



# THE SEPARATIONIST

NOVEMBER 2011

## KELLY THORVALSON: SEA TURTLE RESCUE

**SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2011, 4 PM, GAGE HALL, 4 ARCHDALE ST.**

Sea turtles are threatened and endangered species that highlight the many pressing issues surrounding coastal development and ocean conservation. To help ensure that sea turtles have a future in our oceans, the South Carolina Aquarium uses its facilities to aid sick and injured sea turtles through its Sea Turtle Rescue Program.



When an unhealthy sea turtle is found along the coast, it is brought to the Turtle Hospital by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources where animal care staff can begin to monitor and treat the animal in a state-of-the-art facility.

This program is South Carolina's only dedicated sea turtle hospital and has successfully rehabilitated and released 80 sea turtles back into the wild.

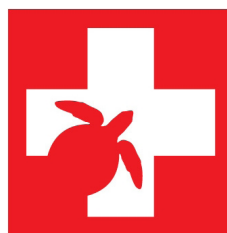
As the Sea Turtle Rescue Program Manager, Kelly Thorvalson manages the day-to-day operations in the S.C. Aquarium's Sea Turtle Hospital, works with the state and federal government on sea turtle conservation, works with public outreach and education efforts, and provides behind-the-scenes turtle hospital tours to aquarium visitors and groups.

On November 20th, Kelly will talk about sea turtles in general, what is happening with their populations,

and what the Sea Turtle Rescue Program is doing to help them. Environmental tips and information are infused into the program as well.



### CHARITY OF THE QUARTER SEA TURTLE RESCUE PROGRAM



The Sea Turtle Rescue Program is our Charity of the Quarter for November and December. Around the world sea turtles have been used for food, tools and decorative items for centuries. This use has had a negative impact on sea

turtles and of the five species found in the Southeastern Atlantic, all of them are either threatened or endangered. The Sea Turtle Rescue Program provides a place for injured sea turtles to receive care, treatment and medicines. Our donations will help sustain these species into the next century and beyond. Please contribute by bringing a check to the meeting or donate via credit/debit card on our website.

### FIND US ONLINE! WE'RE (NEARLY) OMNIPRESENT!



<http://bit.ly/shlmeetup>



<http://bit.ly/shlhome>



<http://on.fb.me/shlFB> (main)

<http://on.fb.me/shlfamFB> (family)



<http://bit.ly/shlyoutube>



<http://bit.ly/shllist>



<http://yhoo.it/shlyahoo>

### ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2011, 8:50 AM  
FIRST FEDERAL OF CHARLESTON BANK  
HARBOR VIEW ROAD, JAMES ISLAND**



The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry are active in the South Carolina Adopt-a-Highway program. We pick up litter from a two mile stretch of Harbor View Road on James Island four times a year. Our official SC Department of Transportation sign is on the corner of Harbor View and Fort Johnson Roads and lets the community know that SHL partici-

pates in this program. Our next trash pick up will be on Saturday, November 5th. We will meet at 8:50 am in the parking lot of the First Federal of Charleston Bank on Harbor View Road, James Island. It's right next to the Piggly Wiggly. The pick up usually last about an hour and a half. Please join us if you can. Call Roger Prevost at 224-9360 if you have any questions.



### SHL HAPPY HOUR

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2011, 6 PM**



Our first SHL Happy Hour was such a smashing success that we had to schedule another. Come relax among friends and enjoy a drink and friendly conversation. Everyone is welcome—alcohol is optional and no topic is taboo.

Join us on Tuesday, November 15, from 6 pm until 8 pm or so at The Blind Tiger, 36-38 Broad Street in downtown Charleston. (It's located between between Church and State, just like us!)

Hope to see you there!

**THE SEPARATIONIST, NOVEMBER 2011**

### BOOK GROUP

**SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2011, 4 PM  
WEST ASHLEY BARNES & NOBLE  
1812 SAM RITTENBERG, CHARLESTON**

On November 27, 2011, the Book Group will meet to discuss *Still Life with Oysters and Lemon: On Objects and Intimacy* by National Book Award-winning poet Mark Doty.

