



Humanist Society of New Mexico



February 2007

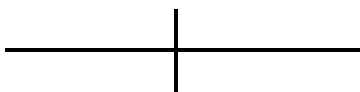
www.humanists.net/nm/ fmarch@thinkwellassociates.com

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I am very excited by the Education Committee's progress in planning a series of lectures to attract people in the community, some of whom would likely want to join the HSNM. This would lead to further steps in the development of a humanist institute along the lines of a master plan that Ron Herman developed with the committee. I am especially pleased to report that we now have a fund of about \$2,800 in support of this endeavor, thanks to some very generous contributions. I suggest that we all think about making a pledge, within our respective means, to Ron Herman (RHerman847@aol.com).

This Sunday morning's discussion group topic was "Strategies for Engaging the Public on Humanist Issues." It was very lively, especially when Ted Cloak captivated us with a description of his anthropology field work in Trinidad. He had attended a lengthy syncretic religious service that combined elements of Christianity and African Yoruba influence in a vivid and creative ceremony with music, dancing, firelight, and spirit possession. This of course was not to suggest a way to engage our New Mexico public, but to provide insight into the personal and community power of religion. Our current strategy for public engagement is to use our lecture series to offer topics of interest to a humanist-minded public, and to make the most of publicity in doing so. So we will need your help. Specifically we will need people to work on publicity and membership tasks. There are current Board openings for positions to do that for the HSNM. Please e-mail me if you would like to serve as a leader or as a helper with either of these activities.

Fred March



Upcoming HSNM Meetings

Meetings run from 10:00 to noon and are free and open to the public.

Saturday, February 10, 2007

Informal Meeting

General Discussion

Summit Apartments, 3901 Indian School, NE

Saturday, February 17, 2007

Topical Discussion

The New Congress: How Can it End War and Achieve Peace

Note: No Food or Drink

Meet at Special Collections Library, 423 Central Ave. NE
(NW corner Edith and Central - parking on the street.)

Saturday, February 24, 2007

The Uses of Mythology

Harry Willson

UNM Law School, Room 2406, 1117 Stanford NE

HSNM Book Club

Sunday, February 11

February selection, *Sam Harris'*
"Letter to a Christian Nation"

Title Wave Books, 1408 Eubank, 2-4PM

Santa Fe Humanists

Saturday, February 3, 10:30 am

General Discussion

Main Branch, Santa Fe Public Library, 145
Washington. St.

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.

DEMOCRATS DISAPPOINT AMERICAN VOTERS

Most progressives, including, I imagine, most Humanists, are becoming increasingly exasperated by the failure of Congressional Democrats to do the bidding of the voters who put or kept them in office in November. Virtually all commentators and pollsters have concluded that the two principal messages the majority of voters were trying to communicate are that

US involvement in Iraq should cease – sooner, rather than later – and that they vehemently disapprove of the way President Bush is doing his job.

The Congressional Democrats have not suggested that they disagree, but they also have made almost no effort to fulfill the voters' expectations. They seem to imagine that supporting Representative Jim McGovern's resolution to cut off funds for the war (which would protect American troops as they depart) or at least taking some action to obstruct Bush's apparent plans (at the time of this writing) for a surge in troops in Iraq could subject them to criticism for being "weak" on national security. This timidity is only likely to anger American voters and harm Democratic prospects in '08. Their perpetual fear of appearing insufficiently tough was shown to be inappropriate in the last election. Newly elected Senators Bernie Sanders, Sherrod Brown, Jim Webb, Sheldon Whitehouse and Jon Tester, for example, fearlessly opposed the war and didn't hesitate to call for a timetable for withdrawal. Rather than hurting their election prospects, their firm stands helped them to win.

