



THE HUMANIST SOCIETY OF NEW MEXICO NEWSLETTER

February 2016

A Chapter of the American Humanist Association

<http://humanistsocietyofnm.org/>

<http://hsnm.wordpress.com>

president@humanistsocietyofnm.org

HSNM Meetings in Albuquerque

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

Saturday, February 13th

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, February 20th

HSNM Topical Discussion 10:00 AM - Noon

What Brought You to Humanism and What Makes You Stay?
Special Collections Library 423 Central Ave. NE

Saturday, February 27th

HSNM Speaker Meeting 10:00 AM - Noon

Creationism Under the Hood: Cargo-Cult Science in the Intelligent Design Movement's Attack on Evolutionary Algorithms

Dave Thomas

Special Collections Library 423 Central Ave. NE

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)

New Mexicans for Science and Reason (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

It has been a long time since I have had the opportunity to sit down and compose a Humanist message for the Newsletter. Personal emergencies required me to delegate to others a variety of responsibilities, one of which is primary purpose of the newsletter: communication with like-minded individuals. A great deal has happened within HSNM that is both motivating, inspirational, and also daunting, including the endeavor to initiate a charter school focused on humanist ideals within global leadership.

It's only natural that people come together in the energizing spirit of shared purpose. When people do so, for a demonstration of what they affirm and what they uphold, let others take notice and pay heed, as worthy ideas and noble sentiments ring out. It doesn't matter what day we meet, or where we gather, but it does matter why we come together, for mutual inspiration and making a community. It should matter that we feel that we're on a shared journey together.

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

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 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.

It must matter that we think we can make a difference to more than just our personal lives. Thinking big can't be left to religious politics. We think that humanity can be good without high gods peering down at us, and without high priests lording over us. We think that we can think for ourselves. When we know that we have an opportunity to guide young minds to also think for themselves, to become ethical stewards of political leadership and global environmental preservation, we change not only our purpose, but the direction of human evolution.

Religions complain that people who won't be followers can't believe in anything, but only someone who has already surrendered their mind could imagine that people keeping their wits have lost their way. Yes, we may wander—but those who wander away from religion aren't lost. We can get lost in wonder without losing our heads. We can be learning from nature without losing our spirit (for lack of a better term). And we can be listening to reason while leading the way.

It is truly human to try to think, to ponder our situation, and to pass judgment on things concerning us all. We wonder not only about what we are, but also about what we ought to be. We are a species only recently rising to a consciousness of our common humanity. We are so very curious about what will eventually become of us.

To grow into our true potential, we must be prepared to learn—from our trials, our experiments, and our explorations. We may not like what we learn. We may instead want to stay at home and stick to traditional ways; keeping our heads down to look upon familiar ground can make us feel secure and rooted. We feel certain of what we're doing when we don't have to do very much. If we think we know exactly why we are here and what we are for, we don't have to think at all. But this sense of security and certainty is a dangerous trap for humanity.

If we think we surely know our purpose then we ultimately lose our purpose to think. Certainty happens when a mind refuses to think and fairly judge. Certainty is poison to responsibility. But if purpose is undertaken thoughtfully, a person becomes responsive to realities, and responsible for actions. Taking reality into account is the highest responsibility that any species calling itself intelligent must undertake. It really is time to get real.

Religious people constantly say that they really know a higher reality and a higher purpose to life. As for us, our good sense tells us that there's no way that religions could really know such things. We can't be faulted for asking, "Has religion been leading us toward a hellish place?" Have we been abandoned to a prison where too many people are worried about who's praying to which god in heaven, while two few people are minding this earth? We are earthlings, first and foremost. If we can't support and defend our true homeland—this green and blue planet—then we are indeed homeless and lost forever.

Religious people constantly say that no earthly worldview can support essential human needs, human aspirations, and human ideals. I also hear it said that a human perspective grounded on the cold reality of science could never nourish the vital spirit of morality. Religions keep saying how a worldly perspective reduces life's value down to the scale of earthly matters and human frailties. They say that nature can never inspire us, guide us, or console us.

I doubt that this is a fair complaint against the natural standpoint. By all means judge human nature harshly. We continue to prove ourselves unworthy of our marvelous habitat, and we've hardly lived up to our full natural potential. But judging nature is another matter. And it's only fair to judge us a living part of nature. As our knowledge of nature's secrets has grown, we have also been growing right along with it.

Let's take a fair proportionate measure of human life. Let's all stand up together, and by standing up, show how you can stand up for yourself, right here on the ground that you occupy. Stand up straight and let a mark be made to show how tall you can stretch, to a height worthy of a human being. From that height now survey all you can see, everything for which you care, that sphere of what you call your life. Now think about how far we can see when we stand together, and stand on the shoulders of visionary giants who came before us, who taught us and inspired us as they helped humanity grow. Think about how far we have yet to see, and think about how those coming after us will see so much farther, only because we're bold and proud enough to stand tall ourselves, in our own time.

Thank you for standing with me, for standing for something truly natural and noble. Let's try to keep

that inspiring vision of human empowerment and enlightenment in mind as we move forward through a new year, and new highly ambitious goals.

