



Humanist Society of New Mexico



September 2012

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

HSNM Family Co-Op

Alternative Children's Sunday School

Informal MeetUps: field trips, hikes, socials

Special 2012 enrollment picnic, all ages.
Aztec Park, south of Comanche on Moon, NE
Sept 9 at 1:00. Please bring a dish/side.

Call 505-292-4375 for more information
or go to www.MeetUp.com

Santa Fe Humanists

Saturday, September 1st, 10:30am

An Informal Discussion

*Is Beauty the Antidote to an Atheist's
Disenchantment?*

Community Room, La Farge
Branch of the Santa Fe Public Library,
1730 Llano Street

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

Friendly Philosophers

Monday, September 3rd - General Discussion

Monday, September 17th

Architecture in Hungary
UNM Architecture Prof. Steve Borbas

*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, September 8th

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: Helen and Jack Fuller
Summit Apartments, 3901 Indian School NE

Saturday, September 15th

Topical Discussion – Open to the Public

Gun Control

Erna Fergusson Library, 3700 San Mateo Blvd. NE

Saturday, September 22nd

Speaker Meeting – Open to the Public

The Art of Argumentation

Trey Smith

Humanist Minute: Please volunteer

Refreshments: Zelda Gatuskin

UNM Law School, Room 2406age, 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/Speaker Programs

Fred March: Past President/Education

Leland Franks: Treasurer

Jerry Gilbert: Secretary/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

Sylvia Ramos, Chair, Feminist Caucus-HSNM

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 for September 2012

by Zelda Leah Gatuskin

"Everything happens for a reason." How often have you heard that one? I think it's time to address this ubiquitous, mostly mindless utterance head-on.

Of course everything happens for a reason, just not in the way the saying is generally intended. Most often, someone will make this observation in reference to a negative or seemingly negative occurrence resulting in something positive that followed or will surely follow: "I didn't get the job," but, "Everything happens for a reason" - maybe there will be a better job down the road. "I didn't win the tournament," but, EHFAR, I've discovered a weakness that I can work on so I can win in the future. "My family suffered a devastating loss," (these are the ones that truly disturb me) but, EHFAR - we have been brought closer together and learned valuable lessons.

For some time now, my response to EHFAR has been this: "Well, everything happens, and because we have the minds that we have, we give it a reason." Lately though, I'm tempted to be more sharp: "You bet that happened for a reason...." You didn't get the job because your skills/connections/effort weren't as good as someone else's. You didn't win the game because the opposing player or team had practiced more, was stronger or simply luckier when it mattered. The family tragedy occurred in the manner of all events - one thing leads to another through some combination of intended and unintended actions and the results of those actions unscrolling in logical sequence. The laws of nature do not make exception. They amount to *reasons*, as in *causes*, that dictate a chain of events and their outcome.

As for the future - what transpires following the incident to which we feel compelled to ascribe "reason" in the sense that some higher power or our destiny must have *intended* or *required* that result - it is our own consciousness and free will that allow us to create meaning and positive attitudes and actions going forward. EHFAR is the rationalization humans use to make lemonade out of lemons. With this in mind, I am working on a new response to EHFAR: "If you mean that there were causes and circumstances that resulted in those unfortunate events, then I agree with you. Whether this will have meaning and usefulness for you in the future is your choice, and I'm glad you have chosen to

deal with the situation constructively rather than surrender to despair."

EHFAR isn't really very comforting when the "reason" part refers to the supposed intentions of a supernatural force. A god that prefers to heap on suffering versus gently instilling enlightenment - one would think a hands-on, all-powerful, all-loving being could do that - deserves the wrath of Job, not an appreciative "EHFAR."

It is not necessary to let EHFAR and other stock platitudes go by unanswered. We can rebut them or state our own view in a way that is challenging but still respectful and kind. In doing so we may find that the old saw was spoken by rote, and the speaker is not uttering a deeply held conviction but repeating words barely considered. You could be jump-starting someone's dormant critical thinking skills and liberating them from the trap of fatalism. Or not. But if you get flak for speaking your mind about EHFAR, you can turn it back on itself and reply, "If everything happens for a reason, then this conversation is happening for a reason too. Maybe you should think about it!"

Next Speaker Meeting Bio

The Art of Argumentation

With the upcoming Presidential election, arguing becomes commonplace in households and on television screens across the country. Unfortunately, what we watch in candidate debates and on 24 hour news networks is not actually debate. A debate requires substantial research and thoughtful response that are often missing in those formats.

We will discuss what argumentation is, what argumentation is not, how we teach critical thinking skills to our youth, and how to embrace the art of debate.