The other lesson of the election – the unpopularity of President Bush – is an issue that Democrats are running away from even more rapidly. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi says that impeachment is off the table. Yet a recent poll found that a majority of Americans would support impeachment if it could be shown that the President had violated the Constitution and laws of the United States by such outrageous actions as lying and misleading the country before unnecessarily invading a nonbelligerent country, approving the warrantless NSA surveillance program, approving torture and eliminating habeas corpus for suspected terrorists. These are precisely the charges House prosecutors would attempt to prove in an impeachment. In other words, the way to prove guilt to the majority of Americans is to bring impeachment charges before the House of Representatives. Instead, most Congressional Democrats say we should investigate those charges in hearings before considering impeachment. This might be appropriate if we didn't already have a solid prima facie case against the President based on administration documents and statements. Investigations would only delay the whole process to the point when the President will be stepping down from office and impeachment would be moot.

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

President: Frederic March

Vice President/Programs: Harry Willson

Treasurer: Ed Root

Secretary: John Waldrop

Membership: Frederic March

Public Information:xxxxxxxxxxx

Special Projects: Ron Herman

Social Activities:xxxxxxxxxxx

Newsletter Editor: Randall Wall

Website: David & Beverly Wesner

Subscription to HSNM Newsletter, published monthly, accompanies AHA/HSNM membership or can be obtained by nonmembers for \$12 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.

I suppose assuming that Democrats would stand on principle, as well as follow the majority position of the public, is too much to hope for. After all, politicians did not get to where they are by being consistent idealists and courageous people of principle. We'll instead have to get used to the unbearable thought of two more years of the Iraq War and of President Bush's dictatorial ways.

Peter Schanck

DARWIN DAY AT UNM

“SELECTION TOWARD PERFECTION”

The UNM Humanist Society is sponsoring an all-day event in the SUB Ballroom A on February 12 to commemorate the 198th anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth. Other groups participating will include HSNM, the New Mexicans for Science and Reason, and the Atheists and Freethinkers of New Mexico. Watch your e-mail for a schedule of speakers, discussions, and video presentations. A schedule will also be provided at the informal meeting of HSNM on Feb. 10.

POETRY TALK

Member Don Gutierrez will read and explain the poetry of Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, and Kenneth Rexroth at the Bear Canyon Senior Center on Friday January 26 at 1 PM. Please call Don for details at 839-9051.

SCIENCE AND MYTH

Science has been very helpful in analyzing the myths that humans insist on using. Because of the painstakingly careful findings of science, we can safely state that myths ought not to be taken literally. They are not true in that sense. Heaven above and hell beneath and earth in the middle where we are – it isn't so. A Maker who formed animals and humans out of clay and animated them and put them in a garden in Mesopotamia – it didn't happen. A man lynched by crucifixion came to life after being dead three days – that didn't happen either. But – that last story could have a figurative meaning. Some one who is emotionally dead could be revived and feel as though he had risen from the dead, and the story could have some kind of meaning for that person. The myth could be true, without being fact.

Myth is thought of as simply false, by many people, especially those who find themselves at last undeceived. There is no Santa Claus. Science helped them figure it

out, and now they are suspicious of myth. “Myth” means “lie.” But it's not quite that simple.

Even science uses myth and metaphor, when it tries to describe some aspects of reality. The descriptions of the age of the universe sound almost Hindu, and the numbers verge on the incomprehensible, for most people. Fourteen billion years? And the earth wasn't revolving around the sun all that time, was it? What is a year?

Distances are so vast, the language becomes mythological. Light travels at 186,000 miles per second, for years, in all directions from the source [!][?] – for millions of years...

Purpose, try as scientists might, cannot be kept out of the attempts to describe the life process. “Get rid of waste...” “Pass on genes...” “Irish elk antlers hampering survival...” These are metaphors, and science can't avoid using them.

All this is not to say that science is “just another myth.” Science is constantly trying to describe reality correctly, and constantly correcting itself as more data is comprehended. But the whole enterprise could be called a mythology – a very good one, which corresponds to reality better than any other.

