



THE SECULAR CIRCULAR

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

January, 2009

<http://www.sbhumanists.org>

January Meeting: Anthology of Atheist Poetry By Dick Cousineau and Michelle Rhea

It is our pleasure to have one of our own members, Michelle Rhea, to host the January meeting. Michelle Rhea and Anita Barnard have edited and published their second atheist poetry collection containing poems from atheist poets around the country, published by Incarnate Muse Press, 2008. Michelle and friends will be presenting poems from the first and second collection of poems. HSSB members Sandy Garcia and Andrew Hankin will be among the readers. Be sure to attend for a meaningful and beautiful afternoon of great poetry.



Andrew Hankin



Anita Barnard (L) and Michelle Rhea (R)

An Anthology of Atheist Poetry
Saturday, January 17th, 3-5 p.m.
In the Patio Room at Vista del Monte
3775 Modoc Road, Santa Barbara
Join us for socializing at 2:30 p.m.
Meeting starts promptly at 3 p.m.

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He hoped and prayed that there wasn't an afterlife. Then he realized there was a contradiction involved here and merely hoped that there wasn't an afterlife.

---Douglas Adams, from *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*

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, Mary Wilk
and Andrew Hankin

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

Pasquale Galante
222 W. Constance Apt. #2
Santa Barbara, CA 93105
569-9416

We regret to report the death of our long-time member, John Cios of Lompoc, California.

Mark Hamilton was among supporters of Sarah House at a fundraiser held at the S.B. Women's Club - Rockwood.

Letters to the Editor: In the *News-Press* of December 9th, Charlotte Carver suggested that the Tea Fire culprits spend a year building Habitat for Humanity houses. In the *News-Press* of December 22nd, John Copejans looked forward to the re-establishment of the wall that is supposed to separate church and state.

On Tuesday evening, December 9th, Starshine Roshell launched her new book, *Keep Your Skirt On*, a collection of her columns that have been published in the *Santa Barbara Independent*, and other newspapers and magazines. At the event were HSSB members Andrew Hankin, Adrian and Hilda Wenner, Hope and Sydney Smith, and Jim Balter. Starshine spoke entertainingly to the Santa Barbara Humanists in May 2008, and some of her published columns can be read again at <http://starshineroshell.com>. Her book is now on sale at the Book Den, Chaucer's, Barnes & Noble, Borders locations, and other local retailers listed on her website.

Upcoming Events

By Dick Cousineau

For our February events, HSSB, along with the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, will be presenting a celebration of Charles Darwin's 200th birthday. Please refer to the flyer included in this newsletter for specific programs during the week of February 8th through 14th. Speakers of national prominence will participate in this event. This is a major undertaking for our Society and the support of every member is not only requested but is needed to make it successful.

A Christian Conversation

By Roger Schlueter

As HSSB President, I often receive e-mail messages through our web site, most of which are junk or spam. However, it is rare to receive a book in the mail. But I did receive the book discussed below, apparently because the author is a native of Santa Barbara who has spent nearly three decades in Senegal as a missionary and believed that I was open to his world view. The following is my response to the author. I've exchanged more e-mails with him that I'd be happy to discuss if you are interested.

For some reason entirely unfathomable to me you sent me your book *One God One Message* with a handwritten note on the Title Page asking me to read "the Prologue and at least the first two chapters." I have done this, reading through the end of Chapter 3. Since you took the time to correspond with me, I thought it appropriate that I take some time to write to you with my reaction.

(See Schlueter, page 5)

HSSB Book Club

By Marty Shapiro

The Society's long-running Book Club will have its next meeting on Wednesday, January 21st. We'll be paying homage to our new Commander in Chief, reading *Obama: From Promise to Power*, by David Mendell (paperback, \$15).

When: Wednesday, January 21st, 2009, 1:30 p.m.

Where: Ray and Louise Stone's house, 2753 Miradero Drive, Santa Barbara (just north of Alamar and State St.); 682-2123. rstone@west.net

Here's an abbreviated review from Amazon.com.: "The author does what any self-respecting journalist would do - paint an accurate account, as well as it can be done this early in the game. This book may seem completely positive on Obama at first, but, pay attention, and you will be rewarded with unbiased reporting. Some statements that appear as digs, are actually nothing more than honest observations."

Darwin Week

By Roger Schlueter

February will be a special month for our Society. We have planned a series of events for the week of February 8-14 to celebrate Charles Darwin's 200th birthday on February 12th. This week of events will replace our usual February meeting. We are co-sponsoring all of these events with the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. They have produced a flyer for the week which is enclosed with this newsletter. Please read all about the many events we will be offering and plan to attend as many as possible. This week will provide a stimulating series of events for you and should provide us with extensive exposure

of the Society to the wider Santa Barbara community.

Social Scene

By Anne Rojas

Happy New Year to All!

If there are any activities you would like to see, please let me know. I welcome your suggestions and help. Perhaps some theatre evenings?

This month the Dining Out will be held at Sizzler, after the meeting. We have not been there for quite awhile and it is an old favorite. Please let me know if you plan on coming so the seating may be arranged.

Our Winter Solstice Party at Jake's was enjoyed by almost 50 guests! Jake has very good food, very fair prices and is working on the service. The music was subdued and lovely. An advantage to Jake's is the fact that we are the only guests for the evening so good dinner conversation is easy and comfortable.

We also had our Last Sunday Brunch at Jake's in December. Wonderful food, service needing some improvement, great prices. This month we will return to Jake's on Sunday, January 25th, at 10:00 a.m., and we will be in a semi-private room. There were concerns that the main area was noisy.

We will return to Cody's as well. It seems that each locale has aficionados. Jake's is more centrally located, and some of us on the Eastside do not wish to drive to Goleta every time.

