



Humanist Society of New Mexico



August 2010

<http://humanistsocietyofnm.org/> fmarch@thinkwellassociates.com

Quote of the Month

The intoxication of anger, like that of the grape, shows us to others, but hides us from ourselves.

John Dryden

Few is the number who think with their own minds and feel with their own hearts.

Albert Einstein

Upcoming HSNM Meetings

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

Saturday, August 14th

Informal Meeting

General Discussion

Visitors please contact Fred March at 505-323-6784 for details or questions.

Refreshments: Carolyn Jo Glen Kaye

Summit Apartments, 3901 Indian School NE

Saturday, August 21st

Topical Discussion

What is Democracy and Can We Have It?
Erna Fergusson Library, 3700 San Mateo Blvd. NE

Saturday, August 28th

Speaker Meeting

The Raucous Caucus

By Zelda Gatuskin

Humanist Minute: Ted Cloak

Refreshments: John Waldrop

UNM Law School, Room 2406, 1117 Stanford NE

HSNM Family Co-op

Alternative Children's Sunday School

Call 505-292-4375 for meeting times

Santa Fe Humanists

Saturday, August 7th, 10:30am

Incorporeal Individualism

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

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

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
(HSNM)**

A Membership 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

Frederic March: President

Bill Little: Vice President/Programs

Jerry Wesner: Past President

John Waldrop: Treasurer

Secretary: Open

Ron Herman: Director of Classes

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Phil Smith: Webmaster

Membership Director: Open

Social Coordinator: Open

Publicity Director: Open

Family Co-op: Open

Friendly Philosopher Director : Attila Csanyi

Subscription to HSNM Newsletter, published
monthly, accompanies AHA/HSNM
membership or can be obtained by
nonmembers for \$15 annually. Send
subscription and membership request to:
Humanist Society of New Mexico, P.O. Box
13675, Albuquerque, NM 87192. Send
Newsletter submissions to: Editor, Randall
Wall at Email paragon2012@comcast.net

The deadline
for Newsletter submissions is the third
Saturday of each month.

**Excerpts from Zelda Gatuskin's Lecture on
The Arts and Sciences**

Excerpt II, Part Two

How did these artists of the past get away with it? They simply gave credit to God. They asserted that they were merely conduits of God's grace, celebrants of God's creation; they did not compete with God but served and exalted Him. And they meant it. So maybe their conception of God was broader than that which the church espoused. And maybe life experience had shown them that their skills had not been deposited as a measure of "talent " into their beings, but came from their own will and study and practice. This only awed them more. It only made them more devoted to their work. Artists practice art the way others practice religion. We are freethinkers and we are religious. We are even prone to proselytize - as I am doing today - we think everyone should spend some time with the arts.

Which brings me to my critique of the humanist movement from an artist's perspective. When I began getting to know humanism and trying to figure out what it means to me personally to be a humanist, I found the philosophy to be a naturally good fit. Further, I felt that what made it a good fit for me also made humanism a good fit for other artists - the spirit of exploration, civic-mindedness, open-mindedness, rejection of authoritarianism... I concluded that the practice and study of the Arts is fundamentally a humanist endeavor, and wondered why the arts received such short shrift in the humanist literature. It seemed to me that the Arts could and should be as rich a source of instruction in humanist principles and the skills we need to promote them as are the Sciences.

But so much of what comes across in the humanist argument has to do with science and reason. Leading me to ask: Is art unreasonable? Is art unscientific? Is art optional? Is art so utterly subjective that it has nothing to offer but "activities " and sentimental cultural attachments? Or maybe art is too elitist, too reliant on "talent " to find its place among non-artists, except in the context of something to be sold and consumed. I would like to dispel all of those notions and propose that

Artists and Humanists have a lot to offer each other. That the Arts and Sciences belong together.

The Arts and Sciences, quite simply, encompass everything. This is the place of freedom, where every kind of thing can be looked at in every kind of way. If we truly love humanity, and desire to understand ourselves and our world and to improve the human condition, then all things human must be open for discussion. And that includes all of the products of the human imagination.

