



THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

September, 2007

<http://www.sbhumanists.org>

Beyond War

Presented by Dr. Bob Dodge

Beyond War is evolving as a movement at a critical time in our history. A time not unlike that of other great social change movements such as ending slavery, ending segregation and granting women the right to vote. In the nuclear age, ending war is not only possible, it is critical if we are to survive.

- Beyond War is a growing group of concerned individual members in 38 states.
- The mission of Beyond War is to explore and promote the means for humanity to live without war. We propose a new way of thinking about resolving conflicts; when we change the way the people think, then we will change the way nations resolve conflicts.
- We are committed to educating ourselves and others in our communities. We also reach out around the world. We will educate influential people and elected officials in order to create the political will to move the world beyond war.



Dr. Bob Dodge, M.D. of Ventura is a family physician practicing full time. He is co-chairman of Citizens for Peaceful Resolutions, President of Physicians for Social Responsibility, Ventura County and a board member of Beyond War.

Next event – 10am Sunday, September 30th, 2007. Brunch at Cody's Café, 4898 Hollister Ave. in the Turnpike shopping center; reservations and membership of the Humanist Society are not necessary.

Beyond War
Saturday, September 15th 2007, 3-5PM
In the Patio Room at Vista del Monte
3775 Modoc Road, Santa Barbara

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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.



I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use. – Galileo Galilei

News About Members

by Andrew Hankin

On Saturday, August 11th Humanist Society members Andrew Hankin, Bob Perry, and Hope and Sydney Smith rode a charter bus with about 40 other activists from the Santa Barbara area to Los Angeles City Hall. They joined several thousand other Californians in a rally for SB840 (California Senate Bill 840 for Universal Single-Payer Healthcare). State Senator Sheila Kuehl, who has pushed SB840 through the California legislature only for it to be vetoed by Arnold, urged supporters of her bill to "go back to your community centers, churches, atheist groups and talk about SB840!" Other notable speakers were Lily Tomlin, who did a hilarious performance as Ernestine, the health insurance claims denial lady; also Ohio Congressman Dennis Kucinich, who has introduced a House Resolution similar to California's SB840. Updates on the campaign for SB840 are on: <http://www.onecarenow.org>

On Sunday, August 19th long-time Humanist Society member Robert Bernstein joined several other bicyclists in a memorial ride from Old Town Goleta to Goleta City Hall. A bicyclist had been killed beneath the wheels of a truck at the intersection of Hollister and Kellogg Avenues on August 8th. At a meeting with two Goleta City Council Members, the riders pointed out that there is no safe and legal place to ride a bike on Hollister Avenue through Old Town Goleta. Plans for proper bike lanes in Old Town Goleta were drawn up more than ten years ago and then completely ignored, so where are bicyclists supposed to ride safely and legally? For more details of this story and subsequent commentary: <http://www.edhat.com/site/tidbit.cfm?id=1400&nid=5657&linkSource=edhat.com>



Notes from the President

By Adrian Wenner

Most of you likely know much more about Humanism than I, but it seems appropriate that we all occasionally re-examine our ostensibly common interests. It appears that Humanism (capitalized on purpose) is a broad philosophic concept rather than a belief statement. It also appears that people of many persuasions can count themselves as Humanists. Not only do we have secular humanists (not capitalized) and religious humanists (not capitalized)—our core principles also appeal to non-theists, atheists, agnostics, freethinkers, empiricists, rationalists, skeptics, materialists and even some Buddhists, Hindus, and Confucians. Some religious fundamentalists, through ignorance, ascribe all sorts of traits to Humanists that are not part of our basic principles. In part, such bias feeds upon public pronouncements by some of those amongst us. As an example, Vir Narain wrote in a guest column, "Humanists and the Trap of Atheism" (August 15th publication of the Institute for Humanist Studies):

"The so-called 'strong atheist' movement proposes, 'I do not know, or care, what your concept of God is, I hold it to be false.' This smacks of a dogmatism quite alien to the humanist ethos. It can perhaps best be described as aggressive atheism."

To remind myself of what we Humanists are about, I keep a copy of "The Affirmation of Humanism: A Statement of Principles and Values" within easy reach and read through the 21 "principles and values" with relish—feeling confident that those statements reflect my goals in life (though not always achieved). I particularly like the second to last statement:

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“We believe in optimism rather than pessimism, hope rather than despair, learning in the place of dogma, truth instead of ignorance, joy rather than guilt or sin, tolerance in the place of fear, love instead of hatred, compassion over selfishness, beauty instead of ugliness, and reason rather than blind faith or irrationality.”

