



THE HUMANIST SOCIETY OF NEW MEXICO

NEWSLETTER

July 2018

A Chapter of the American Humanist Association

hs-nm.org

president@humanistsocietyofnm.org

www.meetup.com/group-HSNM/

HSNM Meetings in Albuquerque

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

Saturday, July 14

HSNM Informal Meeting 10am to Noon
Special Collections Library 423 Central Ave. NE

Saturday, July 21

HSNM Topical Discussion 10am – Noon
Special Collections Library 423 Central Ave. NE
Are We on the Road to Fascism?

Saturday, July 28

HSNM Speaker Meeting 10am – Noon
Special Collections Library 423 Central Ave. NE

*Humans and the Universe: Astronomy from a Humanist's
Point of View*

by Allen Robnett

Meetings by HSNM Affiliates are held throughout the month.
For more information please visit their websites.

Albuquerque Skeptics

(www.meetup.com/ABQSkeptics)

Freedom From Religion, Albuquerque

(www.meetup.com/FFRABQ)

New Mexicans for Science and Reason (www.nmsr.org)

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

Santa Fe Atheist Community

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

President's Message

by Randall Wall

So much could be said about the American Ethical Unions 103rd Assembly held in Albuquerque in early June! An eye-opening experience to be sure, as members of American indigenous peoples related their experiences of environmental justice, or rather, injustice at the hands of government and corporations. Also on offer were sessions on millennials and their take on justice issues, factory farming, social media, activism, and more! Getting to know more about this group that has existed since 1876 has been most interesting for me. In history it is in many ways familiar, but very different in its approach. A series of on-line meetings are being held a couple of times of month. You can log in with a computer or call in from a phone.

See the AEU meetup site at <https://www.meetup.com/Ethical-Humanists-of-Albuquerque-Meetup/> if you're interested.

A highlight of the conference was hearing Roy Speckhardt, Executive Director at the American Humanist Association, give a keynote talk on Humanism and the Environment.

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.

Officer/Committees

Randall Wall: President

David Stelle: Vice President/Speaker Programs

Cynthianne Yabut: Secretary

Richard Grady: Treasurer

Cheryl Gatner: Member-at-Large

Jeanette Smith: Member-at-Large

A subscription to the 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). Youth/student membership (24 years or under) is \$5.00 per year.

Send subscription or membership requests to: Humanist Society of New Mexico, P.O. Box 27293, Albuquerque, NM 87125-7293.

To join or renew membership on line, go to the website at <http://humanistic/join.html>.

HSNM dues are now paid separately from AHA dues. Visit www.americanhumanist.org for more information about the American Humanist Association.

Send Newsletter submissions to: Editor, Randall Wall, Paragon2012@comcast.net. Send Website submissions to president@humanistsocietyofnm.org. The deadline for Newsletter submissions is the third Friday of each month.

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.

And I am very glad to be able to announce that Mr. Speckhardt has graciously allowed me to print his remarks in our newsletter! Of course, it will be printed in installments, so make sure to keep reading!

July is here and it's getting hot, or have you noticed? Its a pleasure to be able to announce that Allen Robnett will be delivering our next speaker meeting talk on "Humans and the Universe." Allen taught Astronomy for many years, so he knows that of which he speaks! Looking forward to it, Allen!

While I'm mentioning him, I'd like to thank both Allen and Charlene for once again hosting a lovely evening of food and friendship. It was a joy to share conversation and see some talents on display as well!

Next Speaker Meeting

The fourth Saturday Humanist Society meeting on July 28 will feature a presentation by Allen Robnett on astronomy. It will survey how the development of tools for astronomy affected human perceptions of their place in the Universe. It will briefly trace the evolution of space from "The Big Bang," through the creation of heavier elements, to the appearance of stars, galaxies, and black holes. The life cycle of stars will be treated. Special consideration will be given to the details of our back yard, the Solar System.

Speakers Bio

In addition to teaching Astronomy and Physics for many years, Allen presented public lectures on many occasions as a member of the Cumberland Astronomical Society. To house a 12-inch diameter Schmidt-Cassegrain telescope, Allen built an observatory on the roof of the school where he taught, in which he spent many evenings learning about the

heavens. He is constantly keeping up with the latest astronomical developments, which come at an ever-increasing rate.

Humanist Environmentalism

by Roy Speckhardt

As humanists, as ethical culturists, even though we value deed over creed, our convictions still matter.

Even though how we believe is more fundamental to humanism than what we believe, that doesn't mean that we can't find consensus about what makes sense based on our humanist principles and how we apply them to the world around us.

Humanists seek to avoid: over-generalizations, appeals to fear, and arguments not based on credible evidence. Instead, we evaluate policies by considering their consequences to real people. And we know that when we don't have the information needed to accurately predict the consequences, we're often better off withholding judgment, rather than jumping to conclusions.

