



THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

November, 2008

<http://www.sbhumanists.org>

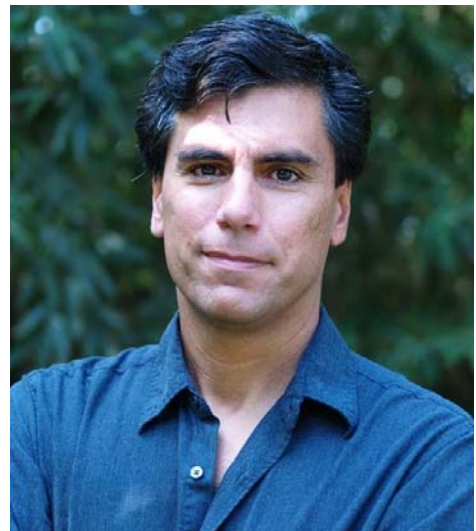
Beautiful Minds: Dr. Craig Stanford Explores the Brains of Dolphins and Great Apes, and What They May Tell Us About the Origins of Human Intelligence

By Andrew Hankin

Dr. Craig Stanford is Professor of Anthropology and Biological Sciences at the University of Southern California, and is Director of the USC Jane Goodall Research Center.

Dr. Stanford is one of the authors of *Beautiful Minds: The Parallel Lives of Great Apes and Dolphins*. He is also an internationally renowned authority on human evolution and primate behavior, and has conducted field studies of our close relative the chimpanzee, in Africa, Asia and Latin America, for 20 years. He is best known for his groundbreaking research, in collaboration with Jane Goodall, on chimpanzees' hunting and meat-eating. He loves to teach "The Origins of Humanity" at USC, for the benefit of undergraduates and faculty.

Beautiful Minds
A presentation by Dr. Craig Stanford
Saturday, November 15th, 3-5 p.m.
In the Fe Bland Forum
Santa Barbara City College,
West Campus
975 Cliff Drive, Santa Barbara



Dr. Craig Stanford

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I don't know if God exists, but it would be better for His reputation if He didn't.
-Jules Reynard, French novelist and playwright

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:

Martin Zuck
5368 Calle Real, Apt. #1D
Santa Barbara, CA 93111
683-2959

Letter to the Editor: Dick Cousineau had a letter published in the *News-Press* of Tuesday, October 21st, urging a No vote on Prop. 8. The following part of his letter was reprinted in the “Choice Words” section: “Discrimination against fellow citizens as to whether and/or to whom they shall be allowed to marry has no place in this democratic, freedom-loving republic.”

In October, longtime Humanist Society member Robert Bernstein appeared on local TV channel 17, talking about strategies for overcoming societal problems with religion, transportation, healthcare and other issues. The show aired several times and can now be seen on DVD (ask Robert in person or e-mail rdb@swt.org), or downloaded from his website: <http://www.swt.org/robert> From his Home Page, click on the link at the top to “Robert Speaks Out on Strategy for Activists.”

Social Scene

By Anne Rojas

Our Reception for Lori Brown at Vista del Monte on October 25th was a great success. About 28 persons were in attendance for lovely hors d’oeuvres, wines, and good conversation. Lori is an engaging, effective personality and I believe we raised some funds for her work.

We also had a good turnout for our old favorite, Ming Dynasty, after our October program. Prof. Rice (our speaker) particularly enjoyed the Mongolian Bar-B-Que.

This month we are going to Palapa Mexican restaurant after our November 15th meeting at SBCC. We will have a choice of pre-selected items. Please e-mail me after November 1st (and before November 10th) with your menu choice. The dinner costs \$16.00, which includes dessert and beverage (non-alcoholic), tax and gratuity. Good wines and beers are available.

The food choices are: Chicken or Vegetarian Burrito, Shrimp Tostada, or Beef Quesadilla. Included with the meal are chips and salsa, guacamole, and sour cream. Dessert is flan or cheesecake.

Atheist Poetry Reading

By Michelle Rhea

My co-editor, Anita Barnard, and I are currently finishing editing and self-publishing our second atheist poetry anthology. We have been invited to read from the anthology at the monthly meeting of Atheists United in Los Angeles on Sunday, November 23rd. In addition to my own poems and those of others, two members of HSSB will have their poems included in the publication: Mary Wilk and Helen Gordon. Two HSSB members have volunteered to help me read the poems to the audience: Sandy Garcia and Andrew Hankin. The reading will be at 11:00 at the Center for Inquiry-West, 4773 Hollywood Blvd. <http://www.atheistsunited.org/>

For those who are interested in the reading but who cannot attend the LA reading, we have also been invited to present the poetry to HSSB for the January 17th, 2009, meeting.

Propositions 4 and 8: Letter to the Editor By Merle Betz

(Note from the President: Merle sent me the following e-mail. My response to Merle follows his original note. Following his receipt of my response, Merle confirmed that he wanted the exchange published. This exchange is in lieu of my regular column.)

I am really disappointed by the Board's position. Why are they taking such positions on matters of custom, culture and civil values? Why take positions which are an affront to many religious values? Cannot humanists be open and tolerant of such values, rather than force it on others? Isn't that intolerance contrary to humanist values?