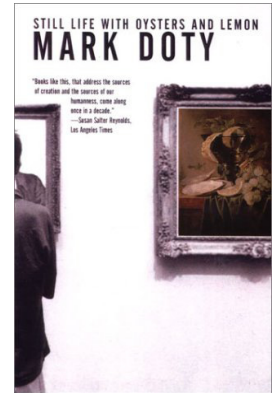
Although at first glance this slim volume appears to be a quick read, it should be lingered over and reread to uncover the full depth of its beauty and insight. Combining memoir with artistic and philosophical musings, the poet and National Book Critics Circle Award winner (for *My Alexandria*) begins by confessing his obsession with the 17th-century Dutch still life that serves as the title of this book. As he analyzes the items depicted in the painting, he skillfully introduces his thoughts on our intimate relationships to objects and subsequently explains how they are often inextricably bound to the people and places of an individual lifetime. Further defined by imperfections attained from use, each object from an aging oak table to a chipped blue and white china platter forms a springboard for reflection. Doty intersperses personal reminiscences throughout, but he always returns to the subject of still-life painting and its silent eloquence. Doty's observations on balance, grief, beauty, space, love, and time are imparted with wisdom and poetic grace.

This book sells for \$11.20 on Amazon, with used copies available for about \$5. Prices on bn.com are comparable.

### MOVIE CLUB

**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2011**

The SHL Movie Club meets once a month, usually on the first Saturday, to view a film and discuss it over dinner. The movie is announced a few days in advance by email, on our website (<http://bit.ly/shlevents>), and on our information line (843-277-0948). To add yourself to the Movie Club email list, please visit <http://bit.ly/shllist>.



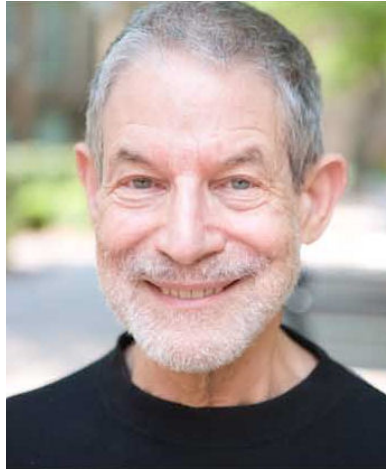
**A RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR STUDIES MAJOR  
HERB SILVERMAN**

“They can send me to college, but they can’t make me think,” bragged a bumper sticker I recently spotted in my hometown. I can tell you from personal experience that this is sometimes true. It’s even more unfortunate that many college students want to take courses where they can get good grades without being critically challenged.

In mathematics, my field of professional expertise, lots of students hope to get by through rote memorization. This is not how mathematics works, and any teacher who allows students to memorize their way through a course does his or her students a disservice. Good students learn that mathematics is not cut and dry, and needs to be continually questioned—not only about its internal logic, but also the reasons it leads us where it does. Does the conclusion seem reasonable? Did we expect it? Do the steps seem natural or artificial? Can we state intuitively what we have proved? Can we generalize the result? If mathematics is taught right, students should have more questions going out of a course than going into it. The more we know, the more we know what we don’t know.

And so it is (or should be) with most academic disciplines. I’ve heard it said half-jokingly that the difference between philosophy and religion is that philosophy is questions without answers and religion is answers without questions. I’d like to think that a secular studies program could combine the best of these two stereotypes.

I see a secular studies program as complementing rather than countering a religious studies program. It would be nice if the current religious studies major at universities evolved into a “religious and secular studies” major. Many Americans, not to mention numerous politicians, display their ignorance of what freedom of conscience actually means when they say, “We have freedom of religion, not freedom from religion.” I believe that just as you can’t have “of” without allowing “from,” any credible religious studies program that incorporates a variety



of worldviews should also include a secular worldview.

The religious studies program at the College of Charleston, my institution, affords students “the opportunity to explore diverse cultures and religions, while providing them with important tools to understand and interpret these worldviews critically.”

