



# THE HUMANIST SOCIETY OF NEW MEXICO NEWSLETTER

April 2016

A Chapter of the American Humanist Association

<http://humanistsocietyofnm.org/>

<http://hsnm.wordpress.com>

[president@humanistsocietyofnm.org](mailto:president@humanistsocietyofnm.org)

## HSNM Meetings in Albuquerque

*HSNM meetings are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted.*

### Saturday, April 9th

**HSNM Informal Meeting** 10:00 AM - Noon

For HSNM members and their guests. For invitation or questions, please contact Ananda Parnell at 505-480-6377.

Highland High School Library

4700 Coal SE

Park in the SouthWest parking lot at Jefferson and Coal

There will be signs to guide you from there.

Refreshments provided.

### Saturday, April 16th

**HSNM Topical Discussion** 10:00 AM - Noon

*Can We Save the Planet from Ourselves?*

Special Collections Library 423 Central Ave. NE

### Saturday, April 23rd

**HSNM Speaker Meeting** 10:00 AM - Noon

*Bad Clowns*

Benjamin Radford

Special Collections Library 423 Central Ave. NE

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Meetings by HSNM Affiliates are held throughout the month.

For more information please visit their websites.

**Atheist Skeptical Kingdom of Albuquerque** ([www.meetup.com/ASK-Atheist-Skeptical-Kingdom-of-Albuquerque](http://www.meetup.com/ASK-Atheist-Skeptical-Kingdom-of-Albuquerque))

**New Mexicans for Science and Reason** ([www.nmsr.org](http://www.nmsr.org))

**Santa Fe Atheist Community**

(<http://www.meetup.com/Santa-Fe-Atheist-Community>)

**Roswatheists** (<http://www.meetup.com/Roswatheists>)

## President's Message:

by Ananda Parnell

"All crimes, all hatreds, all wars can be reduced to unhappiness."

--A.S. Neill, founder of the original Summerhill School

Today, all over the world, education is moving toward more and more testing, more and more examinations, and more and more qualifications. It seems to be a modern trend that assessment and qualification define education.

If society were to treat any other group of people the way it treats children, it would be considered a violation of human rights. But for most of the world's children, this is the normal expectation from parents, schools, and the society in which we live.

Today many educators and families are becoming uneasy with this restrictive environment. They are beginning to look for alternative answers to mainstream schooling. One of these answers is the democratic or "free" schooling, as are modeled in various nations including Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Thailand, and the United States. The oldest and most famous

The Humanist Society of New Mexico  
A Nonprofit Corporation

A Chapter of the American Humanist Association  
Member of The New Mexico Coalition of Reason

The purpose of HSNM is to promote ethical, naturalistic, democratic Humanism among its members and within its community.

Officers/Committees

Ananda Parnell: President  
Randall Wall: Vice President/Speaker Programs  
Cynthianne Yabut: Secretary  
Zelda Gatuskin: Past President  
Richard Grady: Treasurer  
Cheryl Gatner: Member-at-Large  
Tara McCaughin: Member-at-Large

Subscription to HSNM Newsletter, published monthly, accompanies HSNM membership or can be obtained by nonmembers for \$20 annually, HSNM membership is \$20/year (\$30 for two adults in the same household. Send subscription or membership request to: Humanist Society of New Mexico, P.O. Box 27293, Albuquerque, NM 87125-7293.

Send Newsletter submissions to: Editor, Randall Wall, Paragon2012@comcast.net. The deadline for Newsletter submissions is the third Friday of each month. Website submissions may be sent to president@humanistsocietyofnm.org. HSNM dues are now paid separately from AHA dues, visit [www.americanhumanist.org](http://www.americanhumanist.org) for more information about the American Humanist Association.

Humanism is an ethical philosophy that derives its principles from science and reason rather than theology. It asserts the worth and dignity of every person, advocates personal liberty tempered by social and environmental responsibility, and promotes democracy, compassion, and justice. It sees human beings as natural organisms, whose values arise from culture and experience and holds humanity responsible for its own affairs.

of these schools is Summerhill.

