



Humanist Society of New Mexico



November 2011

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

Quote of the Month

The earth is too small a star and we too brief a visitor upon it for anything to matter more than the struggle for peace.

Colman McCarthy

HSNM Family Co-Op Alternative Children's Sunday School

3:00 p.m. first and third Sundays
Unitarian Universalist Church (UUC)
Comanche and Carlisle, NE
Call 505-292-4375 for more information
or go to www.Meetup.com.

Santa Fe Humanists Saturday, November 5th, 10:30am

"Occupation" Forces vs. Tea Parties

Cafe Room, Southside Branch of the
Santa Fe Public Library, 6599 Jaguar Dr.

For more information contact Bill Weihofen
(505) 988-1343

Friendly Philosophers

Monday, November 7th - General Discussion

Monday, November 21st - TBA

Copper Canyon Restaurant, 5455 Gibson (opposite
Lovlace Hospital) in conference dining room.
Dinner at 5:30; talk follows.

Upcoming HSNM Meetings

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

Saturday, November 12th

Informal Meeting

General Discussion starts at 10:10am
Restricted to Members and their Guests Only.
For invitation please contact Zelda Gatuskin at
505-344-6102 for details or questions.

Refreshments: TBA

Summit Apartments, 3901 Indian School NE

Saturday, November 19th

Topical Discussion – Open to the Public

Feminism and Female Submission

North Valley Library, 7704-B 2nd Street NW

Note new location!

(Use entrance for First Choice Community Health)

Saturday, November 26th

Speaker Meeting – Open to the Public

General Membership Meeting

Humanist Minute: Jerry Gilbert

Refreshments: TBA

UNM Law School, Room 2406, 1117 Stanford NE

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

Roy Moody: Vice President

[Education/Programs]

Fred March: Past President

[Special Projects]

Leland Franks: Treasurer

Jerry Gilbert: Secretary [By-laws, Membership]

Carolyn Kaye, 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

Subscription to HSNM Newsletter, published monthly, accompanies HSNM membership or can be obtained by nonmembers for \$15 annually. HSNM membership is \$15/year (\$20 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, News and Notes

As I write, we are well into the season of horror. Slasher and zombie movies herald the approach of Halloween the way "It's a Wonderful Life" and "Miracle on 54th Street" will proclaim the Christmas season in December. Our local tradition of Dia de los Muertes, Day of the Dead, artfully bridges pagan and Christian holidays with a conglomeration of rituals and folkways, superstition and faith. Thanksgiving has a more humanistic tone, but if you've ever felt uncomfortable mumbling grace over the turkey, you know that this ostensibly secular holiday can also present a challenge. Perhaps all this Halloween gore is an apt expression of the dread with which many anticipate the holidays to follow.

Some years back, I was invited to join the editorial team for an Amador Publishers' project, "Christmas Blues: Behind the Holiday Mask." The anthology would address the downside of the holiday season in five parts: Tradition, Family, Outsiders, Stuff, and Re-mythologizing. Of course I related most to the Outsiders section, and felt I knew something about being blue in the midst of the happy bustle of a holiday that did not include me. But, as I told my co-editors Michelle Miller and Harry Willson after reading more than a hundred submissions of poetry and prose, it turned out that my experience only scratched the surface of the agony felt by many Christmas insiders. Their holidays were fraught with family conflicts (not necessarily over religion, but because the ritual forced interaction otherwise avoided), financial stress, and painful memories. All depression and dysfunction was amplified as a result of the forced gaiety of the "season of light." While many approached our subject with humor, a lot of the stories were dark indeed.