Good, as far as it goes. Some students even come away confused when they learn about religions diametrically opposed to their own. Beginning to question previously unquestioned assumptions is a sign of wisdom, even (or especially) if students begin to question their faith in what they have been previously taught is the one “true” religion. What are students to think when they realize that most Asians are Buddhists, people from India are mainly Hindus, Saudi Arabians are Muslims, and here in the United States we have mainly Christians? One reasonable explanation is that religious belief may be based more on geography than on theology. With all the conflicting faith beliefs in the world, students can easily see that they can’t all be right. But can they all be wrong? This is the naturalistic worldview promoted by atheists, humanists, and other secularists, with arguments supported by evidence and critical thinking.

It’s not enough to teach students about all world religions and ignore the perspective of millions of people who live happily and find meaning in their life without appeals to supernatural forces. There is a rich and important history of atheism that has been around as long as theism, though this history is rarely acknowledged. And yes, I agree that atheism should be examined as critically as all religions in an academic setting.

The bottom line is that if students leave college with the same beliefs and perspectives they had when they entered, then they have mostly wasted four years and many dollars.

*See all of Herb’s On Faith posts at <http://wapo.st/herb-on-faith>*

## HOUSTON FREETHOUGHT CONVENTION URGES ACTIVISM CORNELIA CARRIER

Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens were the star attractions at the 2011 Texas Freethought Convention cosponsored by the Atheist Alliance of America in Houston in early October. At the Saturday night banquet, Dawkins presented Hitchens with his Freethinker of the Year Award. In 2010 Hitchens, whom the *New York Times* called “the country’s most famous unbeliever” was diagnosed with stage-four esophageal cancer. Hitchens, who is being treated in Houston, was pale and wan, but still answered questions from the audience. His participation is extensively covered online at <http://www.atheistallianceamerica.org>.

On Sunday morning, Dawkins talked about *The Magic of Reality*, his new book aimed at 12-year-olds. Children from Camp Quest helped him display the special computer apps that come with the book. There was never a first person, Dawkins said. Everyone had parents. Four hundred and seventeen million years ago, our 185 millionth great-grandfather was a fish. But before we got to the fish we would have gone back 7 million years to the common ancestor we share with chimpanzees. He painted the picture of this common ancestor holding our ancestor with one hand and the chimpanzee ancestor with the other.

While different religions have their myths, miracles and illusions, truth and science have their own magic—the magic of reality. This scientific reality is deeply moving and more exhilarating than any myth, illusion or Biblical miracle, Dawkins said.

The theme of the conference was “From Grassroots to Global Impact.” Many speakers made a plea for activism and detailed some truths which should give us all hope that the case for secularism will become easier and easier to make. A 2007 Gallup poll showed that only 27 percent of churchgoers mentioned god or worship as their reasons for attending church. The majority gave one or more of the following reasons: a sense of community, in-

spiration, habit, personal guidance or growth, connectedness to fellow man or a good sing. If churchgoers are happier (in some studies), it is only if their friends are also in church. A sense of belonging is the key to churchgoing and secular communities can offer the same.

Dale McGowan is the executive director of Foundation Beyond Belief (FBB), a humanist charitable membership foundation. McGowan, who spoke to our group last March, said that 73 to 90 percent of donations to churches remain in the church. In contrast, 100 percent of donations to FBB pass through to the 70 charities it sponsors. He urged those present to participate in an automatic monthly donation to the foundation.

One of the best attended lectures was, not surprisingly, about sex and religion. Darrel Ray, author of *The God Virus: How Religion Infects Our Lives and Culture*, talked about the results of a survey that, in a nutshell, concluded that leaving religion is the best thing one can do for a good sex life. Sex is religion’s weak spot. You can’t take sex out of religion because all religions are based on sexual repression, Ray said.

According to the survey, the most sexually repressed are Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists and Pentecostals. The least repressed are Unitarians and Episcopalians. However, all the guilt and repression of religion doesn’t seem to affect behavior much. Religious kids have sex at a rate five to six percent higher than non-religious kids, and pornography appears to be more important to the religious than the secular person.

The need for more national activism was highlighted by our own Herb Silverman, president of the Secular Coalition for America. He, Woody Kaplan, chairman of the coalition advisory board, and Washington lobbyist Amanda Knief held a workshop Sunday afternoon to teach lobbying skills for secular issues.

