



Humanist Society of New Mexico



March 2013

<http://humanistsocietyofnm.org/> zelda@amadorbooks.com

Quote of the Month

If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each man's life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

HSNM Family Co-Op

Alternative Children's Sunday School

Classes for kids of all ages are at 10:00AM on the first and third Sundays of each month at a local private School.

Call 505-292-4375 for more information or go to www.MeetUp.com/Humanist-Family-CoOp/

Santa Fe Humanists

March 2nd, 2013 at 10:30am

Open Discussion of the Futures of Two Faltering Institutions

Community Room, LaFarge Branch of the Santa Fe Public Library

1730 Llano Street

For more information contact Martin Tierney
(505) 983-5001

Friendly Philosophers

Due to small attendance, the friendly philosophers' meetings are temporarily suspended. if interested in continuing, please contact Attila Csanyi - drcsanyi@yahoo.com

Upcoming HSNM Meetings

Meetings are free and run from 10:00 to noon (except where noted)

Saturday, March 9th

Informal Meeting

General Discussion starts at 10:10am

HSNM Members and their Guests Only. For invitation or questions, please contact Zelda Gatuskin at 505-344-6102.

Refreshments: TBD

Summit Apartments, 3901 Indian School NE

Saturday, March 16th

Topical Discussion – Open to the Public

The ERA: How to promote it and how will it change us?

New Valley Library, 7704-B 2nd Street NW
(Use entrance for First Choice Community Health)

Saturday, March 23rd, 10:00am

Speaker Meeting - Open to the Public

The Right to Privacy: Our Fundamental Freedom

Zelda Gatuskin

Humanist Minute: TBD

Refreshments: TBD

Central New Mexico Community College, Montoya Campus - see inside

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.

The Humanist Society of New Mexico

A Chapter of the American Humanist Association.

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

Officers/Committees

Zelda Gatuskin: President

Bill Kimbrough: Vice President/Speaker Programs

Leland Franks: Past President

Eric Pax: Treasurer

Jerry Gilbert: Secretary/Membership

Jay Lee Evans, Member-at-Large

Richard Grady, Member-at-Large

Ashley Jordan, Member-at-Large

Randall Wall, Member-at-Large

Ongoing Projects:

Ron Herman, HSNM Family Co-op Coordinator

Randall Wall, Newsletter Editor

Attila Csanyi, Friendly Philosopher's Director

Sylvia Ramos, Chair, Feminist Caucus-HSNM

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 or 1009 Childers NE, Albuquerque, NM 87112. The deadline for Newsletter submissions is the third Saturday 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.

President's Message for March 2013

by Zelda Leah Gatuskin

I've been writing a lot about the extreme amount of violence in our culture. The are 60-second movie trailers on TV that make me feel like I've been through a war, they are so full of noisy, bloody mayhem. So we had a bit of a reality check the other night when we tuned into a nature documentary about how animals survive a long northern winter. This particular study involved bison and wolves. Brilliant photography brought us every aspect of their movements and activities. Much of it was shot from above as these animals moved across vast landscapes. We hadn't been watching long when the scene got very tense. A herd of bison was traveling in a tight knot with their young in the center of it, and a pack of wolves was literally dogging their heels - charging into them, nipping, taking great chances amid the hoofs of those many-times-larger beasts with horns.

We had seen the wolf pups frolicking earlier. As with the buffalo and their young, the familial scene immediately evoked empathy, a sense of relatedness to that protective feeling of the adult for the young and delight in the adorable play of the little ones. Now, as the wolves flat out attacked the bison with strategic, single-minded prowess, it became ever more clear that they would not give up until they had taken down the young prey. They had their own brood to feed. As if they too understood the universality of parental feeling, they charged the herd with ferocity and managed to split it. The knot of bison, made smaller by two, hurried ahead to save what they could. A single adult bison was left to fend off a pack of five large wolves. It fought valiantly, but when it became clear that the baby bison would not get away, we quickly changed the channel - we who can sit through apocalyptic destruction of whole cities with a yawn.

