



THE
HUMANIST SOCIETY
OF NEW MEXICO
NEWSLETTER

December 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, December 8

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

Saturday, December 15

HSNM Topical Discussion 10 am to Noon
Special Collections Library 423 Central Ave. NE
Fostering Community Without Religion

Saturday, December 29

HSNM Holiday Party

At Charlene & Allen's house (9724 Loretta Dr. NW) from
2 pm to 6 pm, with a buffet at 4 pm. It's a potluck—
drinks, napkins, utensils provided—bring your favorite
food to share.

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

There is a bright spot in the crime statistics. In his *Albuquerque Journal* column a few weeks ago, Argus Hamilton surveyed world-wide statistics and discovered that, though our homes and streets aren't safe, judging by antiperspirant sales, we have the best-protected armpits.

We are not “a political group” but we definitely cannot be an “a-political group” if we are to make a difference in our goal to foster a caring and just society. I probably had lots of company in becoming depressed when it became clear that the US senate would remain in the hands of those who have tried so hard to undo the social legislation of the last century, (I had prayed hard for a supernatural miracle, but my credit is pretty low up there.) But in retrospect, the results could not have reasonably been expected to turn out any better; ten Democratic senators were up for re-election in states that Trump won handily in 2016.

George Lakoff's name has been prominent in our meetings for some time now. He points out, very effectively, that conservatives long ago recognized that followers are won over by appealing to core values (gut issues) rather than to

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

Teri 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.

reason, and by repeating a message, valid or not, over and over again. Donald Trump learned the lesson well. To quote Argus Hamilton again, Trump exults that under his administration the year is now 2018, and that number is the highest that it has ever been.

Roy Speckhardt has encouraged humanists everywhere to come out of the closet and let our voices be heard. George Lakoff, in his *Little Blue Book*, which is a guide to thinking and talking from a liberal, progressive, point of view, ends each chapter from 10 through 18 with a message titled, "Here is what to say." I highly recommend that each of us read it, but the core issue is, don't repeat the conservative propaganda, not even in rebutting it. Every iteration of it makes the brain connections stronger. Instead, merely state the related facts in terms that you want to implant in the subconscious. For example, never use the expression "smaller government"; instead we should dwell on the fact that government will occur one way or another, either government by the Public or by government by corporations.

Lakoff uses the word "Public" with a capital "P" to refer, not just to "the people" but also to all of the public institutions that provide for our safety, education, business infrastructure, etc. His suggestions for framing discussions sometimes seem out of joint with common discourse, but that is principally because spreading of the conservative point of view is so far ahead of us humanists chronologically.

Think carefully about the peripheral connections in framing what you say.

Report on the Informal Meeting by Allen Robnett

The HSNM meeting on November 10, 2018 was our regular "What's On Your Mind" second Saturday meeting. V.P. Charlene Baker led off with a request for suggestions on speakers and

topics for our 4th Saturday “Speaker Meetings” for the coming year.

It was agreed that it would be a worthwhile goal to get into a position to invite a national figure like Dan Barker or Kendrick Frazier to speak, but that we would have to greatly expand our ability to draw an audience first.

The president was chided for using the phrase “blue-leaning” in last month’s newsletter. There was a presidential apology, but I happen to know that the presidential fingers were crossed under the table.

There were very lively discussions of the significance of the blue wave and of the greatly increased percentage of women holding public office. The senate results were disappointing, but to be expected given the over-whelming preponderance of contests for Senate seats from regions that gave Trump double-digit leads in 2016. In New Mexico, the blue wave was phenomenal, including the second congressional district where a Hispanic woman Democrat was elected.

The demonstrable effect of women in government, not only in the US. but world-wide, was a subject of lively discussion.

The play *Farragut North* was extolled as an excellent treatment of the lust for power and the costs one will endure for achieving it. Victims are truth, loyalty and character.

The effects of climate change was tied in to the terrible fires in California, and low-lying property loss in places like North Carolina. It was noted that even Trump is grudgingly making changes in his characterizations of the subject. It was stressed that it is a terrible legacy for our offspring.

It was deemed likely that there are biological and perhaps genetic differences in the brains of liberals and conservatives that lead to such diametrically opposed conclusions in so many areas, especially as concerns personal freedoms when they come into conflict with the health of the society.

The question was raised of why Jewish communities have been subjected to so much animosity over such a long period of time and such a wide geographical area. Proposed answers included jealousy, blame for the death of Jesus, and their tendency to want to remain apart.

Report on Topical Discussion Meeting – Can Creativity Be Fostered?