One can find a version of the full list at: <http://wolfweb.unr.edu/homepage/willis/humanism.html>, or an abbreviated version (12 item Canadian list) at: <http://www.humanists.ca/hac/membershippackage/humanist-principles.pdf>

Perhaps we could consider these “Principles and Values” as 21 Commandments for Humanists—though we certainly would not want to formalize such a thought. We can wonder why we have 21, while the list from Canada contains only 12.

For more information, check out: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secular_humanism.



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Social Scene

By Anne H. Rojas

We had an excellent turnout after the October Dawkins film at our Dining Out favorite, Ming Dynasty. For Sept. we will go to another favorite, Palapa on Sept. 15th.

A few of us enjoyed the comedy productions at Center Stage Theatre on Sunday, August 26th. The system of letting the members know what is playing and picking a date seems to work. Each person is responsible for his own ticket. Stay tuned for more little theatre dates. Thanks to member Alex Henteloff for his great reviews of local productions.

Please keep me informed regarding your suggestions for activities. Your participation is always welcome. Anyone interested in a Halloween Costume Party?? That could be lots of fun....



Upcoming Events

By Dick Cousineau

A rousing turnout filled the Patio Room at Vista Del Monte on August 18, to watch two films by Richard Dawkins. Nearly 100 people showed up to be exposed to this very popular author explaining his ideas on the delusional aspects of religion, and his ideas that religion itself has been the major cause of much evil in this world.

Our next meeting on September 15th, also to be held at Vista Del Mar's Patio Room, will feature Dr. Bob Dodge, a Family physician from Ventura, and his associate Mary Olson. They are the local representatives of Beyond War, a national, grass-roots organi-

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Book Club

By Marty Shapiro

The Humanist Book Society will be meeting on **Wednesday, September 19 at 1:30** to discuss "Why God won't go away," by Dr. Andrew Newberg. The book is a study that melds the widespread appeal of religion with a scientific (neurological) theory about why this phenomenon persists (in America). Here's a brief review from Amazon.com:

Excellent overview of the science of religious experience by Roger McEvelly (the guilty bystander) (Sydney, NSW Australia)

"There is a very good overview of current scientific research and argument regarding the nature of religious and mystical experience here. Recent research into the neurological origins of religion, the stunning compatibilities between various religious myths and inclinations, the function and universality of ritual (across the animal kingdom), the commonness of lesser mystical experience and ritual—such as music, art, or by simply taking a bath, and the social cohesion and function that religion plays in virtually any society, are all discussed.

Copies of the book are available from Amazon.com for as little as \$1.60, if not available locally (list price is \$14).

The meeting (and monthly Book Swap) will take place at the home of our resident benefactors:

Art and Elaine Brody,
1125 Camino del Rio
(off Cathedral Oaks, between Tuckers Grove and Highway 154)
692-8898
brodybiz@cox.net



August Meeting: Film: "Root of All Evil?" written and presented by Richard Dawkins By Jim Balter

August's presentation was the Richard Dawkins film "Root of All Evil?," which consisted of two 48-minute segments, "The God Delusion," and "The Virus of Faith." After watching the first segment, the audience was given the choice of taking a break and having a discussion, but overwhelmingly voted to see the second segment instead.

To hear Professor Dawkins' own words about his film, listen to

http://richarddawkins.net/audio/root_of_all_evil_interview.rm

or

<http://richarddawkins.net/article,83,Interview-at-Point-of-Inquiry-about-The-Root-of-All-Evil,Richard-Dawkins>.

The film can be viewed online at <http://www.unpronounceable.com/dawkins/>.

Or, if you wish to purchase the DVD, you can do so at <http://richarddawkins.net>, where you can also find a large amount of rich material on belief and non-belief, numerous articles by, and interviews with, Richard Dawkins, and lively online discussion among nonbelievers.



Pray, v.: To ask that the laws of the universe be annulled on behalf of a single petitioner confessedly unworthy.

-Ambrose Bierce, Devil's Dictionary

Atheists come out of the closet By Hope Smith

The above headline was a welcome sight on reading the "Faith & Values" section of the News-Press of Saturday July 28. It was above an article originally published in the San Jose Mercury News on a meeting of the Santa Clara Brights, an atheist group. Photographs show them in a Thai restaurant discussing the latest atheist books, including (as we see from one of the books' cover) "God: The Failed Hypothesis" by Victor Stenger (our own latest speaker).