Trey Smith is the President of the New Mexico Speech and Debate Association. He is a Diamond Coach with the National Forensic League and a certified Professional Forensic Educator. He has been voted Debate Coach of the Year multiple times and is the coach of the reigning State Championship Speech and Debate Team. Trey was named one of the '40 under Forty' by New Mexico Business Weekly. He teaches at both the high school and college level. He also serves as a professional consultant for businesses and non-profits.

On the Horizon

* HSNM Officer Elections will be held in October. You must pay your 2012-2013 dues by Sept. 15 to be eligible to vote. Ballots will be included in the October Newsletter.

* Special October Speaker Meetings... Yes, we have two important meetings to put on your calendar for October: AHA President David Niose will give a talk on Monday evening October 22 at 7 pm. We will also hold our usual 4th Saturday meeting from 10-noon, which will be devoted to HSNM business – committee reports, election results, member input and – most importantly – party planning! (Hopefully both meetings will be held in our usual room at the Law School, but we are still waiting for confirmation. Watch for details in the next Newsletter.)

* KUNM Fall Pledge Drive. We don't have the dates yet, but please consider joining our HSNM team to answer phones for our community radio station.

HSNM Elections

HSNM Search Committee Chair Jerry Wesner, assisted by Ron Herman and Salem Smith, has submitted the following nominees for HSNM Governing Board positions. These nominees have expressed their willingness to serve. Each position will be voted on separately as in some cases there is more than one nominee (in past years we have voted on a slate); two Members-at-Large positions will be elected; once the new Board is seated, the President may appoint up to three additional Members-at-Large with the consent of the Board. The President shall also appoint a Past President of HSNM to fill the Past President position.

HSNM Nominees for 2012-2014 Term:

President: Zelda Gatuskin

Vice-President: Bill Kimbrough, Ruth Frances

Secretary: Jerry Gilbert

Treasurer: Eric Pax

Members-at-Large: Jay Evans, Richard Grady, Ashley Jordan

HSNM Bylaws

G. Elections: Election of Board members by the Membership will take place each even-numbered year. The President will appoint a chairperson to form a Search Committee of at least two other members, all of whom have the approval of the Board, by July 4 of the election year to seek candidates to stand for election. The Committee will announce, in the August Newsletter and through other appropriate means, that nominations (including self-nominations) are being accepted for Board positions including four (4) officers and two (2) MaL. Candidates will submit proof of membership in good standing and a short biography to the Committee by September 15. The Committee may conduct a formal interview of any candidate and may recommend one or more candidates for each position. The Committee will arrange for the names and biographies of each candidate,

indicating the position they seek, to be published in the October Newsletter. Sealed ballots, approved by the Board, will be distributed with the October Newsletter to all Members in good standing by September 15. Ballots must be returned by October 15 to be counted. Each Member in good standing by September 15 will be entitled to one vote for each elected position. Votes will be tallied and recorded by the Board and those elected by a simple majority will be entitled to take office on November 1. Tie votes will be settled by a coin toss.

The Annihilation of Civil Rights in America

by Donald Gutierrez

The increasing oppression of Americans by their government is an extremely serious development in civil society today. Significant liberties that Americans take for granted are not just endangered; they are on the way out. Personal e-mails, telephone calls, one's electronic biography of bills, purchases, library materials, medical records, etc. are no longer private. They are not only examined and exploited by the commercial sector; the government is interested in and preying on them. And "preying" is the correct word. Civilian transactions are not only a matter of curiosity to the market; they comprise "evidence" that the government has "decided" it has the right to examine ideologically, to see whether what we buy or join or think or write or speak is acceptable to the government's sense of patriotic values.

The menacing implication of such evaluating is that the government might decide a civilian's activities are not just critical of the country but treasonous. The most notorious target of such government interest has been Muslim-Americans involving the extensive snooping on this sector carried out recently by the New York Police Department. However, Americans who are not Muslim or Arabs have also been harassed by the police or the FBI if involved in public demonstrations or other actions critical of the government that the authorities regard as suspicious, some ending up on No-Fly lists or pestered in other ways.

Now not only is treating personal or public expression of criticism of the government as suspicious if not treasonous, one-sided and based on a violation of American civil rights; the punitive powers that the government can bring to bear upon such "traitors" are extraordinary. As set forth in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) devised under former President Bush Jr. and maintained under President Obama, this law can put Americans in detention indefinitely: no due process, no habeus corpus, no right to a lawyer, no freedom from abuse or even torture during incarceration--and, potentially, imprisonment that

could be located virtually anywhere.

