of the beginning of all things is insoluble by us; and I for one must be content to remain an agnostic.

---Charles Darwin, English naturalist

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 Andrew Hankin

We are pleased to welcome the following new member to our society:

Wendy Foster
924A Garden St.
Santa Barbara 93101
565-1506

Letters to the Editor: In the *News-Press* of December 31st, 2008, Alex Henteloff wrote that then-President Bush should not be allowed to give blanket pardons to “his cronies both in and out of government.” In the *News-Press* of January 19th, 2009, Andrew Hankin suggested that incoming President Barack Obama should take his inaugural oath with his hand not on “some holy book of brutal fiction,” but on a copy of the U.S. Constitution. (See Andrew's letter in full in the adjacent column.)

Upcoming Events

By Dick Cousineau

In February, we will welcome the new president of the American Atheists, Ed Bruckner, from Washington, D.C. He will give an informal talk to us and the community at our regular venue, the Patio Room at Vista del Monte, on Friday, February 27th, at 6 p.m. Abundant appetizers and wine will be served, all for the rock-bottom price of \$10. Please plan to attend this talk by a nationally recognized leader. Reservations are suggested.

For our meeting on Saturday, March 21st, we have invited a world-class scientist, Professor Dennis Clegg, from the Department of Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology at UCSB. Professor

Clegg will address us on his recent acceptance of a multimillion-dollar grant for stem cell research.

Bill's Copy Shop

By Andrew Hankin

In the early hours of Saturday morning, January 17th, thieves launched a large rock through a glass storefront window and stole a cash register. The victim was Bill's Copy Shop, the locally-owned business where the Secular Circular and publicity posters are printed for HSSB. They do a fine job at lower prices than Kinko's. Even though they were cleaning-up broken glass, they had printed the handouts for our event later that day and were able to give them to Andrew, when he went to pick them up. Bill's Copy Shop deserves your copying and printing business, phone 805-564-4353 or e-mail billscopy@linkline.com. They are open mornings to evenings Monday to Friday, also Saturday mornings, at 1535 State Street (on the corner with East Arrellaga Street).

Letter to the Editor

By Andrew Hankin

During his Inauguration, incoming president Barack Hussein Obama should have placed his hand on a copy of the U.S. Constitution, then sworn or affirmed to preserve, protect and defend it, instead of some holy book of brutal fiction. Also, if he had chosen to add anything beyond that specified in Article II, Section 1 of said Constitution, I suggested “so help me Michelle.” His wife is a smart person, sure to give better guidance than the God sought for help by recent Presidents Johnson, Nixon, Reagan, Clinton and Bushes. Those six men all left office in disgrace, and I'm hoping that President Obama will do better, at least ending the current round of wars and torture.

Darwin Week By Roger Schlueter

Enclosed with the newsletter this month is a flyer containing all the final details of our Darwin Week events. These events are co-sponsored by HSSB and the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History.

.....
: **Remember, these events supplant** :
: **our regular third Saturday program** :
: **for the month of February. We** :
: **return to our normal meeting** :
: **routine in March.** :
.....

This week-long series of programs constitutes the most ambitious special event our Society has ever taken on. Topics covered include history, science, religion, politics and the law. We are bringing in presenters from across America to put on this celebration of Darwin's 200th birthday and the 150th anniversary of the publication of his seminal work, *On the Origin of Species by Natural Selection*. As far as I can determine, this is the most comprehensive celebration of these anniversaries in California and possibly the nation sponsored by a local Humanist group.

So please take advantage of this rich buffet of events to enliven and enrich yourself. By participating you can show the Santa Barbara that we Humanists have a real, visible presence here and that we make a substantial contribution to our community.

Speaking of visibility, the City of Santa Barbara will issue a proclamation at their February 3rd meeting declaring the week of February 8-14 "official" Darwin Week in Santa Barbara. This will be televised as part of the regular city council proceedings...Tune in!

HSSB Book Club By Marty Shapiro

The Book Club will meet next on Wednesday, February 19th. In keeping with the changin' times (it's blowin' in the wind, as Bob Dylan once said), we'll be reading the highly recommended *The Limits of Power*, an examination of how we (the U.S.) have treated (or mistreated) everyone else, by Andrew Bacevich. Here's an excerpt from an Amazon.com review. Happy readings!