The Summerhill model of education focuses on developing a thriving democratic community where children learn to be self-confident, tolerant, and considerate when they are given space to be themselves. It is in this framework that the Humanist Society of New Mexico is taking on the immense project of establishing a humanist public charter school, designed with a curriculum that focuses on individualized instruction and the intent of educating strong global leaders.

A structured curriculum with a focus on STEM programs (science, technology, engineering and math), there will also be an emphasis placed on art, foreign languages, woodworking, creative writing, and music. Students of all ages also need open areas where they can amuse themselves, socialize, play games, and be creative. Students will have the opportunity to create things for themselves. Students and adults will generate sports, games, and other amusements, according to need.

The important component of the Summerhill model of education is the right to play. Lessons incorporate projects-based learning, where students explore core concepts through creativity. And truly, the endeavor to establish such a public charter school is one that will be founded and formed entirely with structured creativity.

The process of initiating a charter school is daunting, and has caused some to balk at the amount of initial work that will go into establishing a solid program and a sustainable school over multiple generations. I believe, however, that with a solid vision of reaching initially students in middle school (grades 6-8), and then expanding toward high school (grades 9-12), before fully developing a progressive program that will serve all students grades pre-k through 12, we can create a legacy that will embody and enhance the humanist message: that ethics, morals, global leadership and personal responsibility to leave a positive path to follow are necessary for the sustainability of all life—and not just humanity—on our planet.

The Humanist Society of New Mexico anticipates holding community exploratory meetings and will invite members of ASK, New Mexicans for Science and Reason, and the Unitarian Church on a local basis. We will also be enlisting the help of Jason Hollis-Reynolds, an educator who has helped to start charter schools in the past. Not only is the undertaking of establishing a charter school one that entails a great deal of paperwork and political formulation, but it also requires a great deal of startup investment, which we will be seeking from both local donors as well as grants from national

organizations tied to the Humanist community, as well as specific Department of Education grants.

We are currently in the initial stages of developing our vision, our mission, and the direction in which we want the school to develop. We currently have an Education Committee, and if you are interested in being personally involved in our legacy project of developing a strong educational system that will serve young minds for generations to come, we welcome your insight, and your presence.

If you have any specific interest, or have any questions or areas of concern, please feel free to contact me, Ananda Parnell, President of the Humanist Society of New Mexico, and member of the Education Committee. I have been an educator with Albuquerque Public Schools since 2012, hold a Master of Business Administration, a Master of Education with an emphasis in Curriculum Instruction, Development, and Reading, am multiply endorsed in grades pre-K through 12 with foci in Language Arts, Modern and Classical Languages (German), and Social Studies (New Mexico, World, and US History, Geography, Government, Economics), and TESOL (Teaching English to Students of Other Languages). I also serve the Bernalillo County Fire Department and Sheriff's Office as a registered Humanist Chaplain.

### **Next Speaker Meeting Topic**

Benjamin Radford is back!! One of most popular speakers from last year will be returning to talk about his new book *Bad Clowns!* Bad clowns are all around us, in movies, on TV, in books, and elsewhere. From the Joker to Krusty to Pennywise, they are a pop culture phenomenon. Benjamin Radford recently published the first book on bad clowns, and will be joining us to talk about the history, variety, and cultural impact of these malicious misfits of the midway. For more information, see <http://unmpress.com/books.php?ID=2000000006199&Page=book>

### **Speaker's Bio**

Benjamin Radford, M.Ed., is a scientific paranormal investigator, a research fellow at the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry, deputy editor of the Skeptical Inquirer, and author, co-author, contributor, or editor of twenty books and over a thousand articles on skepticism, critical thinking, and science literacy. He is the author of *Mysterious New Mexico: Miracles, Magic,*

*and Monsters in the Land of Enchantment.* Radford is also a columnist for Discovery News and LiveScience.com.

