



THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

MARCH 2010
www.sbhumanists.org

March Program The God Virus, with Darrell Ray, Ed.D.

- ◆ What makes religion so powerful?
- ◆ How does it weave its way into our political system?
- ◆ Why is sexual guilt so important to all the major religions?
- ◆ Why do people believe and follow obvious religious charlatans?
- ◆ What makes people profess deep faith yet act in ways that betray that faith?
- ◆ Why are people blind to irrationalities of their religion yet clearly see those of others?

For thousands of years, religion has woven its way through societies and people as if it were part and parcel to that society or person. In large measure, it was left unexplained and unchallenged; it simply existed.

Those who attempted to challenge and expose religion were often persecuted, excommunicated, shunned, or even executed. It could be fatal to explain that which the church, priest or imam said was unexplainable. Dr. Darrell Ray will discuss this and much more in his engaging and entertaining presentation.

Learn how his revolutionary ideas explain:

- ◆ the fundamentalism of your Uncle Ned;
- ◆ the sexual behavior of a fallen mega church minister;
- ◆ the child rearing practices of a Pentecostal neighbor;
- ◆ why 19 men flew planes into the World Trade Center;
- ◆ why religion protects pedophile priests; and
- ◆ how it might affect a person's IQ.



Saturday, March 20th in the Patio Room at Vista del Monte, 3775 Modoc Road (Las Positas exit off Hwy. 101, midway between UCSB & SBCC) in Santa Barbara. Information phone 805-259-6432.

Program starts promptly @ 3:00 p.m. with Q+A to follow.

Join us for socializing @ 2:30 p.m.

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Upcoming Programs

by Dick Cousineau

On **April 17th**, at Vista del Monte, our own member, **Professor Adrian Wenner** will host a **panel of HSSB members** to **discuss** their understandings of the **Humanist movement** and its philosophical and community underpinnings.

On **May 15th**, we will be at The Holiday Inn in Goleta celebrating **our 15th Anniversary**. This event will feature two nationally-recognized speakers, **Sean Faircloth** of the Secular Coalition of America; and **Dan Barker** of the Freedom from Religion Foundation. Tickets for the event, which includes dinner, will be only about \$30.00. Tickets will become available in April.

HSSB Book Sale

The HSSB Board has decided to stage a book sale at the Solstice Party. If you have books of interest to our members, please bring them to any club meeting between now and the Party. Pat Copejans has agreed to collect and price these books and will supervise the book sale. Books left over will be donated to Planned Parenthood.

HSSB Book Club

by Marty Shapiro

Our Book Club will be meeting next on **Wednesday, March 17, at 1:30 p.m.**, at the home of new member **Jules Bender, 1307 Hillcrest** (near Mountain Drive and Stanwood Drive, up above the Riviera Theatre, Brooks Institute, etc.). The book is ***The God Virus*** by Darrel Ray, a fascinating investigation of religion and the human psyche - how our minds can be corrupted, as with a virus, by the "R" word.

News About Members

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

Jules Bender, Santa Barbara

Carol Palladini, founder of the Women's Fund of Santa Barbara, was interviewed by Leslie Dinaberg for Noozhawk.

See the article here:

http://www.noozhawk.com/nonprofits/article/022110_noozhawk_talks_carol_palladini

Letter to the Editor: Twits and Aristocrats

by Thomas Scheff

Marcia Sherman's article (*Secular Circular*, February 2010 - Ed.) on Bush and Palin as twits suggests an important question about government by the people. To what extent is an electorate swayed by more or less irrelevant matters? Perhaps in addition to twits there is also an opposite category, those who are seen to be too hifalutin'. For instance, Kerry's obvious upper class manner and Gore's intellectuality probably alienated a considerable number of voters who were defensive about their own class standing and/or their intelligence. Rather than considering their vulnerability to shame about these matters, they might just reject the offending candidate out of hand and embrace the "just folks" candidate that doesn't test them in this way.

Many experts assume that emotions play a minor role in politics, but the opposite may be true. For example, no one has been able to give a convincing answer to the question of the causes of WWI in terms of economic interests. It is conceivable that it and many other wars were largely based on mass emotions, especially vengefulness. In my book, *Bloody Revenge* (1994), I describe the length to which French politics from 1831 to 1914 were organized around restoring their na-

tional honor by revenge for their humiliating defeat by Prussia in 1831.

