



# THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara  
November, 2006

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## Whodunnit?

by Marian Shapiro

Our speaker for November is Andrew Hankin, an electrical engineer from England and a recently elected Board member of the Society. His talk is entitled, *Your Tax Dollars at Work: Documented Conspiracies Against Humanity by US Administrations of Both Parties.*

Frustrated by the Bush Administration's delay of more than a year to investigate the 9/11 attacks, Andrew has been quietly researching his idea that the attack was "blowback" by terrorists against America after years of brutal covert operations by US government agencies.

Unconstrained by religious dogma, political party affiliation or patriotic loyalty, Andrew has uncovered a systematic disdain for human life by the US government. Remarkably, this same government has documented its own reckless work, which Andrew will present in person and on film.

### Religion: A Definition

by Michelle Rhea

[Ed. Note: Michelle is a member poet whose work will occasionally appear on a space-available basis. We'll begin with a very short piece.]

A mirror image of illusion  
fighting the shadows of the invisible.

### Social Scene

by Anne Rojas

Our dining out with Dr. Sloan at El Torito was a great success. The food and service were terrific but the noise level was a bit high. We think it merits a return visit, however.

For our November, 18<sup>th</sup> meeting, we will be going to Ming Dynasty. I have the two back round tables reserved for 23 people. Don't be left out! You must e-mail me if you plan to come with the first 23 people responding included in this event.

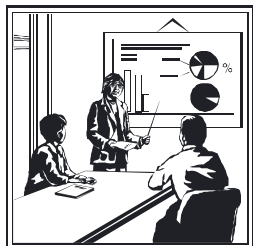
Please continue to make reservations for our fabulous Winter Solstice Party at the Sizzler on December 16<sup>th</sup> at 6 pm. For the bargain price of \$25, you will have a served dinner (chicken, fish or veggie), wines and/or other drinks, and our exclusive salad bar. Also included will be live entertainment and raffle prizes at no extra cost.

We are limited to 60 people; this event is limited to members and their guests only. Your check made out to HSSB is your reservation. Please mail your check to:

Anne H. Rojas  
PO Box 41823  
SB 93140

Please indicate on your check your entree choice.

## Humanist Society of Santa Barbara



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2006-2007

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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. All HSSB members are welcome to attend these meetings. Contact any Board member for more information.

## Membership Notes

by Mary Wilk

Humanist Society meetings are usually held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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](http://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. If you are not a member and would like to learn more about our Society, please contact any Board member to attend one of our meetings on a complimentary basis.

## More Membership Notes

by Wilma Seelye

We send our condolences to long-time member, Ralph Fontana, on the death of his son, Mark, on September 26, 2006.

We offer our condolences to our member Nancy Gogel upon the death of her husband, Walter, who passed away on October 20, 2006. They had enjoyed a long time marriage of over 60 years.

Understanding the Da Vinci Code, an adult education class, on October 14 in an all day session, was lead by Marcia Sherman

Adrian Wenner was invited by the organizers of the Eighth European Congress of Entomology to be one of five speakers at the Congress in Izmir, Turkey. He became the featured speaker during the opening ceremonies. That situation matched his selection as keynote speaker during the Third European Congress of Social Insects in St. Petersburg, Russia a year earlier.

Loretta Redd has assumed her role as Chair of the Planned Parenthood Action Fund of Santa Barbara, Ventura and San Luis Obispo Counties for a second term.

Attending a fund raiser for the Arts Fund were its Advisory Board members Rob and Judy Egenolf.

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I have never made but one prayer to God, a very short one: "O Lord, make my enemies ridiculous." And God granted it.

– Voltaire

## October Meeting Notes

by Robert Bernstein

Is religion good for your health? That is what Dr Sloan's book *Blind Faith* is about and what he talked about on October 7<sup>th</sup>.

Millions believe it is, helped by cover stories in *Newsweek*, *US News and World Report*, *Parade* and many other newspaper stories. He noted several prolific perpetrators of this idea such as Harold Koenig (several books), Dale Matthews (*Faith Factor*), and Jeff Levin (*God, Faith and Health*).

Harvard University is one of many medical schools that offer classes on faith and medicine. One driving force is the John Templeton Foundation that gives millions each year to push connections among religion, science and medicine.

The media pushes these stories that religion is good for your health because anecdotes sell. Sloan pithily explains, "The plural of anecdote is not evidence."

Medical practice in the US is another factor. There is a shift from person to patient when entering a hospital, where one is treated as a collection of organ systems. People want something else and find it in "alternative" medicine and religious claims.

Sloan asks: Is this good science? Good medicine? Good religion? In each case his answer is no, but for different reasons.