### **Opportunities Abound for HSNM A message from the GB**

The HSNM Governing Board met on March 26 following a terrific Speaker Meeting. If only we could have filled Botts Hall for Marshall Martinez's dynamic and detailed report on the work of Planned Parenthood in both providing reproductive health care and working tirelessly to insure everyone has equal access to that care when and where they need it. Improving public awareness of HSNM and attendance at all of our meetings is a recurring request of board. There are so many ways to communicate these days - that shouldn't be hard to fix, right? Starting with this issue, we are going to use our own platform to better promote our meetings. Read on for the inside scoop on our March Speaker Meeting, and consider submitting your own reports or comments about the meetings you attend.

This Newsletter and our website always contain information about upcoming meetings. Pick up extra copies of the Newsletter to give to your friends or leave at libraries, forward the link, or copy/paste your happy humanist hearts out to let people know about our community and our programs. We do not expect all of our members to come to every meeting (it's not church or temple, after all!), but we count on you to help spread the word, especially about our speaker meetings. The great presenters who give up a Saturday morning for us should be rewarded with a good sized audience so that their valuable information and messages can be shared as widely as possible.

Speaking of giving up Saturday mornings... Three per month is a lot to ask of even the most dedicated humanist, and the GB will be dividing the duties as follows for the the remainder of the term (through October 2016):

President Ananda Parnell will lead the Informal Meeting, held on the Second Saturday at Highland High School from 10 AM to Noon. If you have any questions about this meeting, please contact Ananda at (505) 480-6377 or [Ivory\\_tusk@comcast.net](mailto:Ivory_tusk@comcast.net).

Treasurer Richard Grady will lead the Topical

Discussion, held on the Third Saturday at the Special Collections Library Conference Room from 10 AM to Noon. If you regularly attend that meeting and would be willing to take the reins from time to time, should Richard be unable to attend, please speak with him.

Past President Zelda Gatuskin and Vice President Randy Wall will chair the Speaker Meetings, held on the Fourth Saturday at Botts Hall, Special Collections Library, from 10 AM to Noon. Please contact Zelda ahead of time if you would like to present a Humanist Minute or make special announcements or introductions. (Zelda@amadorbooks.com, 505-344-6102)

### Other GB Meeting Items

#### Conferences

Annual AHA National Conference to be held May 26-29, 2016 in Chicago: The GB will consider requests for financial assistance from members who would like to attend but cannot cover all of the costs, which do add up. Please provide details of your plans and needs to as soon as possible.

A coalition of freethinker groups will host the Reason Rally in Washington, DC in June; the GB expressed a willingness to consider funding to send our President Ananda Parnell. We would like to hear from other members who are planning to attend.

We hope that attendees to these or any related conferences will consider providing a presentation to HSNM about their experiences. Contact Randy Wall at Paragon2012@comcast.net about available Speaker Meeting slots.

#### Committees

The HSNM Education Committee is committed to creating a humanist charter school, functioning in the Summerhill model of education. If you are interested in helping us create the framework, have a background in grant and proposal writing, or in community organizing specifically for education and school development, we would love to have you on our team. Please contact Ananda Parnell. Welcome to the new legacy of humanist outreach!

Past President Zelda Gatuskin will be chairing the Search Committee for this fall's HSNM Governing Board

elections. If you would like to sit on this committee, please contact her. You get to talk with fellow HSNM members, and the duties only last for a few months. Plus, being on the committee (usually) saves you from being nominated! Watch this space for more details about the HSNM election process.

#### Help Wanted

We are seeking volunteers to do a few things for a limited time period, so that our group can continue to grow in a graceful and professional manner. Publicity has already been discussed. Do you have a favorite print or online venue where you find events of interest? Please consider signing up to submit our meeting info to them for a few months, and then let's evaluate how much time it took and if it got results. Over time, we will be able to build a contact list and monthly routine for publicizing our events.

Membership and Outreach: It takes a village. Would you like to make calls or visits to our homebound members? Are you affiliated with a group or club who may be interested in hearing about HSNM? Opportunities abound! Contact any GB members to get involved.

#### Special Thanks

The GB approved a new Member-at-large at our recent meeting, Tara McCaughin has stepped up to make us legal (the HSNM GB is required to have 7 members). In addition, Babs Mondschein sat in on our meeting, as all members are welcome to do, and provided valuable input, as did our guest and soon-to-be-member Jeannie Jakel.