Nature is cruel. Life is prolific and for the most part short-lived. Lots of life and lots of death. And you can't pretend that the animals don't feel this, that we're the only ones. The bison will miss its babe. The wolf will run itself near to death to feed its pup. Science has only begun to explore the self- and social awareness of other species and how it may relate to that of humans. Conversely, we know humans also have a survival

instinct that can drive one to kill in order to live. This mechanism demands a distinguishing of "us" from "them" that in humans is mostly conceptual. A curious species surveilling us from above would not see anything so different in our warring armies as wolves and bison. And peering into our domiciles, they may find us well stocked and nowhere near the dire straits of a wolf in winter. And yet we still fight each other.

The wolf and the bison got me thinking about the old concept of Zion that I learned in Sunday School. "Where the lamb will lie down with the lion." It was not a conception of any place on this earth, to be sure. To attain Zion we literally have to go to another plane of existence where the laws of nature do not demand that the lion eat the lamb or perish. To date, prayers and dutiful observance of ritual have not succeeded in taking us there. Even if all humans obeyed the same moral/civil law and we miraculously achieved peace among ourselves, the lion and the wolf would still have to eat - and so would we.

Nontheists like to point to all of the violence, injustice and sorrow in the world as evidence that there is no King of Peace running the show here. Nature is all there is. But nature, if not consciously cruel, is destructive, insatiable, relentless. Religions have visualized more perfect worlds in which we are freed from nature. Since humanists don't buy that, we are challenged to find other responses to the harshness of nature and the pain of existence. My answer is Art. What's yours?

New Location for Speaker Meeting

by Bill Kimbrough

After checking with libraries, community centers, senior centers, multi-generation centers --- all to no avail --- I finally decided to check one more "center". This is Central New Mexico Community College. This was BINGO! Not only are facilities available, but they are FREE because I am an instructor at CNM. Then, we will have another plus: Room H-128 is technology rich. So, from March through October of 2013 we will have our Speaker Meetingst at the Montoya Campus of CNM. An area map is attached. Just follow the arrows. There should be plenty of parking.

Darwin Day Event

by Jerry Gilbert

On Feb 12, HSNM participated in a celebration of Charles Darwin's birthday. The event, held at the UNM Student Union Building, was co-organized by Freedom From Religion (ABQ), Secular Students Association

(UNM), and HSNM. It was supported by New Mexicans for Science and Reason, Women Atheists and Freethinkers, and Secular Humanists.

Ron Herman was Master of Ceremonies and spoke on "The Impact of Darwin on Science and Medicine." Jim Travis, of FFR, spoke on "The Spectrum of Natural Selection." Dr. Dave Thomas, of NMSR, talked about "Gaps in the Fossil Record?" Dr. Paul Watson, Professor at UNM, concluded with "Depression as an Adaptation." I spoke briefly about HSNM's philosophy and goals. After the presentations, there was a Q & A session. The crowd of almost 50 showed strong interest and enthusiasm.

This was the first of a planned annual event, and in the future we hope to have media coverage to better inform New Mexicans about secularism and the secular groups in this area.

Speaker Bio and Topic

Zelda Gatuskin is serving her second term as president of HSNM, and she was recently named co-chair of the AHA Feminist Caucus. Zelda became editor-in-chief of the local humanist press Amador Publishers in 2010. She had published several books with the press and learned the business from its founders, Harry Willson and Adela Amador, who were dedicated members of HSNM. She continues to publisher her own books and the works of others; you can find all the details at www.amadorbooks.com or ask Zelda to show you the collection of Amador books she always has in the trunk of her car. With her husband, musician Frank G. Johnson, Zelda also operates Studio Z, multi-media arts, providing a variety of music, visual design and literary services.

Zelda sometimes takes on polITICAL and social causes. In 1996 she wrote a letter to the editor about something new that had come to her local supermarket - a "loyalty card" - and accused the store of charging more to customers who were unwilling to give the store their personal information. Another angry consumer contacted Zelda and together they began the "No Cards Shoppers" campaign. That was the beginning of Zelda's education in privacy rights, and also the beginning of a big shift in public attitudes about privacy.