Link to the listing of the book on Amazon.com:

http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_ss_i_0_11?url=search-alias%3Dstripbooks&field-

Getting to Know You: Ray Stone

by Meredith McMinn

"Join the Navy and see the world," the old recruiting slogan went. Unfortunately, Ray Stone was below decks being sick his entire first cruise and didn't see much of anything. Still, it wasn't until he'd spent a little over a year at Annapolis that he decided the regimented life of the military wasn't for him. He eventually did see the world—or a goodly part of it—but not until much later. First came the next best thing: New York City.

Ray's first job in the Big Apple was as a bookkeeper, calling on skills he'd learned working in his father's Denver hardware store when he was



growing up. An aptitude for numbers runs in the family—as does music, but a career as a musician was beyond his skills, Ray thought. So it wasn't a great leap to studying Mathematics at Brooklyn College. He's never regretted his choice. There he met Louise Brill, who has enjoyed his piano playing at home through their 54 years of marriage.

(Ray Stone continued on page 7)

Whence Morality?

by Roger Schlueter

We've all seen the assertion that without god, we secularists have no basis for behaving properly. "You have no reason not to rape, pillage and plunder" goes the extreme version of the belief that only god or religion provides a foundation and motivation for individual and cultural morality. To Humanists the idea is preposterous on its face, but we'd be naive to not recognize that such an attitude is common, if not prevalent, in our Christian society.

Interestingly, that morality is derived from religious precepts, has recently been objectively tested by scientists at Harvard University, and the results will be of no surprise to us. The bottom line is that "People who have no religion know right from wrong just as well as regular worshippers." Another way to state their results that is more interesting to me is: "people who did not have a religious background appeared to have intuitive judgments of right and wrong in common with believers." The researchers found that "most religions were similar and had a moral code which helped to organize society."

My interpretation of this result is that morality is more fundamental than religion. It derives from very basic instincts that have been honed over eons and eons by evolutionary forces, especially those associated with the fact that we are social animals. In order to survive, small groups of early humans had to develop intra-clan codes of conduct to ensure survival of the clan and thus of the individual. At the same time, inter-clan competition for resources and women led to inherent distrust of others outside the clan.

We see this conditioning at work today. We still have a general distrust of those who are different than us, with "different" being defined by race, religion, ethnicity, etc. And we still have an affinity for our own clan and cooperate and even engage in altruism to sustain that clan.

As humans, then, our ability to attain peace, sustainability and happiness may simply be an indication of our ability or willingness to expand the definition of our "clan."

Orators, Awake!

by Ray Stone

The HSSB is planning a new annual event: "The Ingersoll Lecture."

Sometime later this year – the date is not yet specified – a speaker of our choice will deliver one of Robert Green Ingersoll's many inspirational lectures. This will be the beginning of what we hope is an annual affair.

We will choose the speaker and the lecture. A lecture will consist wholly of Ingersoll's words. If the lecture we choose is longer than our time limit (approximately 1 to 1 ½ hours), we will pare it down. A different lecture will be selected each year. The speaker will be selected by audition.

Auditions will be open to anyone in the community, male or female, of high school senior age and above. A cash prize will be awarded to the winner. HSSB members are especially invited to audition.

Are you able to speak in public with clarity and conviction? Think about entering this competition. For examples of Ingersoll lectures, check this web location:

www.infidels.org/library/historical/robert_ingersoll/

They are inspirational, easily read and easily spoken. Watch this space for more details.

Who was Robert Ingersoll?

Robert Green Ingersoll, who lived from 1833 to 1899, was an American attorney, and son of a Congregational Minister. During the latter part of his lifetime he became probably the best-known advocate of scientific and humanistic rationalism in this country. He was often referred to as "the Great Infidel."

Besides being a successful attorney based in Illinois and Washington D.C., he toured the country lecturing as an advocate of rational thought, and according to many who heard him speak, he was one of the greatest of American orators.