Challenges that humanity faces are different in different ages and geographies. Today, here, the core humanist issues relate to human rights, scientific integrity, and the rights and liberties that flow from them. And under that framework we aim for civil rights for ethnic minorities, LGBTQ rights, women's rights, secular government, peace, reproductive freedoms and the environment.

As we consider the environment from a humanist perspective it's energizing to see how our positions flow directly from our core humanist principles.

Philosophical Foundations

When it comes to humanism, I argue that our worldview has two foundational principles.

The first is reason, which is found in humanism's unflagging dedication to the scientific method as our source for knowledge, relied upon because experience has proven it reliable. And when you're thinking about making daily decisions using the scientific method, keep in mind that science isn't just something done by

PhD's in lab coats in some ivory tower institutions. It's what we do every day.

When a young child in a high chair takes some of her food and tosses it on the ground to see what happens, that's practicing science.

The second principle is empathy, the capacity to recognize and share feelings experienced by others. In 1933, Albert Einstein wrote: "There is one thing we do know: that we are here for the sake of others—above all for those upon whose smile and well-being our own happiness depends." It's through the cultivation of empathy that we develop a deep-seated compassion for humankind and the world at large. Not only does empathy give rise to compassion, but by understanding others and being better able to walk in their shoes, we intuit an egalitarian-based sense of fairness. This principle of egalitarianism is the conviction that humans are basically equal despite differences in aptitude, and that each person should be treated as having inherent worth. That creates room for differing outcomes based on ability and hard work. But acceptance of inequality between ethnic, cultural or other groups as grounds for discrimination is insupportable.

From here you can see where foundational principles of reason and empathy can be extrapolated to address a myriad of challenges, (and joys), that we face every day.

When it comes to the environment, starting with reason means that once we're exposed to the evidence of shrinking glaciers, rising surface temperatures, and rising sea levels, we are likely to draw the obvious conclusion that climate change is both real and accelerating. It also means accepting what we've learned about climate change and our role as humans in making it steadily worse. Knowing that we are the perpetrators of species extinctions, infertile soils, undrinkable waters, and similar hardships, we are more likely to take responsibility for correcting our course. Not expecting any higher power to save us at the last minute, we are more likely than many to accept that now is the time for us to buckle down and accept some sacrifices in order that generations to come will have a planet to enjoy.

Our empathy and the compassion and egalitarianism that flow from it also encourage us to act on environmental justice issues. In our compassion for the plight of others we can see that environmental problems disproportionately impact minorities. For instance, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, 71 percent of African Americans live in counties that violate federal air pollution standards. Blacks are three times more likely to die from asthma-related problems than whites. Many communities of color lack safe drinking water, swim near waste-contaminated beaches and live near polluted flood waters. And indigent Black and Brown children are eight times more likely to be poisoned by lead. The growing climate change problem means that such communities will soon have to pay more for basic necessities as their prices outstrip growth in wages. So as humanists we can see an additional responsibility to address climate change in order to support social justice.

Non-Human Life

When considering the value we place on the environment, it's worth exploring whether or not humanism is an anthropocentric worldview, the concept that humans are the only, or primary, holders of moral standing.

Should human comfort and convenience be prioritized over all else? Is the only value non-human life holds entirely in relation to our own? That kind of pure anthropocentrism is rather short-sighted and fails to take into consideration the real intrinsic value of other life.

Generally speaking, we do value human life the highest, and there's nothing wrong with that. If anyone had the choice to save two people working in a kennel that was burning down, vs saving fifty pets there, I'd join the vast majority choosing to save the people. But there's a difference between that and failing to appropriately value non-human animals.

Humanists commonly recognize that we are part of an interconnected web of life and that anything significant that impacts one strand can

also shake the web. That's one reason why we're such good environmentalists and support efforts to combat climate change. Humans may be our understandable first interest, but all life and the biosphere itself has value that must be recognized when we discuss the importance of humanity in order to put it in the proper context.

How do we assess such value? Some theists feel entitled to animals as their god-given right, and some animal rights activists might choose the fifty pets over the humans in the thought experiment about the kennel. Humanists tend to be more comfortable seeking a middle path between such endpoints. It's likely impossible to successfully quantify relative value of living things, but even thinking about it may help us recognize that each living thing does indeed have some value. How many chimpanzees would equal the value of a single human life? 5, 10, 20? Even less sensitive humanists wouldn't make the number limitless. If we're considering dogs perhaps we'd be looking at a higher number. Birds might be more still. There must be a way to value all life in our biosphere that contribute to the interconnected web—even rats and ants play their parts.

Think about the *Star Trek* perspective where there's a prime directive not to interfere with the internal development of alien civilizations and a practice of aiming to treat them with respect and value. Even when they found alien life less advanced than humans, they weren't seen solely for their utilitarian benefit to humans. So we might construct an understanding of non-human animals and other life as retaining value independent of humanity.

To be Continued next issue.

Members' Corner

Had a great time at the potluck on the 30th. My jokes went over great! (It's a good sign when people fall down groaning, right?) Next get-together will be September 29th. Suggestions for games and activities gratefully accepted. -Cynthianne