The HSNM meeting on November 17, 2018 was our selected topic meeting, for which the topic was “Can Creativity be fostered?” It was pointed out that the word “fostered” was very appropriate; It can not be taught or demanded, but it seems likely that there are steps one can take to foster creativity in children, in employees, and even in ourselves. We are likely to say, “I know it when I see it,” but find creativity difficult to define. That may be due to the fact that it occurs in so many different forms and levels.

Creativity is evident in solving problems; necessity is the mother of invention. Creativity is a prerequisite for success in the arts; Mozart was cited as an outstanding example of magnificent creativity in the work of a young child. Creativity is a necessity in the language arts; writers of prose and poetry in some cases have to be creative on demand. It could be argued that humans exercise creativity in simply speaking; ideas emerge from the subconscious as concepts for which we must find words to convey their meaning to others. This is especially clear in the use of novel metaphors.

It was suggested that creativity requires a healthy brain, and that even adequate sleep has an effect. The phrase “thinking outside the box” came up frequently in our discussions. This entails ignoring preconceived notions and limitations. Unstructured play time for children is probably an essential part of fostering creativity. Creativity is closely linked to giving the imagination free rein.

It was observed that there are prominent political systems in the world today that strongly discourage creative thinking. And religions in general tend to be repressive and encourage conformity.

Report on HSNM November Speaker Meeting: Tor Matson on “Beyond Reason and Empathy” by Zelda Gatuskin

We had sixteen members and visitors in attendance at the meeting, in which Tor Matson gave an overview of the book he’s writing, *Why Everything Sucks and How To Fix It*. He organized his talk into two parts as with his book. In the first half of the meeting he explained “why everything sucks,” and in the second half he shared his ideas

about “how to fix it.” Tor allowed ample time for questions and comments in both segments, and discussion was lively. Here is a brief overview of key points and audience response.

Tor explained that upon being invited to speak to our group, he did a little research on humanism and learned that its central ideals are reason and empathy. Putting this in the context of his own premise about human evolution, he asked himself what might be *beyond* reason and empathy, hence the title of his talk. The premise of his work is that “we are evolving members of an evolving species on an evolving planet.” He defines evolution as “change for the better.” However, the fact of evolution itself is not universally accepted; it is disputed by young-earthers, all evidence to the contrary; and there are objections from secularists as well, specifically those who view people as “nasty, brutish and short” and in need of rigid systems of control to rein in our violent tendencies.

Tor referenced Steven Pinker and Ken Wilber to support his view that humans are becoming less violent and that we are “evolving into compassion.” Wilber, in his Integral Theory model, correlates the stages of human biological life to the stages of human personal and social evolution, moving through infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and, hopefully, even beyond to still higher levels of self-awareness, rationality and compassion. When Tor described the highest level identified in Wilber’s scheme, in which we turn away from the concept of otherness and seek to build “good systems” that work for everyone, some discussion ensued about “good” being a value judgment and not a very useful word here. But there seemed to be consensus that it would be a good thing to end environmental destruction and alleviate human suffering, and that those ills of our society are closely related.

Tor concluded the first part of his talk by stating that he is an “anti-civilization theorist” and cited Derrick Jensen’s conclusions about cities being like empires, in that they contain more people than resources, and as such appropriate raw materials, export violence and pollution, and promote competition. This assertion generated a lot of discussion concerning biological vs. cultural evolution, epigenetics, and Lamarckian theory.

Tor began the second portion of his talk, “how to fix it,” by stating that “we need to be better tomorrow than we are today.” He described the American way of life as being a result of a corporate agenda in which consumerism is the main objective, with ecological and human suffering being the outcome. Tor cited some examples of positive developments away from this model, such as co-operatives, community gardens, and corporate restructuring that empowers workers. The solution to the problems of cities, Tor stated, would be the creation of local, sustainable, cooperatively managed ecovillages. He is in the process of looking for land to undertake just such an endeavor. As for the question Tor posed at the start: Is there something beyond reason and empathy? His answer was a gratifying (to us humanists) “not really” with the caveat, “except for better integration of that reason and empathy” within ourselves and our society.

There was a good discussion to complete the meeting. In general, I would say that participants had little quarrel with the values and ideals that Tor expressed. There was less acceptance of Tor’s ideas about cities and how to fix our world—we like diversity, cultural exchanges, bananas, coffee, movies, technology, and all those things cities and civilization bring. Tor acknowledged that cities themselves evolve, and the change he seeks is not likely to come with an overturning of one system for another but with a gradual greening, re-purposing and re-envisioning of our existing cities and communities. Terry Sloan provided a positive summing up at the end when he stated his own view that, “Improving cities and society is going to happen naturally.... We are seeing a drift toward a much better human race.”

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.