(Ingersoll continued on page 6)

February Meeting: Dr. Meller and *Evolution Rx* by Robert Bernstein

Our Stone Age ancestors did not live in the sanitized world of today. They were full of parasites. They ingested toxins. Their diet was whatever they could find. They had few remedies. And yet they did quite well. What can we learn from them?

Doctors see disease as being due to just a few possible causes, including toxins, genetic defects, diet, aging and infections. Dr Meller dismisses diet as a significant concern in the modern world. Deficiencies are rare; overeating is the only common problem.:

Agriculture brought major changes to diet just 10,000 years ago. Before that, people hunted or gathered. We know their diet quite well from carbon isotope studies of bones: insects, leaves and berries. And, unlike other primates, a lot of meat. Agriculture gave us the world of carbohydrates. Populations soared, but people were shorter, with more diseases.

Before agriculture, apples, pears and other fruits were very different than today. These fruits have become “candy bars on a tree.” It matters little whether they are “organic” or not.

Type 2 diabetes can be controlled entirely through diet, in Dr. Meller’s experience. Pharma drives our health care system and patients are unhappy if they come away without a prescription.

Flu, measles, mumps, herpes, syphilis, plague, flesh eating disease – infections are real and there was little recourse in the past. The microbes are evolving faster than we are. He thinks we can make new drugs, but we need to understand what we are doing.

In particular, the first thing people do is try to

reduce fever when they get sick. But fever is the first line of defense of the body. It makes life harder for germs and speeds up our immune system.

Stone Age groups tried to avoid other groups. This limited the spread of disease. The chicken pox virus evolved to hide in nerve roots, dormant for years, as a result.

Allergies may be due to our overly clean modern world. Dr. David Strachan developed the Hygiene Hypothesis: When we give our immune system too little dirt to work on, it goes after the wrong things, sometimes including ourselves. Examples are Crohn’s disease, celiac, arthritis, lupus and other autoimmune diseases.

Parasites actually exude substances that deaden our immune system for their own purposes. We may do well to reintroduce some of these less harmful parasites to reduce allergies.



With regard to toxins, our worst toxins are common drugs like alcohol, cannabis, acetaminophen (Tylenol), and hydrocodone (Vicodin). The Stone Age world was full of toxins and our bodies evolved to filter them out. Plants naturally produce toxins that are at least as potent as pesticides

we use. Organic farming may have environmental benefits, but Dr. Meller does not see any measurable benefit to humans.

Better for pregnant women to risk mercury in fish than risk low IQ of children later due to lack of fish nutrients, he said. And bottled water is a wasteful scam.

Sleep is important, but we evolved to sleep in cycles, not in one big chunk at night. Depression is rampant today, yet it is a response to real issues. People should deal with the real issues. That is what our ancestors did. And that may be the answer to many of the medical problems we face today.



Upcoming Events

Social Brunch - March 28th

HSSB organizes a Secular Brunch for humanists, atheists, agnostics, skeptics, freethinkers, singles, couples and families without religion, on the last Sunday morning of every month. No cover charge – pay only for your food and drink. Bring your friends, because membership and reservations aren't necessary.

For March, the brunch is at **10 a.m., March 28th** at **Cody's Cafe**, 4898 Hollister Ave. in the Turnpike Center, Goleta, in the room to the right as you enter the restaurant. For information, call 805-967-3045, or email Mary Wilk, Membership Chair, at:

Membership@SantaBarbaraHumanists.org

Dining Out

Please join us for dinner (5:00 PM) after the March 20, meeting (“The God Virus”) at:

Sizzler

5555 Hollister Ave.

Goleta (near Hwy. 217)

Click here for menu: <http://www.sizzler.com/menus/steaks.asp>

Please let me know if you plan to attend (they want a count) by responding to: activities@santabarbarahumanists.org

Hope to see you there!

Joe Navarro
Social Activities Guy



(Ingersoll continued from page 4)

His collected speeches take up twelve volumes and are as inspirational today as they were to the thousands who heard him speak in the 19th century. Here are some quotations from Ingersoll's speeches:

The man who does not do his own thinking is a slave, and is a traitor to himself and to his fellow-men.

Who can over estimate the progress of the world if all the money wasted in superstition could be used to enlighten, elevate and civilize mankind?