I accepted my outsider status long ago. Then, once I let go of the Jewish rituals of my upbringing, I felt fully liberated. I know that my hackles will rise at the crass commercialism and blurring of lines between state and religion that this season brings, and I won't be shy about speaking out if sufficiently riled, but mostly I'll try to ignore it all. When asked how Frank and I will spend the holidays, I'll give my usual answer: We will have no decorations at home, send no cards, give no gifts, attend no services, visit no relatives or have any visit us. The

best holiday for me will be when all the world is wrapped up in their various rituals and I am left blessedly alone to think my own thoughts. The response to this might be embarrassment, or the blank stare of one utterly unable to relate, or pity for my misguided soul. But sometimes I detect wistful envy. It sounds kind of good, doesn't it?

Those of you who are obliged to participate in rituals of the season, whether you like them or not, shouldn't let it get you down. Rather than feel oppressed, depressed or discriminated against when that strange cultural tide inundates us, let's make it a season of lightness, as well as a season of light, by floating lightly on the wave and not getting washed under. Once the heavy baggage we bring to the holidays is tossed overboard, we are liberated intellectually and emotionally. We can love and respect our family, friends and neighbors without guilt or defensiveness. Sure, they will still annoy the heck out of us, but that's what makes us humans and not zombies. Dig it.

HSNM Schedule Notes

Our Informal and Topical meetings will continue on the usual schedule through November and December. The Informal meeting will be back at the Summit, and the Topical meeting continues at the North Valley Library. We will also meet at the Law School on the fourth Saturday of November as usual, which is Nov. 26 (Thanksgiving weekend), but instead of having a guest speaker we will hold a general membership meeting to discuss our projects, progress and goals. The meeting will be open to the public as always, and we welcome guests who want to learn more about our organization. We will have a Humanist Holiday Light party in December, time and date to be announced, at which we will collect donations for the Roadrunner Foodbank. If you can help with plans for the party, contact Fred March. We will not have a Speaker meeting in December.

Volunteers Needed

It seems like magic, doesn't it, the way our newsletter gets distributed every month? But as humanists we know that supernatural forces are not at work. The essential tasks of managing our membership list and mailing the newsletter only get done thanks to the super effort of Helen and Jack Fuller. I promised Helen months ago that we would find a way to take this responsibility off their shoulders, and the time has come to follow through, as they will be away in November. Is there someone out there with good computer skills who can take over the membership list and print mailing labels? How about a couple of volunteers to handle the

actual mailings each month? Please contact me if you think you can help.

Next Speaker Meeting

We will use our November Speaker Meeting as a General Membership Meeting. This will be a chance to discuss our ongoing projects, talk about plans for the future, and have some fun too. If you would like to present a report, a proposal, a poem, a song, a joke, or have an issue you would like to hear addressed by the Board, contact Roy Moody.

HSNM Supports Community Radio

On Monday, October 17 HSNM provided a team of four - Jay Lee Evans, Carolyn Glen Kaye, Leland Franks and Zelda Gatuskin - to help answer phones for the KUNM pledge drive during the Democracy Now/All Things Considered shift. It was a lot of fun, our organization was thanked on air, and we had the opportunity to network with KUNM staff and volunteers. This is the second time we have worked the phones for KUNM. Their pledge drives are held in spring and fall. If you would like to participate in the future, please contact Zelda.

"Humanist Lives" Update

Lois Kimbrell, Laverne Rison, Arden Tice and Giorgio Spadaro have been interviewed. Attila Csanyi, Jerry Wesner and Fred March are being scheduled, and we have many others on the list. Our team of interviewers is also growing. The core group consists of Joe Stricklin, Kiely Banks, Ashley Jordan and Lisa Lee. Lisa has also taken the lead on scheduling, and is proving herself to be a master of logistics. Our videographer Jevon Campisi, with help from Yvette, are enthusiastically putting in many hours on the recordings. What is it all about? What are we trying to accomplish? How can you get involved? Come to the General Membership Meeting in November (the Law School meeting) to learn more and contribute your ideas.