I need some cookie and drink volunteers for the January meeting on Saturday, the 17th. Can we please have some new people to volunteer for this?

(*Schlueter, continued from page 3*)

The **WHOM** section of your Prologue states that Humanists and Atheists are welcome to read your book. I am both so I am, presumably, a member of your target audience.

But in that very same paragraph you make a number of assumptions that that portion of your audience like me utterly reject. You **assume** there is a "Creator and Owner of the universe." You **assume** the bible accurately depicts some prophet's prayer. You **assume** the bible is a reliable source of historical information. You **assume** the bible is the word of god.

Humanists and Atheists reject these assumptions. Not a good start.

That said, the beginning of your first chapter gave me some hope. In fact, your question as to finding the source of truth in the marketplace of religious ideas is a very good one. How, indeed, is one to decide what to buy? That marketplace of religious ideas metaphor is an excellent one.

But you prejudice your testing of that marketplace by citing Job in the bible. A genuine exploration of the religious marketplace would not begin with the assumption that the bible has something to offer in the decision-making process. I doubt that you would accept that an exploration of that marketplace should start by citing some religious texts of, say, Jainism. If so, then you completely understand why I reject your *a priori* assumption of the validity of the bible.

Then you launch into the illogical. First you assert that the bible is the most popular book in the world. Then you assert it is "the most despised and feared book in human history." I have to assume that you have a tenuous grasp on reality.

Your sections entitled **TORTURED AND OSTRACIZED** cite terrible examples of treatment of Christians. I do not doubt the veracity of these examples. It is interesting, however, that you chose to omit examples of the horrific torture and ostracism committed in the name of Christianity.

And so on. I won't bother to critique all the logical and factual errors in the portion of your book I read. Suffice it to say that it utterly fails to achieve the mission you set out in the Prologue.

All of that said, I want to express my admiration for your efforts to improve the lives of the people of Senegal. Your efforts have, no doubt, made a real difference in the lives of many of the people you have come into contact with. It is hard to overestimate the value of your efforts to improve the lives of West Africans. I applaud your commitment to the betterment of the human condition.

I approached your book with an open mind and although I rejected your premises, I did give it a try. I wonder if you would be open to a reciprocal deal. I'd like you to read *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins and let me know what your reaction is.

Thank you again for sending your book to me.

We are here because one odd group of fishes had a peculiar fin anatomy that could transform into legs for terrestrial creatures; because the Earth never froze entirely during an ice age; because a small and tenuous species, arising in Africa a quarter of a million years ago, has managed, so far, to survive by hook and by crook. We may yearn for a higher answer -- but none exists.

--Stephen Jay. Gould, *American Paleontologist*

Solstice Party Pics!

Photos by Marian Shapiro



Hilda and Adrian Wenner



Anne Rojas and Jake



Judy Freeman and Dick Cousineau



Louise and Ray Stone



Marty Shapiro and John Coppejans



David and Romie Whiteside

In Praise of December 26th (The most underrated day of the year)

By “Anonymous”

Hark! No angel voices sing.
No “ho-hos” and bells that ring.
No more eating till you’re huge.
No more Cratchett; no more Scrooge.

No more “mistle;” no more “toe”--
No more artificial snow.
No more greedy girls and boys
Whining for those Chinese toys.

Every sight of Santa’s dumb mug
Has me muttering, “Bah! Humbug.”
No more fuss—I’ve had my fill.
Silent Night is finally—still.

No more present-wrapping labors.
No more fruitcake from the neighbors.
No more reindeer on the lawn—
Christ has come...thank God, he’s gone!

Evolutionary Gems

By Diane Krohn

In January, *Nature* magazine published a short summary article of recent important developments in evolutionary biology. This summary demonstrates that the evidence for evolution is still growing. In preparation for Darwin Week in February, here is a compiled list of the developments. This list is from P.Z. Meyers’ blog, Pharyngula.

The article in *Nature* can be found at the following link:

<http://www.nature.com/nature/newspdf/evolutiongems.pdf>

The link for the Pharyngula blog:

<http://scienceblogs.com/pharyngula/>

- The discovery of *Indohyus*, an ancestor to whales.
- The discovery of *Tiktaalik*, an ancestor to tetrapods.
- The origin of feathers revealed in creatures like *Epidexipteryx*.
- The evolution of patterning mechanisms in teeth.
- The developmental and evolutionary origin of the vertebrate skeleton.
- Speciation driven indirectly by selection in sticklebacks.
- Selection for longer-legged lizards in Caribbean island populations.
- A co-evolutionary arms race between *Daphnia* and its parasites.
- Non-random dispersal and gene flow in populations of great tits.
- Maintenance of polymorphisms in populations of guppies.
- Contingency in the evolution of pharyngeal jaws in the moray.
- Developmental genes that regulate the shape of beaks in Darwin's finches.
- Evolution of regulatory genes that specify wing spots in *Drosophila*.
- Evolution of toxin resistance.
- The concept of evolutionary capacitance: the idea that environmental stress can expose hidden variations that are then subject to selection.

Thomas Jefferson's Letter to the Danbury Baptists: January 1, 1802

Gentlemen

The affectionate sentiments of esteem and approbation which you are so good as to express towards me, on behalf of the Danbury Baptist association, give me the highest satisfaction. my duties dictate a faithful and zealous pursuit of the interests of my constituents, & in proportion as they are persuaded of my fidelity to those duties, the discharge of them becomes more and more pleasing.

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus building a wall of separation between Church & State. Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties.

I reciprocate your kind prayers for the protection & blessing of the common father and creator of man, and tender you for yourselves & your religious association, assurances of my high respect & esteem.



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Santa Barbara
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