This extraordinarily sweeping government power is outrageous and terrifying in its scope and in the degree to which it violates traditional American safeguards of liberty and freedom (unless Americans "of color" are involved)--that their civil rights are sacred, protected by the fundamental texts upon which the government rests--protected, that is, theoretically. Yet one today can attend a peaceful protest rally or demonstration concerning some crucial issue--such as another undeclared war instigated by Washington--only to be confronted by a police force that resembles a military division in its formidable combat gear, militant intimidation and use of excessive force. Such force (or violence) includes spraying combat-level pepper spray in the face of peaceful protesters, firing rubber bullets and gas canisters at demonstrating civilians and generally roughing them up. And even when the police do not turn violent, they often sequester citizens far off from the protested sites--which undercuts the symbolic value of protesting a special place--or tightly maneuver them like cattle ("crowd control").

Indeed, the resemblance of modern police to a military exemplifies a basic instance of civil rights and federal law being violated. The Posse Comitatus Act was passed in 1878 to prevent federal troops from inhabiting the streets of the country, or, in other words, from states and civil society being dominated by military authority or the federal government. Today, Posse Comitatus is in effect being violated by the militarization of the American police. No matter how minor a civil disturbance or illegal demonstration, the "modern" police often thunders forth as a SWAT team backed by formidable armed cars and occasionally a combat helicopter hovering menacingly overhead. This threatening police presence is designed to discourage the average peace-oriented demonstrator from practicing constitutionally supported rights of free expression. Occasionally, demonstrations have included individuals or small groups bent on disruption or violence against symbolic property. Although such groups might represent "anarchists," it has been proven that this activity is sometimes the work of agent provocateurs instigated by the authorities to give the police an excuse for--often violent--intervention.

And the police often show up at a demonstration not only in enormous force of numbers and ordnance, but armed with an "attitude," and that attitude is that these protesters are dangerous, possibly violent and even traitorous. Though it's hard to avoid being illegal if a demonstrating group has properly applied for a demonstration permit and been denied, that illogic doesn't prevent the local police commandant from

instilling his “troops” with a description of demonstrators as vicious trouble-makers.

The result is what the New York Police Department not long ago described as “we own the night” which is now extending into “we own the day” as well. If the police in effect “own” the streets, then posse comitatus has virtually been obliterated, and all a mayor or a governor need do is call out the politicized police and that’s in effect the end of civil society in its constitutional right to public self-expression about social issues of concern. At bottom, it doesn’t really matter that its police use gas canisters and rubber bullets rather than an army presence usually (not always) forbidden by posse comitatus in action; the streets get violently “cleared” and significant public discourse in the form of street protest is abolished as demonstrators are cordoned off sizably from the object of their protest, shunted around like cattle (“crowd control”).

A governor or the president can, respectively, bring police or army martial law to an end. What is disturbing is that militarizing and ideologizing the police makes it all the easier to impose government repression over more and more sectors of civil society as well as over the constitutional rights defending the variety of crucial public functions and activities that a free society enjoys--and should enjoy. Naomi Wolf in her book *The End of America* stresses how frighteningly quickly a democratic society can turn into a dictatorship, an open society closed like the shuttering of an enormous eyelid. It happened in a far better educated society than ours in early 1930s Germany. With the assistance of America’s sixteen intelligence agencies, it can happen here as well as the population continues being bombarded by manufactured fears of terrorism and the country’s financial and economic structure continues to deteriorate. It can’t happen here? It already is happening here.

Why the Conservative Worldview Exalts Selfishness (continued)

By George Lakoff and Elisabeth Wehling, Alternet.org

If you believe all of this, and if you see the world only from this perspective, then you cannot possibly perceive the deep economic truth that The Public is necessary for The Private, for a decent private life and private enterprise. The denial of this truth, and the desire to eliminate The Public altogether, can unfortunately come naturally and honestly via this moral perspective.

When Krugman speaks of those who have “the mentality that sees economic pain as somehow redeeming,” he is speaking of those who have ordinary conservative morality, the more than forty percent who

voted for John McCain and who now support Mitt Romney — and Angela Merkel’s call for “austerity” in Germany. It is conservative moral thought that gives the word “austerity” a positive moral connotation.

Just as the authority of a strict father must always be maintained, so the highest value in this conservative moral system is the preservation, extension, and ultimate victory of the conservative moral system itself. Preaching about the deficit is only a means to an end — eliminating funding for The Public and bringing us closer to permanent conservative domination. From this perspective, the Paul Ryan budget makes sense — cut funding for The Public (the antithesis of conservative morality) and reward the rich (who are the best people from a conservative moral perspective). Economic truth is irrelevant here.