NM Book Awards Finalists Announced

HSNM has sponsored the Philosophy category for the 2011 NM Book Awards. Three finalists have been announced:

Jack Burch, "The New Trinity" (DeVorss & Company)
Seth David Chernoff, "Manual for Living" (Spirit Scope Publishing)

Marianne Powers, "Doing the Right Thing" (Quillrunner Publishing)

Winners will be announced in November. More info at <http://nmbookcoop.com/>.

Course 19846: The Many Faces of Humanism

University of New Mexico's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute
Northeast Corner of Indian School and University

Fred March will teach The Many Faces of Humanism in three successive Monday sessions from 1-3 PM on November 21, 28 and December 5. The course includes many graphic illustrations and several video clips and is designed to stimulate thought and discussion. You can register with the Institute by phone, mail, fax or in person. Please call 505-277-0077 for more information or to register by phone.

Biologist

by P.Z. Myers (submitted by Jack Fuller)

I am accustomed to the idea that truth claims ought to be justified with some reasonable evidence: if one is going to claim, for instance, that a Jewish carpenter was the son of a God, or that there is a place called heaven where some ineffable, magical part of you goes when you die, then there ought to be some credible reason to believe that. And that reason ought to be more substantial than that it says so in a big book.

Religious claims all seem to short-circuit the rational process of evidence-gathering and testing and the sad thing is that many people don't see a problem with that, and even consider it a virtue.

It is why I don't just reject religion, but actively oppose it in all its forms - because it is fundamentally a poison for the mind that undermines our critical faculties.

Religious beliefs are lazy jokes with bad punchlines. Why do you have to chop off the skin at the end of your penis? Because God says so. Why should you abstain from pork, or shrimp, or mixing meat and dairy, or your science classes? Because they might taint your relationship with God. Why do you have to revere a bit of dry biscuit? Because it magically turns into a God when a priest mutters over it. Why do I have to be good? Because if you aren't, a God will set you on fire for all eternity.

These are ridiculous propositions. The whole business of religion is clownshoes freakin' moonshine, hallowed by nothing but unthinking tradition, fear and superstitious behaviour, and an establishment of con artists who have

dedicated their lives to propping up a sense of self-importance by claiming to talk to an invisible big kahuna.

It's not just fact-free, it's all nonsense.

Religious Extremists, Financial Extremists and the Inadequacy of a Metaphor

by Donald Gutierrez

Gamuts can be seriously misleading as a metaphor for what nation-states have come to call terrorism. Terrorists, according to Washington, are mainly extremist Muslims who are dying (literally and figuratively) to attack the West. "Muslims" of course denotes an enormously large religious culture and Muslim extremists comprise a subset that threatens mainly that part of the world called the West -- for reasons seldom analyzed seriously by the West. The main counterpart in the West to this Muslim sect are Christian Fundamentalists, who, if they strike some Christians as extreme, are not as extreme as the (Muslim) Wahabis. The left on this religious gamut would be the Unitarians and, left of them, Dorothy Day's Catholic Worker organizations.

Thus, along this metaphor of the gamut, Muslim extremists even seem to be beyond the pale of normal (i.e., western) human ideology and behavior. They are willing to kill themselves blowing up Westerners, infidels, even other Muslims -- whereas westerners who are willing to blow up other people (including children, but not themselves) from planes or from posts near Las Vegas are conventionally regarded in the west as patriotic and normal, let's say healthy middle of the gamut.

Wahabis, like the Christian right, also embody a patriarchy. Theirs is extremely harsh towards females, not allowing them to go to school or walk in public unaccompanied by a male family member or even drive a car. For adultery females in Wahabi societies like Saudi Arabia are subject to death by stoning, a practice found among (but also condemned by) the ancient Jews.

Well, all that is extreme, further right on the religious gamut than even some right-wing Christian groups who, however, also severely subordinate women, even claiming their husbands have the power of life and death over their wives. Moreover, in their total control of the education of their children and relegation of women to the home, some Christian Fundamentalist sects embody religious authoritarianism. The Wahabis have long since consolidated that status. Indeed, Wahabism, with its sharia law, is so extreme that one could say it falls off the end of the gamut, if it can even be placed on a gamut

to begin with.

