



THE HUMANIST SOCIETY OF NEW MEXICO

NEWSLETTER

November 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, November 10

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

Saturday, November 17

HSNM Topical Discussion 10am – Noon
Special Collections Library 423 Central Ave. NE
Can Creativity Be Fostered?

Saturday, November 24

HSNM Speaker Meeting 10am – Noon
Special Collections Library 423 Central Ave. NE
Beyond Reason and Empathy
Tor Matson

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 Allen Robnett

Randy has passed me the gavel, and I take this opportunity to express my delight in finding such a great philosophical home full of so many wonderful friends. It is said that a man grows into the office that he holds, and I am hopeful that I may grow to deserve the confidence that you have placed in me.

As recently as two years ago, I was only vaguely aware that any humanist organizations existed, yet, for decades I have called myself a humanist. How can that be? Well, I had long since concluded that all supernatural phenomena exist only in the human mind, and that as a result, it is up to humans to find meaning in life and to foster a caring and just society.

If there is an underlying theme to my tenure as president, I hope that it will be “Make a Difference.” We derive much satisfaction in untangling many of the world's problems on Saturday mornings, and then revert to focusing on our own problems on Saturday afternoon and the rest of the week. We will be looking for ways to “Let Our Little Light Shine.” I have already received several

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

Allen Robnett: President

Charlene Baker: Vice President/Speaker Programs

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Richard Grady: Treasurer

David Stelle: Member-at-Large

Terry Sloan: Member-at-Large

Randall Wall: Past President/Newsletter Editor

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.

suggestions that can move us in that direction. I will immediately follow up on those suggestions, and continue to solicit more suggestions.

An underlying goal for the past several months has been attacking the number one problem of our area, the terrible twins of poverty and crime. Politicians garner votes by promising to get tough on crime, in spite of the fact that the incarceration rate in the United States is already roughly four times that of most other countries. (Fact-checked).

A rational approach would begin by determining what causes so many to reject the norms of our society. Many of us hold fast to the idea that education is the key, beginning with simple literacy. A survey by the New Mexico Coalition for Literacy found that 46% of New Mexicans read at or below level two (example: able to locate a street intersection on a map). To grasp the enormity of the problem, compare this with the fact that 64% of jobs today require a literacy level above two.

A final word about goals: exhorting you to vote would be a case of preaching to the choir. On the other hand, don't forget that 60% of registered voters do not bother to vote in mid-term elections. If you can arrange for just one uninvolved but blue-leaning individual to vote, you will have doubled your vote.

Next Speaker Meeting

A talk about the evolution of human culture and experience, and some ideas about future forms, systems, and possibilities. From prehistory to a sustainable, ethical, and appropriate future culture, by way of Spiral Dynamics, cognitive science, Permaculture, and an integral, whole-system view.

Speaker's Bio

Tor Matson is a systems thinker and aspiring systems builder, and his book *Why Everything Sucks And How To Fix It* will be finished eventually when the stars align, perhaps this solstice. He is currently looking for property for a sustainable village project somewhere in NM.

Humanist Environmentalism

by Roy Speckhardt, Executive Director, American Humanist Association

(Continued from August newsletter)

Standard of Living vs the Environment

There are many challenges and trade-offs to consider when we seek to address environmental degradation. Perhaps today's greatest challenge is grappling with how to raise worldwide standards of living in an equitable manner while simultaneously addressing the continuously deteriorating environment upon which our very existence depends.

Think about the great lifesaving work the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is doing to reduce malaria deaths, and UNICEF's work to support child health and nutrition. Of course we support these good works, but they will result in more people surviving and increasing their standards of living, which will also mean they will have a greater environmental impact. This leads to tough moral questions about what we prioritize in our efforts to safeguard the environment and help struggling populations.

Fortunately there are some areas we can expend our energies that will help with both aspects. Education about environmental degradation, family planning, and conservation can go a long way toward improving global prospects for the future while helping individuals in their specific situations.

As with other serious questions in humanism, we have to learn from history when we address the present. Recent Humanist of the Year, Jared Diamond's book *Collapse* as well as *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, detail some historical success stories that actually worked.

In past Japanese and New Guinean societies, people learned to avoid the devastating environmental effects of deforestation by replanting trees at rates that exceeded the harvesting of their natural resources. Over recent years, Costa Rica leveraged eco-tourism to its benefit, and Denmark now generates most of its energy from renewable sources.