Historically, American democracy is premised on the moral principle that citizens care about each other and that a robust Public is the way to act on that care. Who is the market economy for? All of us. Equally. But with the sway of conservative morality, we are moving toward a **1 percent economy** — for the bankers, the wealthy investors, and the super rich like the six members of the family that owns Walmart and has accumulated more wealth than the bottom 30 percent of Americans. Six people!

What is wrong with a 1 percent economy? As Joseph Stiglitz has pointed out in *The Price of Inequality*, the 1 percent economy eliminates opportunity for over a hundred million Americans. From the Land of Opportunity, we are in danger of becoming the Land of Opportunism.

If there is hope in our present situation, it lies with people who are morally complex, who are progressive on some issues and conservative on others — often called “moderates,” “independents,” and “swing voters.” They have both moral systems in their brains: when one is turned on, the other is turned off. The one that is turned on more often gets strongest. Quoting conservative language, even to argue against it, just strengthens conservatism in the brain of people who are morally complex. It is vital that they hear the progressive values of the traditional American moral system, the truth that The Public is necessary for The Private, the truth that our freedom depends on a robust Public, and that the economy is for all of us.

We must talk about those truths — over and over, every day. To help, we have written *The Little Blue Book*. It can be ordered from [on-line booksellers], and after June 26 at your local bookstore.

A Review of David Niose's "Nobeliever Nation: The Rise of Secular Americans"

By David Chivers

In his new book, *Nonbeliever Nation: The Rise of Secular Americans* David Niose, president of the American Humanist Association, outlines the history of secular thought in America, the relatively recent rise of the Religious Right, and a resulting re-emergence of secular forces that is still in its early stages. He then urges secular people (whom he broadly defines) to step forward and reclaim their longstanding right to be recognized and allowed to participate in the political life of the United States.

For humanists, a lot of this information and history will be familiar ground, and many of the author's arguments will be familiar as well. But Niose's book is a clear, well-written, thoughtful summation of the secularist viewpoint, written in an engaging, lively style. This should make it an appealing introduction to humanist/secularist thought for those who are not humanists, and for humanists it provides a wonderful summation of our general viewpoint.

His first several chapters are a quick survey and short history of secularism in America. He points out that secularism is a long cherished American point of view. By secularism he means not just atheism and agnosticism (which he addresses) but also religious people who believe that religion should be their private domain and not be supported or imposed by the government. He outlines the history of secular support, a narrative that may seem obvious to many but has become the subject of attack by the Religious Right in what can only be termed an audacious attempt to rewrite history.

He argues that there was a sea change in the broad support of secularism, first in the 1950's as a result of opposition to communism, and again in the 1980's with the rise of the Religious Right. It is a change that has been brought about in large part by the assumption by many that secular values were too entrenched in the American character to really be the subject of such obvious assaults. But by not engaging the Religious Right's arguments earlier, the Silent Secular Center (my own term) allowed the Right to begin to dominate the political debate, in part by demonizing the very idea of a "secular society" which for so long had been the accepted American ideal.

Niose calls for secular Americans to re-engage in the national debate, to step forward and announce themselves for what they are, and refuse the Religious Right's attempts to marginalize them. He does so in straight-forward, well-argued writing that is eminently

readable. For people who are already humanists, his urgings to come out more publicly about our views is the main challenge of the book.

This book is not aimed primarily at changing minds on these subjects but at raising the alarm to just what is happening in political and cultural America to people who, quite frankly, might not have given the matter much thought. But it is the very public coming-out of the Religious Right in this last presidential election, with serious candidates such as Rick Perry, Michele Bachman, and Herman Cain, that has awakened many people to just what the Right is now trying to impose, and how it goes against the very fabric of America. In that way, David Niose has written one of the timeliest books published in the last few years.

David Chivers is a former administrative judge and now practices law in Springfield, Massachusetts. He is a member of the Greater Worcester Humanists.

Flowers Lived Yesterday

by Jean O'Hara, February 1995

The flowers dance to the tune of music
As the waves break and sway on the near shore;
All this provides the lilt of a great quick
Crescendo leading to Nature's new store.
Nothing is as pretty as the beautiful sign
Of a gone by flower announcing the next
Season to come by shedding its benign
Blossom after it displayed itself vexed
Through the summer for all to behold new
Stages of transition. From one fast tilt
Of changing petals formed by Faded view,
The music plays forever and silt
Formed by the sea rushing a Jolly bass
Waters, dies and waves flower cold winter's phase.

First Unitarian HUManist Group, 7pm

September 11th, 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, September 8th, 2:45pm

Saturday, September 22nd, 2:45pm

Starbucks, 1309 N. Main Street, Roswell, NM