Physicist Robert Park refers to the Sharpshooter's Fallacy in junk science. The idea is to shoot first, then draw a bulls eye

(See *Sloan*, page 5)

## Chairman's Chat

by Ron Kronenberg

*[Ed. Note: Ron expected that this issue would be published before the election. Sadly, it was not but that fact does not dismiss his comments. I apologize for the delayed publication date of the newsletter this month.]*

I was deeply moved, as I am sure you were, by the response of the Amish Community to the murder of their children. They were a shining example of a forgiving people, living their values in a violent world. Even with the onslaught of the press, not a smidgen of hate was extracted from the community. We, as secular Humanists, can learn an important lesson on how to live our values from that Amish example.

We have an opportunity to live our values in the upcoming election. In our membership application we say that Secular Humanism is "A search for viable individual, social and political principles of ethical conduct, judging them on their ability to enhance human well-being and individual responsibility". To enhance human well-being means that we may not be acting in our own narrow interests, but in the interest of the community as a whole. Does that mean that a higher tax that we pay, to help the poor is voting our values? My answer may not be your answer, but let us consider these values as we vote on the many propositions that we must consider in this election.

I do not believe that government by proposition is the best way to go. We elect a legislature to make our laws. That is how a representative government operates. If you don't like the laws they pass, throw the lawmakers out. Giving people the respon-

sibility to decide on a great number of propositions is not as democratic as it sounds. It gives even greater weight to big money and to special narrow interests. One half of a billion dollars is going to be spent on this state's midterm election. The electorate is often fooled when the title of the proposition is not exactly what the law, as written, would accomplish. That is why I am in favor of Proposition 89. It is a step in getting big moneyed interest out of government.

Santa Barbara Humanists are not an extension of any political party. If all of us Humanists vote our values, we will not all be voting for the same things. That is what happens when you think for yourselves, and that is how I think it should be. Let's walk our talk!

## Humanist Library Display

by Marian Shapiro

Stop by the main Santa Barbara public library on Anapamu Street to see our Humanist Society display in the lobby outside of the Faulkner Gallery. Board members Marian Shapiro and Hope Smith spent many challenging hours planning the display and setting it up on November 1<sup>st</sup>.

The small display case is stocked full of interesting information about our society, how it got started, what Humanism is, the programs we've had this year, our acclaimed newsletter, and many books on or by Humanists. The display will be up through November 29<sup>th</sup>. Please let Marian know (968-0478) if anything in the display needs repositioning.

*(Sloan, continued from page 3)*

where you hit. People who advocate for religion in medicine sift through studies and see what comes out. This is not the same as doing a controlled study.

In one case, church attendance was correlated with reduced mortality. Of course, those well enough to go to church are probably healthier than those who cannot get out of bed. The study was widely cited before the author controlled for this factor and withdrew his conclusion.

Good medicine? Christina Puchalski wants doctors to do a spiritual history on each patient. The average doctor visit is 19 minutes and Sloan asks what part will be given up? There isn't enough time for evidence-based prevention to be discussed as it is.

Good religion? Manipulation, coercion and invasion of privacy are some ethical issues. It also trivializes the religious experience. Suppose it turns out marriage has health benefits. Is it proper to prescribe marriage to a patient? It is similar with religion, even if there were evidence of benefits.

And there just isn't the evidence. Koenig claimed 1200 studies largely support religious benefits for health. But they evaporate on inspection. 266 papers come up on religion from 1966-2000 on Medline but only 17% of these are about claims of health benefits and religion.

Templeton funded a Harvard study on the benefits of third parties praying for patients. No effect was seen except in the case where the third parties knew they were prayed for.

And that effect was negative!

One question was asked about the imposition of religion in medicine with regard to Terry Schiavo, stem cell research and "partial birth" abortion. Sloan said that this is not getting better soon and is causing real harm. We are all familiar with religious influence of this sort.

But Dr Sloan's talk was even more valuable for exposing the widespread lies about alleged benefits of religion on health.

## Sloan Follow-Up by Ray Stone

*[Ed. Note: Ray followed up on the meeting by exchanging e-mail with Dr. Sloan. Ray's original e-mail is reproduced below followed by Dr. Sloan's reply.]*

Stone: I recently attended your lecture here in Santa Barbara and enjoyed it very much. I kept wondering what, according to its advocates, the medical benefits are of teaching religion in medical schools. Do physicians feel that patients (with certain ailments?) who are more settled, optimistic, secure have a higher chance of successful recovery? And if that's the case, maybe they believe that religious folks are more settled or optimistic or secure. Do you know of any studies that address these two questions?