This last consideration segues into the problem with the metaphor of a religious, theocratic gamut: it sizably blocks the view of another gamut in the modern world that can be regarded as far more pernicious for not only the West but for the world than these two aforementioned religious-“right” cultures. Let us call this other gamut the financial-corporate sphere or the Global Economy. Here we are dealing with an institutional possession, aggrandizement and control of monies that exert enormous influence over almost every country in the world. It can make or break the economy of entire nations, pluck millions of jobs from one country and plant them in another at far worse wages and working conditions, easily manipulate governments, pollute the global atmosphere to a lethal degree and so monopolize the wealth, media and commercial and political character of a nation that a populace like the United States, under the illusion that it is still a democracy, is actually ruled by the very rich.

What sort of gamut does that extreme of power fit into? Do we have gamut metaphors for extreme concentrations of wealth and corporation aggrandizement, so that one could call the Koch brothers, the World Bank or the IMF financial-corporate extremists in a way that conveys to the West the politician- and media- exaggerated threat of Muslim extremists? After all, David and Charles Koch are not blowing up people and buildings. However, they and their ilk are blowing up jobs and people’s homes and health, thus starving, dispossessing and ruining the lives of millions of individuals. That’s not as sensational, however, as flying planes into skyscrapers, and as given to media-sensational drama, as 9/11. And, then, people like the Koch brothers aren’t Arabs -- and billionaires similar to them ideologically own the media.

The Koch brothers, Mellon-Scaife, Paul Singer and other multi-billionaires like Sheldon Adelson, Richard “Dick” Farmer and Roger Millikin (all three individuals strong supporters of Newt Gingrich’s American Solutions for Winning the Future) are exploding, blasting, destroying jobs, education, health and medical coverage and infrastructure in ways far more pernicious than a small group of Arab fanatics like al Qaeda (created, lest we forget, by Washington in the early 1980s). We don’t, however, have a gamut metaphor for these extremely wealthy corporate and financial westerners and institutions that dramatizes just how dangerous they really are, not only to Americans but to the world. The figure of a gamut doesn’t do justice to the multiple dimensionality of their immense power which stretches through commercial, political, financial worlds beyond common imagining. “Stratospheric”

might get one closer to the figurative realm of their power and extent, because, aside from the linearity of “gamut,” stratosphere suggests something immeasurably above the “atmosphere” in which most people reside.

Gamut is a metaphor of linearity. Left, right, center, center left, center right, and is at best useful for ideology (political, religious, cultural) which it -- rather crudely, at times -- places somewhere on a metaphoric line. Now the Koch brothers, for example, are placed on the right side of the gamut, as, by implication, are extremist Muslim like the Wahabis. “Extreme,” which does fit cultural, religious or ethnic groups like the Wahabis or the Christian fundamentalists, fits the Koch brothers even better than it does “right wing” religious sects because it at least provides a descriptive word more expressive of and accurate about what the Koch and their multi-billionaire “brothers” really are as an extremely dangerous social, economic and political force. (For that matter, Wahabis aren’t quite accurately portrayed as right-wing, because their culture is hardly western and thus doesn’t fit into the West’s cultural parameters except in those significant religious authoritarian aspects similar to western Fundamentalists.)

The Koch brothers and other billionaire extremists are not just right wing, they are mass destroyers. Was Hitler merely right-wing, or was he a mass killer and anti-Semite of such proportions as to make the use of the linear metaphor “right wing” feeble as a significant descriptive term? Hitler’s polity was so revolutionary in its shredding of the basic qualities of a democratic republic and rule of law that placing it in the usual political gamut utterly fails to reflect the dynamic of the extraordinary political terror behind his polity. The same inadequacy of gamut as a descriptive metaphor applies to Stalin as a left-wing personage. Stalinism betrayed Marxist principles by exalting and rigidifying the state and making a slavocracy of a large part of the population, thus doctrinally not even being “left,” according, at least, to the tradition of European libertarian socialism. And if we can -- and should -- regard George W. Bush, Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld as mass murderers for starting illegal, unnecessary and utterly brutal wars in the Middle East, then they too exemplify the gross inadequacy of the gamut metaphor to underscore the true character of their demonic evil.