This is the bluntest, toughest, most scathing critique of American imperialism as it has become totally unmoored after the demise of the Soviet Communist empire and taken to a new level by the Bush administration. ...

In the event a reader knows of the prophetic work of the American theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, you will further appreciate this book. Bacevich is a Niebuhr scholar and this book essentially channels Niebuhr's prophetic warnings from his 1952 book, "The Irony of American History"...

In essence, American idealism as particularly reflected in Bush's illusory goal to "rid the world of evil" and to bring freedom and democracy to the Middle East or wherever people are being tyrannized, was doomed to failure by the tides of history. Niebuhr warned against this and Bacevich updates the history from the Cold War to the present.

When: Wednesday, February 19th at 1:30 p.m.

Where: Dick and Judy Cousineau's house, 505 Alegria (off Las Positas, between State St. and the 101); 687-2371.

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In spite of all the invocations and prayers at the inauguration ceremony, there is some hope. Did you notice Obama's reference to non-believers in his acceptance speech?

"For we know that our patchwork inheritance is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus -- and non-believers."

It's not often we hear that word used by a politician.
---HSSB Member Mary Wilk

January Meeting: Atheist Poetry Reading By Diane Krohn

For our January meeting, we were treated to readings from a collection of atheist poetry published by Incarnate Muse Press, 2008. Anita Barnard and HSSB member Michelle Rhea are co-editors, and read several of their poems. Other authors in the book include our own HSSB members Helen Gordon and Mary Wilk, who read their own poems. HSSB members Sandy Garcia and Andrew Hankin served as volunteer readers. In addition to the poetry reading, we had a photo show in the background, “celebrating the beauty, variety, and sufficiency of this natural world.” The beautiful photos were by Michelle Rhea and her son, Aidan Hogge.

Jay Spears also appeared as a musical guest, showing his video, “Smak Dem Christians Down,” and performing his song, “Guy in the Sky.”

There were so many wonderful poems from the reading, it’s hard to select just one. But this one may resonate with many of us:

I Am An Atheist

By Michelle Rhea

It is not for a lack of desire,
for who would not want an Omnipotent
Being
looking out for one's welfare,
protecting one's loves?

It is not for a streak of rebellion,
for I live my life no differently
than most who believe in God.

It is not for disappointment
in prayers unanswered,

for my life is good.
Some call it “blessed.”

It is not due to misunderstanding,
for once I believed as they do,
bible at my bed, read through
dark nights of doubt,
praises to God in the morning.

It is not due to anger at clergy,
nor encountering the wrong church
or hypocrite laity,
for I've known many wonderful believers.

It is not due to anger at clergy,
nor encountering the wrong church
or hypocrite laity,
for I've known many wonderful believers.

It is not hatred, fear, pride,
selfishness, or lack of education;
It is not bigotry, persecution, or immorality
that prevents me from believing.

I am an atheist,
not believing in the gods of today
for the same reason believers
disbelieve
in the gods of yesterday.



Our poetry readers and authors at the January meeting. From left to right: Sandy Garcia, Andrew Hankin, Anita Barnard, Michelle Rhea, and musical guest Jay Spears. Photo by Robert Bernstein.

The Power of Darwin

By Richard Dawkins

Charles Darwin had a big idea, arguably the most powerful idea ever. A powerful idea assumes little to explain much. It does a lot of explanatory “heavy lifting” while expending little in the way of assumption or postulation. It gives you plenty of bang for your explanatory buck. Its Explanation Ratio—what it explains divided by what it needs to assume in order to do the explaining—is large....

...I'll end on a subtler legacy of Darwin's big idea. Darwin raises our consciousness to the sinewy power of science to explain the large and complex in terms of the small and simple. In biology we were fooled for centuries into thinking that extravagant complexity in nature needs an extravagantly complex explanation. Darwin triumphantly dispelled that illusion. There remain big questions, in physics and cosmology, that await their own Darwins. Why are the laws of physics the way they are? Why are there laws at all? Why is there a universe at all? Once again, the lure of “design” is tempting, but we have the cautionary tale of Darwin before us. We've been through all that before. Darwin raised our consciousness, and we are emboldened to seek true explanations of genuine power.

To read this entire article, visit the Council for Secular Humanism:

http://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php?section=library&page=dawkins_29_2



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