The island of Hispaniola provides a strong example as well. As you likely know, Hispaniola contains two countries, the Dominican Republic to the West and Haiti to the East. While their differing colonial histories were certainly a factor in what we see today, environmentalism also played a major role. Whereas Haiti didn't address deforestation, the Dominican Republic actually made it a capital offense to chop down trees. I don't advocate for capital punishment for any purpose, and most of us would find it an appalling to even consider such extreme measures. It does, however indicate just how serious the Dominican government was about conservation. The different orientation toward forest conservation by the Dominican Republic vs Haiti contributed to a radically different reality for the Dominicans as opposed to their Haitian neighbors. In Haiti the clear cutting lead to massive soil erosion, reduction of land for crops, and widespread food shortages. While the Dominican Republic is far from rich, its economy is much more robust than Haiti's, the single poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

Diamond also pointed out spectacular failures we can learn from, such as when Easter Island was deforested to the point that the island could no longer sustain its once robust culture. He even pointed out how it was a logical personal economic decision to cut down the last tree on the island, but a devastating decision for their society. We have to be forward thinking and implement the necessary regulations and norms in our culture so it doesn't become advantageous to damage our resources beyond recovery.

While there are declines evident around the world in places where deforestation has gone unchecked, we can gain encouragement from the successes and be optimistic that if we make the effort, social transformation can and will happen.

That said, we should have a complete picture of what we're up against and how far reaching environmental issues can be.

For example, Diamond also offered an explanation for the horrific ethnic cleansing in Rwanda that's completely separate from the ethnic hatred between the Hutus and Tutsis. Instead of tragically preventable ethnic violence, Diamond paints a picture of unsustainability that was headed toward an inevitable train wreck. He described how *years* before the human disaster, Rwanda experienced a few years of unusually high rainfall, which resulted in significantly increased crop yield and a major baby boom. On top of that environmental coincidence are Rwanda's inheritance practices, where sons split the land of their fathers. That led to steadily diminishing land for food that accelerated dramatically during this time of population increase. The ratio of persons per acre was gradually increasing for years, but it spiked just before the disaster to levels significantly beyond the capacity of the land to support the people. 40% of the people were consuming at or below famine levels.

In post-analysis of the resultant massacre, it was discovered that just as many Hutus were killed by Hutus as were killed by Tutsis, and Tutsis were killing Tutsis as well. The evidence shows this was no accident. Diamond's explanation connects the facts. His argument was that ethnic rivalry was just the spark that ignited the fuel of overpopulation and impending starvation into a battle for resources.

Unfortunately, this situation is going to be more common worldwide as the global population continues to explode. As Al Gore mentions in *An Inconvenient Truth*, we've already surpassed the number of people our planet can handle for a sustained period. We may not be too many decades from a time when crises like the one in Rwanda are seen around the globe.

I want to leave you with these final thoughts. I don't have all the answers, but am convinced that we need to act quickly on broad scope measures that will address the strains of overpopulation on our planet and reverse our negative global trajectory. Behavior changes are needed that reduce our ecological footprint. And global

lifestyle changes are needed so that we lessen the burden we place on our planet and can live better lives. While there's no silver bullet answer to the ecological conundrums we now face, waiting for disaster is just not a humanist option. So let's use all we know to alleviate the problems now, and use humanist reasoning to find better solutions for the future.

We humanists help ourselves by being active in environmental justice as well as other social justice measures. Being a humanist should suggest that we recognize the responsibility to maintain the earth as an interesting and wonderful place to live – its plants, animals, lakes and skies need to be preserved, not turned into junk piles, toxic dumps, and deforested wastelands.

We need to include kindness to non-human animals because cruelty or indifference to suffering is not a sign of a joyful life being well lived.

We need to check our population growth because we don't need more and more individuals, who are too stressed and struggling for survival to even take a stroll in the forest.

And we need to make the world a better place for ourselves, for future generations, and for all of life as we know it.

These things are the core of humanism.

HSNM News

Roadrunner Food Bank Donations

HSNM makes a yearly donation to the Roadrunner Food Bank. If you want to participate, give a check made out to "Roadrunner Food Bank" with "HSNM donation" on the memo line to a board member at one of our monthly meetings, OR mail it to HSNM, PO box 27293, Albuquerque, NM 87125-7293. Alternatively, bring non-perishable food items to a meeting.

Holiday Party

Our Holiday party is going to be December 29 at Charlene & Allen's house (9724 Loretta Dr. NW) from 2 pm to 6 pm, with a buffet at 4. It's potluck- drinks, napkins, utensils provided- bring your favorite food to share.