#### **Planned Parenthood Presentation**

by Tara McCaughin

We had the great privilege of hearing a dynamic speaker at our last speaker's meeting. Thank you, Randy, for having Marshall Martinez from Planned Parenthood as our presenter.

Marshall presented the case for, in my view, not only continued funding for Planned Parenthood but an increase in what Planned Parenthood receives from public funding. He pointed out that in New Mexico Planned Parenthood is funded by private donations, both small and large, and payment for services, which are on a sliding scale so no one is turned away. There

is no public funding in New Mexico for Planned Parenthood.

In his presentation, Marshall spoke at length and in great detail of what Planned Parenthood actually provides. Besides Abortions, which is a very small proportion of it's services, Planned Parenthood provides pregnancy testing, hiv testing, std testing and many other well women reproductive health care services, as well as all sorts of birth control for women and even vasectomies for men. It was pointed out that many of these women, especially poor women, mostly minorities, could not get this care if not for Planned Parenthood.

In summing up, I would like to state that Marshall gave an excellent, detailed presentation of what a great organization and how needed Planned Parenthood is.

### **A Few Words About Downton Abbey** by Barbara White

Now that it's over, those of us who followed the whole lengthy series on TV look back and consider some matters it brought up. For one things, what made it so addictive? Primarily, I think, because of the times we live in, devoid of the comfy certainties it was about. We would like those back, we think. Granted, it started out with WWI, but that didn't entail the heavy bombing on home ground of WWII - with a loss of some 400,000 British right there. Anyway, it moved on to the Armistice in just a few episodes. And of course, so many appealing characters, so well portrayed. And for many of us, the first sight of one of those vast piles called stately homes. And of course, much of it was "romanticized."

A primary example of that was how the servants lived. Viewing the program, one wouldn't conclude that life was all that hard for them. Not true! - it was outrageously hard, with 12-15 hour days tearing up and down many flights of stairs carrying buckets of water up and collections from toilets (not flushing ones) down, plus food and much else. (A fuller description of this is in Bill Bryson's *Home*, a fascinating book from cover to cover.) All in pretty chilly quarters, there being no central heating. There may have been folks with such warm, paternal attitudes as the principals, but if any, they were the exception. For most, the servant just didn't exist except as needed.

Very little of social life was shown, but that's understandable, in the interest of keeping the story line moving. True, there were the dinner parties with invited guests plus the hunting and shooting parties, but actually folks of that ilk must have been out of the house fairly often to attended parties elsewhere.

Maybe not all of us saw the interview with Julian Fellowes, the author. A modest (extremely so) and graceful interviewee he was, more especially so considering that he wrote every line of dialogue and all directions for settings, etc. It must have taken him years. After all, he had other things to do, being - some of the time anyway - a member of the House of Lords.

He certainly is keen on motherhood. The girls just about finish getting hitched when they are buying maternity clothes. Well, maybe that's how it was, there weren't all that many options back then.

### **Secular Humanism in Films** by Bob Bhaerman **The Humanist.com**

In her essay, "The Humanist Approach to Film: My Brilliant Career," author and Eastern Michigan University lecturer Coralie Cederna Johnson writes that "everyone seeing a film for the first time makes a value judgment, even if it is only based on an emotional response, but the humanist goes back to probe these initial responses more deeply. The student of the humanist approach seeks to learn what film can tell about the human condition by searching for the answers to several questions asked of other art forms: What kinds of ideas political, religious, historical, or philosophical are hidden beneath the surface? ...Who are we and what is life all about?"

A number of lists have been compiled of top humanist movies, such as James R. Taylor's "Movies for atheists, secular humanists, and non-church goers." Dubbed a starter list that in no way suggests completion, Taylor's list aims to "provide a resource for movies that deal in some way with secularism versus sectarianism, faith versus reason, liturgical literalisms versus scientific principals and common sense, theocracy versus democracy. Among the thirty-five titles on the list are *Chocolat* (2000), *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989), *Eye of God* (1997), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1990), and *Waking Life* (2001).