Poet and Painter of the Present

By Donald Gutierrez

Both D. H. Lawrence and Claude Monet were obsessed with the present, Lawrence even coining terms for it--Momentaneity, the Now. Monet pursued its essence by, among other things, doing a series of works on or studies of the same object (the Rouen Cathedral, the humble haystack) at different times of the day or evening, sometimes frustrated that pictorial depictions would, to his mind, never catch the Essence--though he certainly caught something essential. Lawrence's pursuit of the Present was different: "...there is another kind of poetry (than that of the past and future): the poetry of that which is at hand: the immediate present. In the immediate present there is no perfection, no consummation, nothing finished. The strands are flying, quivering, intermingling into the web, the waters are shaking the moon ("Preface to the American Edition of New Poems, "Selected Essays 287). This poetics of incompleteness and immediacy seems markedly different from the esthetic of Monet, who once said: "Because of the constant changes /of nature/ I am just running after nature without being able to capture it. The rivers empties, fills up again, one day it's green, then yellow, then dries up" (Serge George,

Like Lawrence, Monet was fascinated by flux: What is important about this subject (his famous pond at Giverny) is reflecting water where nature is all the time changing owing to the patches of sky that are reflected in it and that give it life and movement" (51). "All his life," George says, "Monet sought to capture an instant picture of the ever-changing relationship between light and nature" (63). Monet wanted to capture the infinite in the finite, the eternal in the moment. This of course is the ultimate ambition of any serious work of art. But Lawrence, seemingly, would have none of that: "Don't give me the infinite or the eternal...Give me the still, white seething, the incandescence and the coldness of the incarnate moment...the Now" (Selected Essays 288). "Poetry of the instant present," he continues, "cannot

have the same body or the same motion as the poetry of the before and after...It is never finished...there is no static perfection, none of the finality which we find so frightening

This finality might be frightening, Lawrence implies, because it suggests the finality of death or of other kinds of inexorable limits. Something "finished," "perfect," "final" intimates the past, that which is final and thus dead. This "deadness" is part of Lawrence's objections in *Etruscan Places* to museums and Roman civilization--a certain repression, rigidification and monumentalization of life and culture that he found stifling, totalitarian, ultimately anti-life. The opposition of the fulfilling moment and paralyzing permanency even assumes an ideological edge in that invigorated little travel book when he says "They /the Romans/ hated the phallus and the ark, because they wanted empire and dominion, and above all, riches: social gain. You cannot dance gaily to the double flute and at the same time conquer nations or rake in large sums of money" (D. H. Lawrence and Italy, *Etruscan Places* 14).

Is Monet, then, frightened by whatever in life seems vulnerable to its exigencies, threats, uncertainties, dangers? Perhaps. And perhaps not. Surely, Monet's despoitions were primarily esthetic, and, in his early years, subsisential, rather than existential--a near-starving artist with a family to support, his work derided by the conventional, art-market taste of the day and decade. His searing resolve was to capture the sense of reality on a canvas and that reality was LIGHT, la lumiere! Monet himself put his artistic plight most suggestively: "I am simply expending my efforts upon a maximum of appearances in close correlation with unknown realities, or at least from what we can know of it" (William Seitz, "Monet and Abstract Painting," *Monet: A Retrospective*, Charles F Stuckey, ed. 387). This sentiment approaches painting (and particularly Monet's series-painting method) as a strategy of esthetic incrementalism in dealing with the mystical. It also begins to suggest what a philosophically, psychologically and spiritually subtle enterprise snaring the present in the golden cage of art can be. It suggests, too, boldness that Monet shares with Lawrence in refusing to concede any victory to that "frightening reality" that Lawrence disavows.

According to the art historian Kenneth Clark, "The sensation of light was the only true subject" for Monet" (*Painters on Painting* 127). Clark, I feel, is misleading here. With the major exception of Abstract Expressionism, light has significance in artworks only or mainly by what it falls on or imbues. Certainly one could imagine "pure light" in the sky, but even then the sky is, if you will, the "object" endowing light with definition,

with form. And Monet, with his bumpkin haystacks and scintillant rivers and murky/gorgeous cathedrals and magically hazy London sites and Venetian palaces and luscious water-lilies and pulsing sea shores and skinny poplars certainly was dependent on objects in his obsessed pursuit of light. Granted, Monet turns the great Rouen cathedral into magnificently diverse baroque spectacles of form as encrusted golden-brown, olive, yellow, and yellow-green light. But does the light in a painting lack significance unless one sees the paintings as illuminating objects, places, earthly presences? As is well known, many of Monet's late water-lily paintings, which magnificently balance light and dark colors, numinously suggest minute multiverses teeming with a pictorial life less and less dependent on figuration for its esthetic identification.