Humans insist on meaning. Two books from the 1960's help: *THE DOORS OF PERCEPTION*, by Aldous Huxley, and *THE JOYOUS COSMOLOGY*, by Alan Watts. These books state that we humans look at the world through a net, imposing a grid on all that reality. Certain drugs, and some advanced meditation techniques, tear the grid away, leaving the observer terrified, at least at first.

Jorge Luis Borges' story, “El Aleph,” tells of a fellow who stared at a certain brick in the wall. The brick was the origin of all things, El Aleph. Aleph is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and the occult meaning of the letter is “everything that came before the beginning.” The man saw everything at once, no net, no grid.

Science has some marvelous grids. They do not seem to be just “made up,” but correspond to reality, built up over decades of strict observation. The periodic table of the elements is an astounding one. The elements of which the universe is composed can be arranged in a table, according to the number of protons in the nucleus of each atom, and much chemical behavior can be correctly predicted on the basis of the positions of the elements in the table. It is amazing that humans figured this out! But, since I don't think “myth” means “lie,” or “literal untruth,” but rather simply “story,” “story, that is, that helps me comprehend the world,” I make a leap and call this net that science has made and is constantly fine-tuning another mythology.

The heart of the matter isn't that myth is false. It is that myth is the explanatory net of values and connections which enables one to make sense of the world.

Einstein, or somebody, said that the most astonishing thing about the universe is its comprehensibility. Science is working on enlarging that part of reality which we understand. The task is far from finished. Dark matter makes up 80% of reality, and we have no idea what it is! The Hubble telescope is finding things we do not comprehend, and seems to be peering back in time. Yet see the metaphors which get pulled in irresistibly. "Horse Head Nebula." It isn't a horse's head! Even "nebula" itself is a metaphor – they are not clouds; they are stars! This is science, using myth.

Harry Willson

SECULAR LOBBYIST VISITS ABQ.

Several members of HSNM, the UNM Humanist Society, and the Atheists and Freethinkers of NM (previously Albuquerque Atheists and Freethinkers) met with Lori Lipman Brown on Jan. 16 for her talk at UNM and for meals during her visit. Mrs. Brown, an attorney and former Nevada legislator, is a very capable representative for atheists and other non-believers in Washington, DC. Furthermore, her personality tends to win over those who hear her, even those surprised at her lack of belief in gods. She is Director of the Secular Coalition for America (SCA) and the first registered Congressional lobbyist to advocate exclusively from the perspective of non-belief. Members of the coalition include the American Humanist Association, Atheist Alliance International, Freedom From Religion Foundation, Institute for Humanist Studies, Secular Student Alliance, Secular Web (Internet Infidels), and Society for Humanistic Judaism.

Lori explained that her work relies heavily on the Constitutional basis for minority rights and church/state separation. In just a year and a half, she has already spoken with half of the US Senate and over 100 House members, including many of their prominent leaders. She has appeared on the O'Reilly show three times over the past year. She stressed that it is important that her constituents hear some of "the details of what their lobbyist is doing." "It's especially important for (atheist and Humanist) student groups to realize that they are represented in Congress, and for me to hear from the next generation." Brown said. At the UNM talk, one student asked Lori how she gets along without a personal relationship with Jesus, to which Lori replied that she has a wonderful family, her partner Paul, and

many friends that she relies upon. Her talk received front page media coverage by the UNM Daily Lobo and a brief interview on a KUNM radio broadcast with Kelly McNeil. The radio spot can be replayed by going to www.kunm.org/news and reviewing the archive for Jan. 16.

After a speaking engagement in Tucson, AZ, Mrs. Brown flew to Albuquerque, where Marilyn and Sam Brownstein generously offered their guest room for her two night stay. Following her talk at UNM, Lori and several members of HSNM accepted the invitation of Ted Cloak and Max Will of the Atheists and Freethinkers to share their monthly dinner event at Mimi's restaurant. This provided an opportunity for members of these groups who share similar goals and interests to get to know each other better over a pleasant meal (communion!). Following her visit with us, Lori went on to Las Vegas, NV, to participate in the annual conference of the James Randi Educational Foundation (www.randi.org), where she was a keynote speaker.