Mike Treder's "Top Ten Transhumanist Movies" is comprised of films that engage the viewer in a challenging exploration of transhumanist ethics. The films include: Avatar 3D (2009), Gattaca (1997), The Terminator (1984), The Matrix (1999), WALL-E (2008), Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde (1931), Brazil (1985), Metropolis (1927), 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968), and Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004).

The Humanist magazine published its own list in 2011: "Real to Reel: Ten Classics in Humanist Cinema" by Nick Farrantello. "How does one clearly define a motion picture genre as humanist?" Farrantello asks. "I'm thinking of those few films that reject religion and supernaturalism, even peripherally, and that uphold the ideals of reason, ethics, and justice while also celebrating what it is to be human," he explains. "A humanist film should identify and explore the individual as well as the shared human experience." He then describes in detail ten films, including Inherit the Wind (1960), Harold and Maude (1971), Monty Python's Life of Brian (1979), Amadeus (1984), and Planet of the Apes (1968).

Here are a few more choices of great humanist films from a variety of sources:

Film critic Marty Mapes compiled a list for MovieHabit.com on February 12, 2002, of scientific, skeptic, atheist, or humanist movies "appropriate for a quiet little Darwin Day celebration." Describing the 1997 film Contact, Mapes writes:

Jodie Foster brings to life Carl Sagan's Ellie Arroway, the atheist astronomer who dreams of visiting another world. She knows her atheism counts against her...but she stays true to herself and lets the chips fall where they may. Contact is a science fiction movie without being an action movie. Instead of laser blasts, chases, and grunting, it offers questions, dilemmas, and discussion....Contact is also a great tribute to Sagan. Ellie has all of Sagan's curiosity, morality, and rationality. Like Sagan, Ellie is a rationalist who's interested in religious discussion. She repeats a probabilistic argument for the existence of extraterrestrial intelligence that Sagan used in his Cosmos. And when she says "billion" you can almost hear him in her voice.

The Humanist Society of Santa Barbara highlights Creation (2009), a British biographical film about Charles Darwin, as a great movie for humanists to watch. Set some fifteen years after Darwin (played by Paul Bettany) returned from the Galapagos Islands, it portrays his difficulties finishing On the Origin of Species and dealing with the death of his daughter,

Annie, who he interacts with in flashbacks and hallucinations. "Both Darwin and his wife Emma [Jennifer Connelly] feel the pain of Annie's death, but it strains their relationship between one another, which is especially acute due to Emma's strong religious feelings and Darwin's ideas about evolution," notes the reviewer.

Chicago Tribune film critic Michael Wilmington called Jean Renoir's Grand Illusion (1937) a "must-see humanist film."

Based on the experiences of Renoir and his fellow pilots in POW camps at the end of World War I, co-scripted by Charles Spaak, it is one of the great humanist movies. And, for its rending portrayal of the bonds that spring up between the jailed French officers and their German captors, it's also one of the most uncompromising of anti-war films.

Blogger Nate at Wheat and Tares, dubbed the 2015 film adaptation of the musical Into the Woods "the humanist gospel of Stephen Sondheim."

Originally written in two long acts, the film does its best to cram it all into two hours. Each act of the original musical presents two entirely different philosophies and worldviews. Act 1 presents a religious and moral view of life, and Act 2 a humanist and morally relative view of life. The end result is a remarkable fusion of religious and humanist beliefs in which both are presented with nuance and respect. Ultimately, it demonstrates that both religious and secular humanist principles reveal important truths and should be able to coexist.

Life of Pi (2012) is another film that explores humanism in relation to different worldviews. In his review, philosopher Peter S. Williams examines the Christian, Hindu, and secular humanist perspectives and themes of truth, faith, and hope in the Academy Award-winning film, adapted from the 2001 novel by Yann Martel (which won the Mann Booker Prize).

Brian Eggert reviewed Stanley Kubrick's Paths of Glory (1957) at Deep Focus Review, calling it the director's most humanist film. He also stressed that it should not be considered solely an anti-war film, but also a depiction of the horrors of war, specifically those authorized by the governing political structure. Defined through the power-mongering among aristocrats and inequality on the social ladder, Kubrick's critique aims toward the ignorant, inhuman system, and ruthless logic of military law.