It seems to me that there are many propositions on the ballot which are more subject to skeptical, systematic, scientific type evaluation than these propositions, yet there is no position from the Board. It seems to confirm what the TV commentator calls the "culture war."

My personal choice was to vote in favor of these propositions. I am rather tired of being told how to think under aegis of the prevalent "political correctness," which seems to favor mandates of values.

I come from a Pennsylvania Dutch Mennonite and Lutheran heritage, a strong historical basis for free conscience and free inquiry. I suppose a lot of members of the Humanist Society would cringe when I say I voted as I did because "My mom and dad raised me that way." It is insulting to label me as some sort of religious extremist, however.

Response to Merle Betz By Roger Schlueter

(Note: Merle's letter is repeated below, with Roger Schlueter's response in italics.)

I am really disappointed by the Board's position.

I'm sorry you feel that way. I would remind you that all Board meetings are open to Society membership so you are always welcome to participate.

Why are they taking such positions on matters of custom, culture and civil values? *For at least two reasons: First, Props 4 & 8 are no longer just matters of custom, culture and civil values because their proponents have exercised their rights to put the Propositions on the ballot. Having done so however, they are now a matter open for public debate. As such, it is entirely appropriate that individuals and organizations express their views. That is at the root of the American political process.*

We acted on Props 4 & 8 because our Social Justice Committee considered that the intent of these two propositions violated basic Humanist principles. They voted unanimously to oppose them and to bring a recommendation to the full Board that the Humanist Society take a similar stand. Following procedures established in our By-Laws, the Board approved the Committee's recommendation.

The Humanist Society is a non-profit educational organization. As such, we have a right (if not an obligation) to offer to the membership and the public at large an informed opinion regarding how Humanist values would inform a voter on these Propositions.

(See **Schlueter**, page 5)

(Schlueter, continued from page 4)

Why take positions which are an affront to many religious values? *Our positions were taken on the basis of Humanist values. Consideration of what reaction other individuals and organizations might have to our stance was not a factor, as it should not have been.*

We should never hesitate to stand up for our principles. Nor should we compromise our values just because of some possible other adverse reaction.

For example, the Mormon church in Utah has been a major player in advocating for Prop. 8. Certainly they did not wilt in the face of disapproval from some Californians. I am unaware that their actions have taken into consideration any affront that might have been given.

Humanism is not opposed to religion. However, we are opposed to religious groups attempting to force biblical values into secular law. Surely you are in agreement.

Cannot humanists be open and tolerant of such values, rather than force it on others? Isn't that intolerance contrary to humanist values?

Surely tolerance of differing views is a basic Humanist value. Your questions are framed as if expressing our own values is "forcing" those values on others and that by our standing up for our views that we are being intolerant of others. Nothing could be further from the truth. We are NOT forcing our views on anyone at all. We are merely articulating how Humanist values could inform a voter who subscribes to those values. Expressing one's views is NOT tantamount to being intolerant of others.

In fact, Merle, in the case of Prop. 8 in particular, what is happening is that

fundamentalist Christians in general and Mormons in particular are trying to force their biblical views on the whole of California. They are trying to force religious values into the California Constitution, a decidedly secular document. Why are you not outraged at their intolerance of our secular society?

It seems to me that there are many propositions on the ballot which are more subject to skeptical, systematic, scientific type evaluation than these propositions, yet there is no position from the Board. It seems to confirm what the TV commentator calls the "culture war."

You are certainly entitled to your views and there may be any number of other Santa Barbara Humanists who would agree with you. But nothing happens in a vacuum. If you wanted to have the Board take up other Propositions, you are quite welcome to present your case to the Board. Alternatively, I have no doubt that the Social Justice Committee would be happy to entertain any proposals you might have for them. It's your Society too, Merle, so jump in when you want something to happen.

My personal choice was to vote in favor of these propositions. I am rather tired of being told how to think under aegis of the prevalent "political correctness," which seems to favor mandates of values.

Again, there are problems with your framing of these statements. First, the Society did not tell you how to vote. We informed you of how we think Humanist principles reflect on Props 4 & 8. We expect that you would exercise your own judgment. I have no doubt that you heard other people and groups advising you on how to vote. Does not the Humanist Society have the same standing to make our voice heard?

*Your lamentation of "political correctness" hits a sore point with me.
(See **Schlueter**, page 6)*

(Schlueter, continued from page 5)

These days it is used as a potent weapon to denigrate someone who disagrees with you. It is a foil to "shoot the messenger" and to avoid dealing with the issue at hand. I can assure you that the Board consideration of both Propositions involved spirited debate. Our decisions were not unanimous. But I can assure you that your bogeyman of "political correctness" never raised its ugly head. You should be wary of making such unfounded accusations without any evidence to support your position.

I come from a Pennsylvania Dutch Mennonite and Lutheran heritage, a strong historical basis for free conscience and free inquiry. I suppose a lot of members of the Humanist Society would cringe when I say I voted as I did because "My mom and dad raised me that way." It is insulting to label me as some sort of religious extremist, however.