What does Monet's frustrated (he would destroy some of his canvases in a rage) yet exalted condition have to do with D. H. Lawrence's exaltation of the moment, his celebration of the very entity or phenomenon fleeing like a fish right before his eyes? In Lawrence's early-middle-period poem "A Young Wife," the wife describes her love in complex terms--"The pain of loving you is almost more than I can bear." The poem gives a variety of metaphoric dramatizations of this condition and ends up repeating the first two lines, suggesting a youthful marriage haunted by death, and, in this poet and poem, the death of a dominant mother). So time in the poem remains very much in the present, the "problem" unresolved at this stage. (Later in the series Look! We Have Come Through! its resolution would be figuratively dramatized in Lawrence's long, apocalyptic and still underrated poem "New Heaven and Earth") . Is the poem then unfinished artistically? Is it incomplete? I think not, if one prizes honesty in a verse and is receptive to Lawrence's poetics of confronting the present in all its transience, incompleteness, rawness and instantaneity ("the strands...all flying," etc.). This is a particularly difficult poetics to realize in practice, as Lawrence suggests in his more well-known credal poem, "Song of a Man Who Has Come Through":

A fine wind is blowing the new direction
of Time. If only I let it bear me, carry me,
if only it carry me!The rock will split, we
shall come at the wonder, we shall find the
Hesperides...

Lawrence here is pondering more than how to wait for inspiration to write a poem, but he is addressing that too. The kind of exquisite sensitivity to that "wind" (soul, Holy Spirit, inspiration, creative energy) is,

according to Lawrence, what poetry of the present requires. Monet too is after light reflection with endless series after series. What wonders (some would say to this day) he might have achieved with a movie camera!

But of course he didn't use one and perhaps wouldn't have. In any case, Monet caught his eternal moment, his Moment, supremely, in many works, but certainly in a 1922-24 work called "Les Bassin aux Nymphaes, le Soir." Huge in size, roughly 16 feet by 24 feet, this "evening" depiction of probably the most famous art pond in the world not only glorifies light and dark of the flowered water; it also memorializes color in form, the form of a recognizable entity called a lily pond, but, again, that form as color that itself reflects light (and dark) as the passing of time.

The French statesman and journalist, George Clemenceau, a close friend of Monet and admirer of his work, suggests a numinous dimension in Monet's water lilies: "Wherever one cast's one's eye upon Monet's Water Lilies, space seems to extend in opposite directions or never to demand focus" (Monet: A Retrospective 29). Clemenceau implies that Monet subtly resolves the esthetic problem of form (and thus of space-time) by transcending it through the "emancipation" of space and form from precise or literal objectification. Monet's are waterlilies that achieve their enormous powers of evocativeness and mysticism through his bold, almost maniacal pursuit of the Now of light and shadow to be both water lilies and some immense order of abstraction beyond water lilies, some galaxy of the super-imagination. This perhaps is why one might feel that Monet has envisioned infinity in his depiction of his pond. Thus, instead of catching the quicksilver of the moment, the Frenchman might have tumbled the viewer into a watery flower-and-leaf stretch of a vastness beyond conception. With that ambition, no wonder he occasionally stomped his first studies and some finished work as well!

The work (the ecstasy) of art has transformed the moment in all its evanescence into an order of permanence; Monet through art has rendered that magical paradox, the eternal moment. Color reproduced by Monet from the passing instant of phenomena crystallizes water and water plant and evening light on art's own terms--and that is what art does in its arrogant and noble resistance to the present dissolving into the past or the future. Both Monet and Lawrence in different art media and from different vitalistic slants are trying to hold the moment fast and thus, paradoxically, perhaps contradictorily, make it last.

Lawrence addresses his Moment in his Birds, Beasts and Flowers poem "Fish" by means of a poetics of the

present, a free-verse prosody, an acute descriptiveness and, finally, a philosophy that he idealizes in fish but makes clear humans (including himself) have not yet achieved--something one could call the Higher Insouciance:

Fish, of fish So little matters. Whether the waters rise and cover the earth

Or whether the waters wilt in the hollow places

All one to you.

Aqueous subaqueous

Submerged

And wave-thrilled

As the waters roll

Roll you

....

Never know

Never grasp.

....

One lives the eternal moment when, like Lawrentian fish, s/he arrives at an indifference delightedly above (or below) the passing of time and its transformation of the face of things.

In discussing these artists keenly attracted to the flux in life, the Reality of the present, the moment as Moment, one confronts the paradox that both try to snare that fleeting time direction that conceivably doesn't even exist (unless one is generous about what constitutes its boundaries). One doesn't catch or capture a flux. The river is always moving past us, suggesting either that past and future contain and conceal the present, or, conversely, that past and future are part of a flow that is ever-present. One reason Monet late in life seized upon a pond is that although it doesn't move it certainly changes in tone, shading, texture, in what French artists all "effet." Undoubtedly the light and dark in Monet's pond "moved." But Monet, if not imprisoning that movement, represented and celebrated it as, to use Alfred North Whiteheads's superbly paradoxical phrase, a "finite perfection." And Lawrence--he may never have secured his Higher Insouciance as much as he might have wished, but his fish will keep darting and gliding and poising still as enigmatic fauna in our minds forever, that Moment of art--which is always there--vibrating in the Present that is, perhaps, always and never.