Brown explains that SCA was formed in response to the increasing power of the religious right in American politics, and that she and her assistant work on a growing budget. SCA's mission is to increase the visibility of nontheistic viewpoints in the United States and to protect and strengthen the secular character of our government as the best guarantee of freedom for all Americans. Lori's calling card clearly identifies her allegiance with the line "Atheists. Humanists. Freethinkers. **Americans.**" For more information about SCA or to make a donation, see www.secular.org.

Ron Herman

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Editor,

January 3, 148

Some reflections on E.O. Wilson's "Olive Branch to Evangelicals" (January newsletter): Wilson is quoted as believing in "Promethean fire seized to set men free." Yet no one is free from the natural logic of the material world. To think so is just as delusional as belief in a supernatural being who will intervene to save us from the consequences of our own ignorance and stupidity.

For those with eyes to see, our planet is still Eden and we have not yet destroyed it. What puzzles me about evangelicals is their long failure to accept the human responsibility expressed in Genesis 2:15, "And (reality) took (us) and put (us) into the garden of Eden to dress it and keep it."

Dale L. Berry

THE URGE TO SURGE

Changing the euphemisms won't fool those of us who can remember. They used to call it "escalation." 1965. More American troops, and that'll take care of everything. Into Vietnam, a nation of thirty million people, we sent half a million troops. It didn't work.

The urge-to-surge people want twenty thousand American troops to pacify Baghdad, a city of six million people. Do the long division problem. Write it out, cross off those four zeros – 6,000,000 / 20,000 – that's one U.S. soldier for every 300 furious Baghdad citizens. "House to house" is also part of the announced "new" strategy. 300 to one, remember.

It will turn into Stalingrad, which was the turning point on World War II. At Stalingrad the Red Army defenders of Mother Russia defeated definitively the Nazi enterprise of world conquest – it was all lose and retreat after that for the German invaders. Russian losses were dreadful, but the defenders won.

In Stalingrad the result of "house to house" was the complete destruction of the city itself, and the annihilation of the million plus invading Nazi army. Hitler wouldn't let his army surrender, so it was destroyed altogether. In Baghdad the Acting President won't let his army "redeploy," so he just may lose it altogether.

In Baghdad the Americans are the aggressors, having invaded in gross violation of the U.N. charter. The defenders have all the advantages of terrain and motivation. The invaders can't figure out how to get out. "The flies have conquered the flypaper" – a line from John Steinbeck's novel about the Nazi [them, again!] occupation of Norway. THE MOON IS DOWN. More Nazi troops would not have changed anything.

No one anymore is admitting that this is all about oil. We have no plan to abandon the permanent bases, which are there, and are where they are, because of the oil.

When the Haliburton Memorial theft of all the reconstruction funds is finally stopped, the question will become, "How come they get schools and universal health care and we don't?" Of course the reconstruction of Iraq will make little sense, if all the Iraqis have been killed.

Harry Willson

HSNM Newsletter, February 2007

Teacher Wanted

Humanist Society of New Mexico



Part-time, course development & teaching the history of science & religion to adults. Send letter of interest with qualifications & proposed methodology to PO Box 13675, Alb. NM 87192 or to website.

Tele: 292-4375 Website: www.humanists.net/nm

Seen on the Web

A short video of accomplished non-believers with accompanying interview.

<http://www.secularstudents.org/node/522>
(Thanks go to Jerry Wesner)

It's Time You Paid Your Dues

A friendly reminder for those of you who have a local membership to HSNM. The beginning of the year is the time for renewing your membership to HSNM. Thank you for supporting HSNM!

Friendly Philosophers

Monday, February 5

Open Forum

Bring Your Own Topic for a General Discussion

Monday, February 19

Dick Mason

The Public Perception of Atheists

Copper Canyon Restaurant, 5455 Gibson (opposite Lovelace Hospital) in conference dining room. Dinner at 5:30; talk follows.