Sounds like you have an interesting background. Unfortunately, it does not seem to have prevented you from engaging in a siege mentality. Nobody labeled you as anything. Nobody commented on your background or your values or how you decide to vote. And, most importantly, nobody labeled you as an "extremist." Merle, get a grip.

All we did was express as a Humanist Society our views on Prop. 4 & 8. Voters and Humanists should consider our views, integrate them with other views, evaluate the Propositions against their own values and, finally, vote. I'm sure that is the process you used. I'll do the same. Ain't democracy great?

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By honest I don't mean that you only tell what's true. But you make clear the entire situation. You make clear all the information that is required for somebody else who is intelligent to make up their mind.

-Richard Feynman, Nobel-prize winning physicist

October Meeting: Ronald Rice on Media Ownership – What Does It Mean and Why Should You Care?

By Jim Balter

"If you think there's a right or wrong answer ... then you are wildly misinformed, and you're not going to get that answer from me" -- thus were our members introduced in October to this complex subject by the witty and highly credentialed Dr. Ronald E. Rice of the Department of Communication at UCSB. Dr. Rice then delivered as he promised, to identify some central concepts and issues and to expose us to a variety of different positions.

Some of the basic principles of media regulation derive from the U.S. Constitution. For instance, the founders wanted to place the power in the people, who must be informed to make good decisions, thus freedom of speech and of the press. The media should provide all sorts of perspectives -- the marketplace of ideas. Arguably, if everyone can say what he or she wants, the truth will out. So, the media must be unconstrained by government; media is another check and balance, there to monitor the government. The restriction on the government regulating media content was further enhanced when the law came to recognize corporations as persons, giving them the right of free speech and, as the courts have interpreted it, free spending.

The government allocates radio frequencies and puts a limit on signal power so stations don't interfere with each other and remain local, and so that frequencies are available for government functions. In return for use of the airwaves, which are a public resource, media companies must provide and support the public interest, convenience, and necessity, and are subject to anti-monopoly controls.

(See **Balter**, page 7)

(*Balter, continued from page 6*)

However, the allocation issue is disappearing with the proliferation of cable and internet media.

The media in the U.S. are businesses, following the market model, and so it's important to understand the pluses and minuses of the market system. Market strategies, such as horizontal integration, vertical integration, economies of scale, and economies of scope, apply to media companies, and these tend to result in large, concentrated corporations. These corporations, by law, have a responsibility to their shareholders to maximize profits.

Particular to the media market is the use of symbols, for example Mickey Mouse, which are controlled via copyright, which is a result of another constitutional principle. Copyright allows people to make a living from their ideas, while entering them into the public domain after a while -- 17 years in the original copyright act of 1790. Digitization, which allows for easy widespread copying with no loss of information, has had an impact, resulting in the time period being greatly extended.

The Telecommunications Act of 1996 removed restrictions on ownership, resulting in Clear Channel buying up 1200 radio stations. Arguments exist for and against such concentration. Questions arise about its impact on diversity and other basic principles: the data show that there has been a reduction in station ownership by minorities and women; over 75% of Latino households aren't reached by Latino-owned stations, and over 90% of black households aren't reached by black-owned stations. But lack of diversity in ownership doesn't necessarily mean lack of diversity in content.

There are real problems with vertical integration due to internal market inefficiencies; case studies show lots of biases and pressures, of editors, journalists and whistle-blowers being suppressed, punished, or fired. Evidence shows that news bureaus become smaller and smaller, and there is less funding for investigative journalism as news is no longer a public service but becomes governed by the profit-driven nature of these integrated companies and the concerns of their advertisers (who are their customers, not the consumers). A fundamental problem is that the media industry, unlike any other industry, controls what gets covered, including coverage of the media, which does damage to the principle of a marketplace of ideas. In addition to controlling coverage, the media industry spent close to \$1,000,000,000 on political influence between 1998 and 2004.

To avoid these and other problems with the market model, one can consider the public sphere model, closer to what the authors of the Constitution had in mind.

You can listen to Dr. Rice's whole information-packed talk, including Q&A, on-line by clicking on the link in the October calendar entry of santabarbarahumanists.org

HSSB Book Club By Marty Shapiro

Our Book Club will be holding its last meeting of the year in November. We'll be concluding our discussion of Christopher Hitchens' ambitious anthology, *The Portable Atheist*, with readings #23 (George Orwell) through #47 (Ayaan Hirsi Ali).

When: Wednesday, Nov. 19th, 1:30 p.m.

Where: Dick Cousineau's house
505 Alegria Rd. (off Las Positas, just east of Modoc Road/Highway 101)
687-2371

Voter Registration

By Diane Krohn

By the time most of you read this newsletter, the election will be over. I hope all of you have taken advantage of the opportunity to participate in democracy. HSSB member Marian Shapiro has been responsible for setting up and staffing voter registration tables in Goleta for the past 3 years. Voter registration hours have been greatly increased within the last 6 weeks because of the tremendous interest in this election. Voter registration tables have been at Albertson's, Von's, Borders, K-Mart, the Isla Vista Market, the Farmers Market, and lastly, the Lemon Festival.



Marian Shapiro ready to register voters! Photo by Ellie Lambrou



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