So the inadequacy of the “gamut” metaphor to the Koch brothers -- and to the other extremist American billionaires (and the White House). If viewed by a more accurate descriptive metaphor than “gamut,” their financial supremacy would be utterly shocking. It could glaringly reveal a sociopathic cruelty towards the rest of society and a financial avarice that would vividly

illuminate the injustices and evils they perpetrate and, consequently, perhaps elicit deserved empathy towards their millions of victims. The usual gamut metaphor enormously underestimates and simplifies their effect on society. Indeed, their financial influence and power are so extreme in the totality of their social impact as to place them above linear location on a gamut. Instances of their buying or co-opting state politicians, such as their control of ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council) or of governors like Walker of Wisconsin, are changing America from a society with some -- if not much -- distribution of wealth and power into a blatant plutocracy.

To meld the ideas of "gamut" and "extremity" in perhaps a more realistic metaphor, one might say that under the sway of the Kochs and other billionaires, extremity has become the norm, the average, a crucial center of social reality. Put in other terms, the billionaires are turning the United States into, using Norman Mailer's phrase, a commercial totalitarianism. This proclivity finally obliterates any kind of gamut or perhaps stands it on its head with the extreme power of Wall Street residing invulnerably at the top.

Ultimately, "gamut" is a perniciously misleading word and metaphor for Wall Street because it fails disastrously to define and elaborate the truly brutal character of monopolized corporate and financial power in America (and, of course, elsewhere). "Gamut" gives the false impression that Kochs, Mellon-Scaifes, Coors, Adelsons are just dots (big ones, to be sure) on a line of power commensurate with, say, anti-abortion, anti-Gay or even Tea-Party groups. This perniciously misleading equivalence must be exposed and changed to reveal the extreme menace of vast ideologized wealth and economic power not only to the well being but even to the survival of civil society, not only in the United States but throughout the world.

Newsletter Submissions

by Randall Wall

You know over here at HSNM Newsletter headquarters me and my extensive staff of editors, writers and printers like nothing more than to see submissions coming in from people just like you. I'd like to remind you that we more than welcome you to send in your articles, announcements, letters to the editor, poems -- heck, even jokes if they're funny. The deadline is the third Saturday of each month; complete information on submissions can be found toward the bottom of page two. Once we receive your submission my staff will get right to work editing it for hours and hours until it's ready to be published. So please give it a try, won't you?

Gimpse of Detractors

By Jean O'Hara, 1994

Bridge is more than a game of cards
It is an adventure to life's bards,
Enjoyable, stimulating and socially acceptable
It is terrible if you view it as exceptionable.
Some disdain bridge as being too couth
The same others from the "gentlemen's C average"
would be aloof.
Take the ones that must see coffee black
And say, "Discrimination is not a lack,"
Definitely do not want you to crack,
"Great unwashed, get off my back."
So, as the detractors cannot be stopped
One finds bridge for the mundane to be swapped.
A strand of Mozart rather than rock and roll
Is what is not a detractor's goal.

The Atheists and Freethinkers of New Mexico

<http://atheists.meetup.com/75>

Sunday November 6th 9am

Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice,
202 Harvard SE

Tuesday, November 22nd 6:30pm

Social Meeting at 6:30pm at Mimi's Cafe, 4316
The 25 Way, Near Jefferson and I-25

New Mexicans for Science and Reason

November 9th, 7pm

*The Two Billion Year Old Bushveld Igneous
Province of South Africa: a Product of Two
Catastrophes*

Wolfgang Elston and Eric Tegtmeir