Atheists/Freethinkers Meetup Group

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

Business Meeting on first Sunday, 9am,
Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice, 202
Harvard SE

Social Meeting on third Tuesday at 7pm at Mimi's
Cafe, 4316 The 25 Way, Near Jefferson and I-25

AGNOSTIC MOM: DARWIN DAY: A DAY OF CELEBRATION AND EDUCATION

COLUMN By Noell Hyman
For HumanistNetworkNews.org

Jan. 17, 2007

If you ask my son what his favorite holiday is, he'll tell you it's Christmas. Then he'll tell you that his second favorite is Darwin Day.

What is Darwin Day? According to its official website, it is a "global celebration of Science and Humanity" on Feb. 12 of each year, Charles Darwin's birthday. There is a giant movement to make this day an "International Celebration to show our appreciation for the enormous benefits that scientific knowledge, acquired through human curiosity and ingenuity, has contributed to the advancement of humanity."

Why single out Charles Darwin for the celebration of what science has offered us? The article "*Why is Evolution Important in Teaching, Science, and Society?*" on the Rutgers University's website has an article answer to this question. Here is a summation of its explanation.

Evolution is the central theory of life. An understanding of evolutionary process and evidence is necessary for considering, not only the history of living things, but also many modern questions. For example; Why should we be concerned with a bird-flu epidemic? Why is HIV so difficult to treat? How does research on lab rats apply to humans? How did humans evolve from apelike ancestors? What is the best strategy for delaying the onset of pesticide resistance? Increasingly evolutionary understanding is required for appreciating basic questions in fields traditionally apart from basic biology and anthropology. Major areas of psychology, philosophy, computer sciences, and other fields now require a solid grounding in evolutionary thinking."

What better cause do we have to celebrate? I hope that the religious and nonreligious alike will recognize the benefits that Darwin's work has given us and join us in the celebration.

A goal of the Darwin Day movement is to build momentum and increase the number of celebrants and celebrations until the year 2009, when it will be Darwin's 200th birthday and the 150th anniversary of his

book, *On the Origins of Species*.

How do we celebrate Darwin's Day? The events page of the Darwin Day website (www.darwinday.org) contains a world-wide listing with links, listed by country alphabetically (United States' celebrations are toward the bottom under "U").

Most events have speakers. A humanist organization in my hometown has had fish at a seafood restaurant (as in the Darwin fish). The organization pushing the Darwin Day movement suggests having a "phylum feast," a feast with an enormous variety of meats from various phylum.

Some groups celebrate for one day, on Darwin's actual birthday. Others extend the celebration for the entire week.

As a mom who wants her kids to grow up with an appreciation for science and an understanding of evolution and our origins, I have created our own tradition of celebrating that is both fun and educational.

We have a six-night celebration over the dinner hour. Our celebration centers on the book, *The Tree Of Life: The Wonders Of Evolution* by Ellen Jackson. Our meals over the evenings represent the various stages of life forms as Jackson out-lines them in her books. I decorate the table according the stage we are focusing on (two evenings take place under the sea, one has to do with dinosaurs, etc.) and we quiz the kids with questions and evolution trivia throughout the meal. Each meal ends with a surprise treat that has to do with the life forms for that evening.

Mark your calendar for Feb. 12 and join us as we celebrate the advancement of humanity through scientific discovery!

Happy upcoming Darwin Day!

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Noell Hyman writes for her blog, AgnosticMom.com She has been blogging since August of 2005. Relatively new to the humanist landscape, Noell declared herself a humanist some time in the year of 2002 after leaving religion, specifically the Mormon Church. A stay-at-home mother of three young children, Noell's aim is to reach other non-religious parents who find themselves isolated in the struggle to raise a healthy family without religion. Noell wants to make "Agnostic Mom" a humanist and secular household name. Visit: www.AgnosticMom.com