The notion that faith in Christ is to be rewarded by an eternity of bliss, while a dependence upon reason, observation and experience merits everlasting pain, is too absurd for refutation, and can be relieved only by that unhappy mixture of insanity and ignorance, called "faith."

You can safely assume that you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.

— Anne Lamott, writer (1954-)

Save the Date—Summer Solstice Party!

Our Summer Solstice Party is scheduled for Saturday, June 19th, starting at 1 p.m., in Stow Grove Park, Goleta. We will have great food, games, and, of course, good conversation.

A belief which leaves no place for doubt is not a belief; it is a superstition.

— Jose Bergamin, author (1895-1983)

In the news: On February 26th, The Secular Coalition for America met with White House officials on national policy. “We are very pleased that the Obama administration is affording us this opportunity to present our positions on issues of high importance, issues of freedom and fairness that affect every American, regardless of belief,” said Secular Coalition for America Executive Director Sean Faircloth. “Our Founders knew that there was no place in American government for the privileging of religion, or of one belief over another, and that will be a central theme in our interaction with the White House.”

Read about it here: <http://www.secular.org/node/209>

And a report by Friendly Atheist: <http://friendlyatheist.com/2010/02/26/update-the-secular-coalition-for-america%E2%80%99s-briefing-with-the-obama-administration/>



(Ray Stone continued from page 3)

The couple had a daughter, Karen, by the time Ray completed his M.A. in Applied Mathematics at Brown University in 1959 (son Robert was born four years later). Brown also launched Ray into the brave new world of computers, which became his career. Fulfilling a promise he’d made to himself as a boy on a family trip to the Golden State, Ray sought his fortune in California, where the nascent computer industry was burgeoning.

One job led to another and eventually to Santa Barbara, which Louise agreed to try out for a year. She was reluctant to leave her recently-made friends and start life over again. That was in 1963. “Friends still ask her, ‘Is your year up yet?’” Ray quips.

For ten years, Ray ran his own company, Stone Mountain Computing, which developed and marketed a spreadsheet program for business. Obsolescence is almost instantaneous in the technology sector, but the company had a good

run before Ray retired in 1993.

He’s hardly been resting on his laurels since then. Even before he became a man of leisure, Ray became deeply interested in his family history. He has traced one branch back to the 14th century. In 1989, he visited his parents’ birthplaces in Belarus and made a detour to Israel to meet two newly-discovered relatives—the last of his parents’ generation—who depicted for him the life of those towns in the early 20th century. He compiled what he learned into a book, *Three Families*, and he continues to delve into Jewish Genealogy.

So what’s a nice Jewish boy doing in the Humanist Society? He evolved. Though no trouble-maker, Ray began at an early age quietly resisting what didn’t make sense. His mother was religious, so they attended a “Conservative” synagogue. His first conscious doubts came at a family Bar Mitzvah, when he started reading the English translation of prayers that proclaimed that God is good and God protects his people. How, Ray thought, could that be true in light of the Holocaust? But though this troubled him, he and his wife sent their children to Sunday School at the local Temple to learn about their heritage and to answer questions posed in their public school classes.

When his daughter married into a fundamentalist Christian family, Ray was challenged to formulate and articulate what he truly believed, and why.

In 2005, while Ray was planning an event to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the local lawn bowls club, a fellow member, Judy Freeman (now Judy Cousineau), mentioned that he had a lot in common with her husband, Dick. As it happened, Dick was also planning a party for the tenth anniversary of the HSSB in the same location.

The first HSSB event they attended, Louise said to Ray, “These people are our people.” They’d found their community; this was home.



HSSB Calendar

Look inside the newsletter or visit our website for more exciting details!

March 16: HSSB Board meeting, 5:30 p.m., at Jim Balter's house

March 17: HSSB Book Club. Book to be discussed is *The God Virus*, by Darrel Ray

March 20: March HSSB meeting at Vista del Monte: *The God Virus*, with Darrel Ray

March 28: Brunch at Cody's Restaurant

April 17: April HSSB meeting at Vista del Monte, featuring a panel discussion by members

May 15: Celebration of our 15th Anniversary, at the Holiday Inn in Goleta



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