In "The Right to Privacy: Our Fundamental Freedom" Zelda will discuss how privacy and the regard for privacy in the U.S. is diminishing, and how the lack of privacy diminishes us as persons while it empowers public and private entities to infringe on our other rights as well. She is offering this talk in commemoration of an important anniversary in the history of privacy rights,

the ruling in *Baird v Eisenstadt* on March 22, 1972, in which the Supreme Court determined that unmarried people have the right to obtain and use birth control on the basis of their constitutional right to privacy. This set a precedent for the more celebrated/notorious *Roe v Wade* decision the following year.

New Mexico Coalition of Reason Website

by Randall Wall

The internet recently made room for a new website for the New Mexico Coalition of Reason. The website address is NewMexicoCoR.org. The website's design is attractive as well as informative. Each member organization, which includes HSNM, has a brief write-up which can be seen by clicking on the 'Groups' link. The 'Events' link will take you to a calendar section where you can view all of HSNM's events as well as our alliance group events. The 'Links' page can be used to access several interesting webpages. Finally, the 'News' link will take you to several news items including one written about our Darwin Day request to Mayor Berry written by our own President Zelda Gatuskin.

Keep an eye on this site as the year progresses. If you subscribe to the RSS feed for the Newsroom, you will get an alert each time a new item is posted. Many exciting things will be coming our way soon!

If You Don't Like Our Country, Why Don't You Leave it?

by Donald Gutierrez

I was asked that question some years ago at a party by a few people in an educated group that included some liberals. "Why don't you leave for some other country if that's the way you feel?" This query, more an accusation, came up because I had been criticizing the government for one thing or another. The challenge reveals a common mistake by Americans, that country and nation/state are one and the same. They of course are not, though the officials, political bodies, organizations and main media--not to mention dictators-- that embody or by and large support the state want people to think so, especially in times of crises like war.

But, as even the casual observer must realize, the politicians and institutions theorized to represent the populace, the country, often don't do so. They certainly don't do so in a time like ours, in which at least two out of the three sections of the Federal government have come to be virtually owned by huge commercial and financial powers as well as the state being involved in a 10-year war that the majority of Americans reject. Thus,

there is plenty of justification for Americans questioning and criticizing not only their government but its connection with all the gigantic corporations, banking businesses and defense industry guiding the hand of supposedly politically representative institutions like the Senate and the House, let alone the Presidency and the Supreme Court.

But it was distressing to hear amidst what seemed an educated group of people some acting as if questioning the government--i.e., supposedly the country--is out of order, even somewhat disloyal. One would think that in an ostensibly democratic society, the very opposite would be out of order--not to question the government, especially in view of the fact that the government constitutionally derives its power and legitimacy from the national constituency. Thus, one could say that it is an ethical duty, let alone a political right, of not only an American but of any individual in a republic to criticize his/her government; that would seem obvious.

To the ancient Greeks, one was not a citizen unless one participated in political culture; that was a prime obligation. Being a citizen meant being actively conscious and evaluative of what empowered political activity involved and its participants did; indeed, a citizen was one of the participants. One became a vital part of a political reality and thus of a significant social community by being a citizen in this Greek sense of political awareness, participation and political criticism. One fulfilled a crucial obligation by such critical involvement.

So, at this point we can flip the title of this essay and say that maybe Americans who are not critical towards their (after all their) country should leave the country and head for dictatorships where individuals who don't criticize the government, who "know their place," who know Father-Dictator knows what is best, are welcome. Such people would go along with whatever a dictator or elite wants or does, because that is how a good conformist, a proper non-citizen, or fear-riven follower behaves. Upon them, however, falls ancient Greece's word of ineffable condemnation--barbarians.