The Greater Worcester Humanists Take on the Boy Scouts of America

By Jessica Sheehy

For Humanist Network News

July 14, 2010

While the debate rages on regarding the Boy Scouts of America's discriminatory membership policy--which denies membership to atheists and the LGBT community--the public has heard from countless organizational leaders representing atheists, LGBT rights advocates and even many religious communities about the injustice of the policy.

For their part, the BSA's national leaders have made their support for the discriminatory policy clear, while some former scouts have taken it upon themselves to speak out both in favor and against the policy. There is one tier within the Boys Scouts hierarchy, however, which has remained notably silent: local BSA groups.

Many local BSA leaders have yet to make their positions public. Privately, they tell members and potential donors that they reject the national policy of discrimination that's been put in place above their heads, but according to the national standards, local troops are in practice compelled to comply.

This double talk and hands-off attitude allows the BSA to maintain support for local divisions all over the country while keeping unpopular policies in place. If the BSA is fighting so hard for their "right" to discriminate, then someone somewhere must be making use of it, but the local groups aren't owning up.

However, one American Humanist Association chapter, the Greater Worcester Humanists, has had enough and is urging local BSA leaders to speak up in response to questions that have long gone unanswered. Their argument: the Boy Scouts cannot be allowed to continue trying to get support from people on both sides of the issue and the public deserves to know exactly where the local BSA groups stand.

Three Massachusetts BSA leaders were publicly contacted: Matthew Conlon and Jay Garee from the Mohegan Council, and Gerald Bieler from the Nashua Valley Council.

Of the three emails sent by the GWH to local leaders, not a single one was answered--which suggests that they

have a lot to work out within their organizations.

American Humanist Association chapters and affiliates all over the country are encouraged to make an issue of the contradictions within their own local BSA groups and keep the pressure on local officials to answer publicly. With enough outcry, BSA leaders will be forced to break their silence and issue a response.

And if people consistently reject any contradiction and demand clarification, every possible outcome is better than the current situation.

The most desirable result of course would be that the local leaders stand up to the national figureheads as a demonstration that their policies need to change to meet both internal and external demands. If their stance causes further uproar, it would finally be in the BSA's best interest to change their policy.

However, the BSA higher-ups might still refuse to change. David Niose, president of the American Humanist Association and of the Greater Worcester Humanists, suggests that, if after publicly speaking out against the policy of discrimination without change within the national BSA, local leaders could break off and create an all-inclusive BSA alternative. If they did so, they would surely gain wide support from the public.

And even if the local leaders do concede and begin openly discriminating, at the very least the American people would breathe easier knowing where the BSA stands and they could take it upon themselves to boycott a shamelessly hypocritical and discriminatory organization. This would certainly change the BSA's reputation and, rather than being tricked and deceived, people could make informed decisions. The result over time would be a nation-wide loss of support for the BSA.

It should be made clear, however, that this is not an attack on the local council leaders. They are the ones who work so hard, often as volunteers, to help local children grow into respectful and capable adults. The Telegram & Gazette quoted GWH spokesman Christopher Lackey as saying, "It's our understanding that the local councils are run by decent people who want to do the right thing and it's a shame that the national BSA casts a cloud of intolerance over scouting."

We can only hope that these decent people will speak up and that improvements can be made so that boys of all creeds, orientations and varying capabilities can choose to participate in an organization like the scouts.

Friendly Philosophers

Monday, August 2nd

Open Forum

Bring a Your Own Topic for General Discussion

Monday, August 16th

The Magic of Fractals

Dave Thomas

Copper Canyon Restaurant, 5455 Gibson (opposite Lovelace Hospital) in conference dining room.

Dinner at 5:30; talk follows.

The Atheists and Freethinkers of New Mexico

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

Sunday, August 1st, 9am

Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice, 202 Harvard SE

Tuesday, August 17th

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

New Mexicans for Science and Reason

Wednesday, August 11th, 7pm

Scientific Paranormal Investigation: How to Solve Unexplained Mysteries

Benjamin Radford

UNM Law Building

1117 Stanford NE, Room 2402

Freedom From Religion

Saturday, August 21st, 2pm

Discussion of Projects

UNM Law School, Room 2406

Albuquerque Philosophy Meetup Group

Wednesday, August 11st, 7pm

Wednesday, August 25th, 7pm

Varied Topics

For location see: www.meetup.com/philosophy-229