Next Speaker Meeting Topic

"Creationism Under the Hood : Cargo-Cult Science in the Intelligent Design Movement's Attack on Evolutionary Algorithms"

Genetic (or Evolutionary) Algorithms have been used many times to successfully "breed" innovative answers to difficult problems in physics, math and biology. Creationists realize that the successes of such programs provide additional evidence for evolution, and have mounted a vigorous attack on Genetic Algorithms. Dave Thomas countered these attacks a few years ago by publishing a new genetic algorithm for solving the difficult "Steiner network problem". Intelligent design creationists have since reacted by publishing two "analyses" of the Thomas algorithm. Dave will show that these new attacks are based on fallacious logic and outright misrepresentations. Are the creationists wrong? Is 1217 less than 1246? The answer to both of these questions is a resounding "Yes!"

Speaker's Bio

Mr. Dave Thomas is a physicist and mathematician. He received bachelor degrees in mathematics and in physics, and a master of science in mathematics, from the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology, where he was awarded the Brown Medal and the Langmuir Award. Dave is president of the science group New Mexicans for Science and Reason (<http://www.nmsr.org>), and also is a Fellow of CSI (Committee for Skeptical Inquiry), the publishers of Skeptical Inquirer. He has published several articles in Skeptical Inquirer on the Roswell and Aztec UFO Incidents, as well as on the Bible Code. Dave has also published in Scientific American (Dec. 1980 cover article), and has several patents. He received the National Center for Science Education's Friend of Darwin Award in 2000. Dave is married, and has two sons. He enjoys playing bluegrass, and performs juggling and magic shows for elementary schools and other groups. Dave is past president of the Coalition for Excellence on Science and Math Education (CESE), and is past president of the New Mexico Academy of Science.

HSNM Classifieds

Immediate Opening: HSNM Monthly Newsletter Editor Assemble monthly newsletter from member contributions and online humanist resources. Assistance will be provided with formatting a template in the software of your choice, gathering contributions and proofreading. Be creative! Be literary! But it is most important to be on time - the monthly deadline for sending a printable pdf file to the printer is the third Saturday. Contact Randy Wall at Paragon2012@comcast.net for more details.... If you want to give it a try, our President Ananda Parnell will follow up with you about also joining the HSNM Governing Board as a member-at-large.

We welcome all volunteers. If you cannot commit to an ongoing position but can help with publishing or distributing our Newsletter, please contact Randy, Ananda (president@humanistsocietyofnm.org), or one of our other board members.

Humanist Minute

by Harry Willson - May 26, 2007

[Harry Willson was co-founder of Amador Publishers with his wife, Adela Amador. They were avid members of the Friendly Philosophers and HSNM. Harry served as our VP for a while, and that says a lot for his fondness for our group - he had sworn off "going to meetings" after leaving the clergy. He left me with the press, and unruly piles of his published and unpublished material. Here's something fun that just turned up. --Zelda Gatuskin]

We humanists have a problem, several problems. We have "word problems." These words come to mind immediately: atheist, God, religion, creation, myth, belief.

Let me share my own experience from forty-some years ago, when I really took on the task of trying to change the way people use a certain word. It's not as important a word as those I just listed, but I think you may find the

story interesting.

The word is "reverend." The dictionary says, "worthy of reverence, deserving to be revered," and then it slides into the common usage - a title of "respect for a clergyman. I couldn't stand the title, or label, when people tried to apply it to me. Finally, I did what we were taught to do in seminary. I resorted to "word studies."

"Reverend." The word appears only once in the King James Version of the English Bible - in an obscure psalm, referring to YHWH, or God. "Holy and reverend is his name." The Hebrew word is translated in other places as dreadful, fearful, awful, awesome [before my grandchildren's generation redid that word]. The Spanish translation of that verse makes it very plain: "Santo y terrible es su nombre." [Holy and terrible is his name.]

You calling me terrible? Dreadful? Awful? Only one is reverend, and that is God alone, I insisted in those days. And I really tried to get people to quit misusing the word. "Call me Mister." "Call me Harry."

I found a few allies among my young colleagues, and we got so far as the presbytery level- that's the local assembly of pastors and elders who together act like a bishop in the Presbyterian Church. The Presbytery of Rio Grande went so far as to declare to the public all this word study stuff, and then to announce that only God is reverend, and then even to forbid all and sundry from applying the word to any mere human being. The story hit Time Magazine in an article, entitled, "Call Me Harry." My thirteen minutes of fame, I guess.

The result was not one ounce of change that I or anyone could perceive. People, and institutions, went right on calling mere humans "reverend." They're still doing it, to other people. I did get them to quit saying it of me. "Only God is reverend." And then I kept on thinking, and discovered that God is a myth, also, and the whole thing now lies somewhere between moot and ridiculous.

So let's be gentle with each other and our serious word problems.

Food For Thought Quote

"You can search throughout the entire universe for someone who is more deserving of your love and affection than you are yourself, and that person is not to be found anywhere. You, yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection."
Gautama Buddha