The article seems sympathetic to the growing number of atheist groups in the Bay Area, discusses their belief in natural laws rather than supernatural forces, and the different ways in which atheists interact with the larger theistic majority they live among. Included are comments from officials of atheist organizations, including both Dave Kong (California state director) and Ellen Johnson (president) of American Atheists (both also among our speakers in recent years).

I was delighted to carry the article with me that same evening to the reception that Anne Rojas gave for Blair Scott, the Alabama State Director for American Atheists (who also attended our "Last Sunday of the Month Brunch" the following morning). He gave us a fascinating account of the different social environments within Alabama and also of the workings of one particular atheist group of which he is associated.



Letter to the Editor **Victor Stenger's Talk** By David E. Whiteside

I read with interest John Coppejans' letter regarding Victor Stenger's talk on his book, "God: The Failed Hypothesis." While I agree that "any thinking human" should know better than to believe in the preposterous myths about the Judeo-Christian-Muslim god (not to mention all other supernatural beings), unfortunately that cannot "be the end of the discussion," as Coppejans suggests.

What's really important about Stenger's work is that we have for far too long allowed religious apologists a "get out of scientific examination free card" under the misguided idea that science deals only with the natural world and religion speaks only about the supernatural. For example, my own late father, a scientist and rational human being in most respects, taught that "science tells us how things happen, religion tells us why." With all due respect, he was wrong.

We have been losing the struggle with religionists in part because our scientists have remained silent about "the failed hypothesis" that god and other supernatural beings exist. But in truth, religionists have plenty to say about the natural world: all three of the so-called monotheistic religions—as well as most other "faiths"—preach silly ideas about how the universe was created. Worse, "creationists" and "intelligent design" advocates have been attacking science in general, and evolutionary science in particular, with all too much success.

It is a huge—and hugely important—sea change that scientists such as Stenger and Richard Dawkins are now speaking out against religion. We, the rationalists of the world, don't need to be convinced, but the large masses of humans do need convincing. And as long as we sit back and simply assert that the burden of proof is on the religionists,

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they'll continue to hold sway over the public by providing what they call "proof" in ways that are difficult for the scientifically ill-informed to realize are no proofs at all.

This is not a polite debating society where failing to meet the burden of proof will lose. This is a struggle for the minds of the public, and to win them over we—and especially our scientists—must speak up and show why religious claims are wrong.



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zation that promotes the means for humanity to live without war by stressing the facts that; 1) War is obsolete, 2) We are all one on this planet, and 3) We have the will and capacity to move beyond war and violence as a solution to differences.

Saturday, October 20: we will welcome the international photojournalist Mark Manning who will share his experiences and insights regarding the obscenities of the endless War in Iraq.

Saturday, November 17th: will bring us

Dr. Ed Callaway, internationally acclaimed Neurobiologist from the Salk Institute, San Diego, to discuss some pertinent workings of the brain he has discerned through his studies.



Open Letter to the Society By Dick Cousineau

I often contemplate the question, "Just what are we doing here in this Society?" In my mind, we have four obvious motives, and many not so obvious, but I'll just speak to the former:

- 1) To be a Community of like-minded individuals gathering together for support, friendship, and activities that promote Secular Humanism.
- 2) To actively enjoy one another's company.
- 3) To celebrate life and knowledge here and now.
- 4) To grow intellectually and share that growth with others.

Regarding Number One, we are encouraged to socialize with one another, not just at the monthly meeting, but also at our other functions, such as After-Meeting Dinners, The Sunday Brunches, The Book Club and Special Member Activities. Further, to take the time and interest to introduce ourselves to others in the Society who we haven't yet met.

Number Two reminds us to enjoy another Humanist by inviting him or her to lunch or dinner or to our home during the month, and get to know them better.

Number Three exemplifies celebrating the awesomeness of life, knowledge of ourselves and others. To speak with others of our insights and journeys. To be aware that

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(Cousineau continued from page 7)

not all members are on the same path or at the same level in their experience of Humanism.

Number Four illustrates that our readings and discoveries improve our grasp of the human condition, and we can act upon these insights within and beyond the Society.

So, let shine the unique light that is you and appreciate the same in others; share your life's journey.



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