I'm sorry I didn't ask this question when you were here, but it took me a couple of days to formulate it in my mind.

*(See Stone, page 6)*

(*Stone, continued from page 5*)

Sloan: I've seen some studies suggesting that religious people are more optimistic but I can't say that I've looked closely at the quality of the methods. There is some evidence that optimism is associated with health benefits. But keep in mind that even if it seems that this means that religiosity is associated with health benefits, the studies that attempt to test this directly are very weak and inconclusive.

## Letter to the Editor by John Coppejans

We, homo sapiens, evolved slowly with an increase in brain size and the ability to use it better now than our early ancestors. We were labeled "homo sapiens" because we were wiser than other living beings. But, are we really wise and knowledgeable?

Sure, we have invented many things that were considered impossible not too long ago. We strike out at the far reaches of space and study close-ups of other planets. We have the ability and the knowledge to live longer, healthier and happier lives. But what are we doing?

Look around at our environment, oceans that were once pristine are polluted, the air we breath is filled with noxious fumes and the land has been raped and poisoned.

The majority of the people on earth do not live healthy and happy lives. If they have a job, they have to work more hours and in many cases both husband and wife need an income to be able to pay for the necessities of life.

In third world countries disease and starvation

are rampant.

To settle our differences we still use violence. We still adhere to outdated superstitions instead of using reason and science. Superstitions put us in different camps and fill our heads with hatred for those who do not believe the way we do. The peaceful influence of religion is a farce. Symbols like the cross, crescent or the star are not worth fighting for. Organized religion and fanatical nationalism have been and still are major stumbling blocks on the way to a saner world order.

What can we do to change this? I wish I had the answer. I only know we need a reversal in our ways of treating the earth and all life that inhabits it.

We are all involuntary passengers on this globe that we call Earth and we all spend just a little time here, so instead of fighting and killing each other we should look for solutions that are based on reason. For that we need people in power who do not think that as long as it makes a profit everything is all right. We, the voters have the power to elect people in high office that really have the well-being of this planet at heart and are not being influenced by greed and a hunger to dominate.

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When I do good, I feel good; when I do bad, I feel bad, and that is my religion.

– Abraham Lincoln

## Action Alert

by Carol Pallidini and  
Marian Shapiro

*[Ed. Note: This effort was brought to the attention of the Social Justice Committee by Carol and forwarded to me by Marian. I have copied portions of the relevant web sites for this newsletter as so annotated.]*

[First Freedom First](#) is an organization dedicated to the preservation of First Amendment rights. They are asking that we sign a petition with this preamble:

The founders of our nation believed that all Americans should have the right to worship according to their own beliefs, or not to worship at all. So strong was their commitment to religious freedom that they enshrined it in the first sentence of the Bill of Rights.

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

This constitutional guarantee is often known as the "first freedom."

Religion is a deeply personal matter. Americans must be free to practice their religion without coercion. Government exists to provide for the general well-being of all people, and its workings must be independent of specific religious doctrines. Simply put, there must be a separation of church and state.

If we do not stand together as a nation,

we stand to lose this fundamental freedom.

We, the undersigned, call upon elected and appointed officials to join us in reaffirming America's religious freedom by demonstrating a commitment to the following:

- Every American should have the right to make personal decisions -- about family life, reproductive health, end of life care and other matters of personal conscience.
- American tax dollars should not go to charities that discriminate in hiring based on religious belief or that promote a particular religious faith as a requirement for receiving services
- Political candidates should not be endorsed or opposed by houses of worship
- Public schools should teach with academic integrity and without the promotion of religious preference or belief.
- Decisions about scientific and health policies should be based on the best available scientific data, not on religious doctrine.

We join together, as the most diverse nation in the world, to commit ourselves to defending and preserving this freedom.

The Social Justice Committee recommends that you sign this petition

## Web Site of the Month

by Diane Krohn

<http://richarddawkins.net/home>

Richard Dawkins, for those that don't know, is a contemporary evolutionary biologist and out-spoken atheist. He has written several books related to evolution and natural selection. His latest book, *The God Delusion*, is the #2 best-seller on Amazon, and is also a best-seller on the NYT and WSJ.

His book tour [journal](#) is interesting and

entertaining to read. He has been surprised by how supportive his audiences have been for his book tour.

The website also has various links to science and religion-related news articles and a discussion forum that focuses mainly on the evolution/creation debate, but also has some discussions related to religion. Be sure to click on "the good, the bad, the ugly," for positive comments ("the good"), negative, but thoughtful comments ("the bad"), and just plain negative comments ("the ugly").