In view of how terribly inadequate representative government is in a self-proclaimed republic and mass society like ours, criticism is not only a function of citizenship; it is absolutely essential. Such criticism might be a tiny voice coming from the average, isolated person; s/he is up against entrenched, formidable power not only in such organizations as the NRA or the energy corporations or multi-billion dollars banks but right-wing billionaires as well.

Further, individuals or offices of political power are quite remote to the average person, though of course not to wealthy individuals or mega-corporate influence.

Moreover, there are politically powerful people even more remote from our average American who bear enormous political influence. Take not only self-elected former V. P. Dick Cheney (easily one of the worst thugs of early 21st century world politics) but his formidable bully of a lawyer, David Addington. As Cheney's legal adviser, Addington (known as Cheney's Cheney) threw his weight around in ways that had more than a little to do with the state terrorism perpetrated by the George W. Bush administration. He significantly helped Cheney make end-runs around legal procedures that would have raised barriers to the incarceration and torture of detainees as well as making the White House precipitation of war against Iraq more difficult if not impossible. According to Jack Goldsmith's *The Imperial Presidency* and Jane Meyers' *The Dark Side: the Inside Story of How the War on Terrorism Turned Into a War on American Ideals*, Addington all but terrorized fair-minded Republican lawyers in the Office of Legal Counsel who felt that Cheney especially was violating the Constitution in many of the ways in which he sought not only to expedite an illegal war but increase the power of the presidency to virtual imperial status.

All this and more from a single individual who the American public not only had no control over but who, I wager, the average American didn't even know existed.

And Addington is only one of many unelected individuals bearing significant political power. As such, he exemplifies the grave danger of the tendency of representative government to represent not the populace (the country) but special interests whose "interests" are all too often the very antithesis of the vital needs of the country. But there we have it: state versus country. In the darkness of such a subtle but pernicious polarity, not being analytical and critical of the state could border on treason if one could make a case for immense political power uncriticized by the very people it significantly affects--let alone other countries-- being tantamount to a level of irresponsibility that threatens the very core of a free, open society.

Bad Weather vs. Good Weather

by Jean O'Hara

Driving cars gets you where you're going.
One has to drive new cars to keep abreast
Of the weather as it just might be snowing.
So, with an old Junker, you're St. Peter's guest.
The ice and sleet with wintry blasts of wind
Puts treachery and knavery to shame; then,
The end, because Nature is fiercer with delimbed
Trees and debris in the road than mean men.

One slippery swerve, one's too much hot verve,
And the flip side of destiny thus goes
As the short life announces dead nerve.
So, the life is gone and no one remembers lost throes.
The affirmation of life is forever.
Death acts just to hail a moment's sever.

Letter to the Editor

If Nietzsche had possessed 21st century knowledge of human evolution he would have titled one of his books *Prehuman, All Too Prehuman*. Kierkegaard said that despair is the synonym of Sin and argued that each of the "sins and various other human behaviors are manifestations of despair. Fatalistic understandings of the "end of the world" stories express despair. But Bible stories need not be understood in that way. They can be taken as warnings and what happens when people fail to heed realistic warnings. We don't take care of the garden – we get expelled into harsher lands. Those who don't believe a mighty flood is coming get wiped out when the flood catches them unprepared. John's book of Revelation reveals in rich symbolism the corrupt and self destructive nature of imperial orders. Rome = Babylon. Recent books like Radu J. Bogdan's *Predicative Minds* and Christopher Boehm's *Moral Origins* converge on what it means to be human and, by implication, how to recognize and remedy degenerated, regressive or prehuman aspects the societies we live in.

Dale L. Berry

Grants, New Mexico

First Unitarian HUManist Group, 7pm

March 12th, 7pm to 8:30pm

Social Hall, First Unitarian Universalist Church,
3701 Carlisle Blvd. NE

Open to both Religious and Secular Humanists

Meets the second Tuesday of each month

Roswatheists

Saturday, March 2nd , 2:45pm

Saturday, March 16th, 2:45pm

Starbucks, 1309 N. Main Street, Roswell, NM