Sean Faircloth, who used to be executive director of the coalition and is now director of strategy and policy



## HOUSTON FREETHOUGHT CONVENTION (CONT'D)

in the US for the Richard Dawkins Foundation, warned that many of our social ills result from religious bias. The Tea Party claims to be for small government, but in reality they favor a theocratic large government. The founders' original intent was not based on Christianity, but now every state has some laws that favor religion inappropriately. Nonetheless, in the heart of the Bible Belt 2300 people showed up to hear Dawkins speak at Eastern Kentucky University, he said.

Faircloth's latest book is *Attack of the Theocrats: How the Religious Right Harms Us All and What We Can Do About It*. He lamented the fact that some businesses, such as day care, claim to be religious to avoid health and safety laws. Liberty University that teaches creationism churns out graduates who end up teaching in our public schools.

Faircloth has a 10-point Vision of a Secular America which would end the "privileging of religion" in the law.

1. Military must respect all beliefs and non-beliefs
2. Reproductive information must be based on science and health.
3. Healthcare professionals must do their duty to the patients.
4. Eliminate religious bias in land use.
5. Eliminate all bias in sexual choice.
6. Autonomy for end of life choices.
7. Eliminate religious bias in schools.
8. Elect more secular Americans to Congress.
9. Protect children from religious abuse.
10. Medical innovation should be dedicated to health and well-being.

Faircloth will be lobbying the Congress on these issues. "The future of the country is secular America," he said. He and other speakers urged those present to get involved in politics—attend city council and school board meetings, run for office and lobby congressmen.

All were encouraged to attend the Reason Rally on March 24, 2012 on the National Mall in Washington, DC.

## REASON RALLY MARCH 24, 2012, WASHINGTON, DC

The Reason Rally will be held March 24, 2012, in Washington, DC. The rally will be filled with music, comedy, and addresses by leaders of the secular movement. It's billed as the largest gathering of the secular movement in history.

DC Rally Bus, a service that supports our First Amendment right to peaceably assemble by providing buses for rallies in Washington, DC, may send a bus to Charleston. Availability depends on demand; we need to sign up 40 riders by January 24, 2012. To register, visit <http://bit.ly/shl-bus>.

Note that the **Annual Convention of American Atheists** is scheduled for March 25th and 26th, 2012, in Bethesda, Maryland, and Richard Dawkins will be the keynote speaker. If you prefer to stay in DC for the conference, the DC Rally Bus isn't your best bet for transportation, but special room rates are available for DC area hotels. See below for a phone number, or visit <http://reasonrally.org/find-a-hotel/>.

**THERE'S A  
SPECIAL  
HOTEL  
ROOM RATE  
FOR YOU IN & NEAR  
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

- The Hilton Garden Inn
- The Hilton Washington DC/Rockville Hotel & Executive Meeting Center
- The Bethesda Marriott
- The Legacy Hotel
- The Bethesda Marriott North

(More Info: 908-276-7300 Ext. 7)

**REASON RALLY**

MARCH 24, 2012  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

# THE SEPARATIONIST

## THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SECULAR HUMANISTS OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

*Opinions expressed in *The Separationist* are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of SHL.*

*Please contact the editor with any questions or comments about this publication. Contributions of short articles, news items, letters to the editor or other information of interest to SHL members are always welcome. Contact the editor at [newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org](mailto:newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org).*

# THE SECULAR HUMANISTS OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

## CONTACT US

Write:

SHL

Post Office Box 32256

Charleston, SC 29417

Or Call:

24-hour information line: 843-277-0948

Media inquiries: 843-670-0290

## OUR OFFICERS

President: Matt Dean

Vice President: Herb Silverman

Treasurer: Jonathan Lamb

Secretary: Laura Kasman

## JOIN SHL

*SHL is a group of freethinkers who believe in the humanist philosophy. Members come primarily from the greater Charleston, South Carolina, area. SHL is affiliated with American Atheists, American Humanist Association, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, Atheist Alliance International, Council for Secular Humanism, and the South Carolina Progressive Network. Annual tax-exempt membership fees are \$35 (individual) or \$50 (couple or family). Additional donations are always welcome. To join, visit our website at <http://bit.ly/joinshl>, and for more information about our activities, visit <http://bit.ly/shlevents>*