



# Humanist Society of New Mexico



July 2009

<http://humanistsocietyofnm.org/> [fmarch@thinkwellassociates.com](mailto:fmarch@thinkwellassociates.com)

## Quotes of the Month

The major difference between a thing that might go wrong and a thing that cannot possibly go wrong is that when a thing that cannot possibly go wrong goes wrong it usually turns out to be impossible to get at or repair.

Douglas Adams

In matters of style, swim with the current; in matters of principle, stand like a rock.

Thomas Jefferson

## Upcoming HSNM Meetings

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

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**Saturday, July 11<sup>th</sup>**

**Informal Meeting**

*General Discussion*

This Meeting is for Members Only or by Special Invitation Only – For invitation please call Fred March - 323-6784

Refreshments: Barbara White & Ruth Smyer  
Summit Apartments, 3901 Indian School NE

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**Saturday, July 18<sup>th</sup>**

**Topical Discussion**

*What Makes You Happy?*

Special Collections Library, 423 Central Ave. NE

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**Saturday, July 25<sup>th</sup>**

**Speaker Meeting**

*The Human Nature of Religion and Science*

Frederic March

Refreshments: Janet Johnson

UNM Law School, Room 2406, 1117 Stanford NE

**HSNM Family Co-op**

**Alternative Children's Sunday School**

Call 505-292-4375 for meeting times

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**Santa Fe Humanists**

**Saturday, July 11<sup>th</sup>, 10:30am**

*Lighten Up*

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

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

**H**umanism 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*

*Carolyn Kaye: Secretary*

*Ron Herman: Director of Classes*

*Randall Wall: Newsletter Editor*

*Janet Johnson: Book Club*

*Ted Cloak: Community Liaison*

*Phil Smith: Webmaster*

*Membership Director: Open*

*Social Coordinator: Open*

*Publicity Director: Open*

*Family Co-op: Open*

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](mailto:paragon2012@comcast.net)

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

## **Humanists Debate Religion**

By Harry Willson

Amador Publishers advertises itself as "a humanist press." All partners, Zelda, Adela and I, are members of the Humanist Society of New Mexico, a membership chapter of the American Humanist Association. I served as program chairman for four years. Our humanist self-definition, from page two of every monthly newsletter, states: "Humanism is an ethical philosophy that derives its principles from science and reason rather than theology."

There is a debate going on among us humanists about how to deal with religion and religious people. Some are more tolerant, one would dare say, than others. We all agree that we respect individual persons, no matter what they believe or claim to believe. Some of us are more zealous, more "turned on," by our experience of freedom from religious ideas and authorities. My book, **FREEDOM FROM GOD: RESTORING THE SENSE OF WONDER**, reveals some of that excitement from my own case.

Other humanists wonder why the group spends so much time and effort discussing religion. "I thought we were past that," some have said. Others have paraphrased the slogan of some Christian evangelists, about loving the sinner but hating the sin. "We love the idiot, but hate the idiocy." Many would say that verges on the unkind.

Other humanists are into what is called "cognitive science," in which scientists ask what is innate in human nature. "Hard-wired," they like to call it. Many of them seem to be saying that religion, and spirits and gods and all that, are innate in the genes, in the human brain. Some years ago one of them published a book, **WHY GOD WON'T GO AWAY**. It was quite unconvincing, and I suspected then that the book title was not the author's own, but was thought up by a marketing geek. My comment then was, "He can't go away. He is away." Even the prophet Isaiah complained, "Truly thou art a god who hidest thyself."

The heart of the matter is a misuse of the word "religion." It is a sociological term, and the roots of the

word mean, "tie back." It refers to that which ties a human group together. There are some things that are innate in humans, but those things are not yet religion. Religion comes after, long after. Religion is organized, backed by "tradition," eons of it often. The more highly organized religions have priests, temples, scriptures -- they all have oral tradition steeped in authority.

Religion is very powerful, especially with reference to the young, but it is not innate. There are innate tendencies in humans, to be sure. One is the inclination to personify the unknown and the unseen. Those of us who know better find ourselves doing it, with reference to wind, storms, the cosmos itself. Our language and our instinct lead us to personify. Another innate tendency is readiness on the part of the young to believe what the older ones tell them. At one point that was a survival mechanism, saving time and trouble with reference to things like thin ice, weak tree limbs and wolves. The stories the older ones teach the young become very complex and elaborate, with demons and gods and commandments. But all that content is not innate.

One can outgrow all that. One can figure out what really happened in one's own case. One can escape from it, and thrive, and live a morally upright life without it. In fact the uprightness seems more likely if the outgrowing process has taken place. Freethinkers, for example, are more consistently opposed to things like torture and war than Christians are.

I talked recently with a nephew who left the Mormon Church, after marrying into it decades ago and becoming something of a local leader. The religion took up a larger and larger chunk of his life. He began to study the history of the whole business, and finally declared his individual independence, getting his life back, repudiating "organized religion." "The authority is phoney," he told me.

Two other facts indicate that "religion" is not innate.

[1] Buddhism, which is considered a religion, is older than Christianity, but it is non-theistic. Maybe it isn't a religion at all any more, but a well-developed philosophical belief system. There is no God in it. Millions of people are getting along without that.

[2] And Christianity itself is changing. It is on the wane in Europe. The churches are empty. And even in this country, the "nones" [those who answer "none" to pollsters who ask about one's religion] are on the increase, to a dramatic degree. People, like us, are getting along without God and religion.

We local humanists often comment to each other about what a large proportion of us have white hair. Some worry that it could mean institutional trouble in the future. But others note, "Well, it's hardly surprising. It takes a while to figure this out."

## Letters to the Editor

We should be very cautious about applying evolutionary principles to ethical and legal questions. On the basics, "survival of the fittest" was Herbert Spencer's phrase. What is called "Social Darwinism" would be more accurately labelled "Spencerism." "Natural Selection" was Darwin's term that he derived from his observations of animal and plant breeding to produce diverse domesticated lines from earlier wild populations. The "natural" cancels the element of intelligence usually implied in the word "selection." Spencer's concept has a benevolent "hidden hand" that we now should realize is an illusion both in nature and in the market place. The unmodified term "selection" when applied to humans is called eugenics. Today eugenics is in very bad repute because of the ignorant, racist, arrogant and pseudoscientific ways it was practiced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But taking a long view and a broad anthropological view human groups almost always have had ways to select who is eligible to reproduce. That theme is elaborated in *The Privileged Ape* by Jack Cohen. On the same basics we could call ourselves the domesticated ape. Natural selection is aimless, blind and stupid. It is a good premise for science because it demands and inspires detailed case by case empirical research.

As for appealing to the science of evolution to support a hypothesis about how to produce good citizens (Laverne Rison, June newsletter) I agree with Lee McIntyre's thesis in *Dark Ages* that we do not yet have a science of human behavior. But raising good citizens is an important goal and Humanists could help by encouraging children to organize their peers to democratic groups.

Dale L. Berry

I've changed my mind about the idea that gays getting married would be suicide for them and perhaps for our entire society. I also changed my mind about what it takes to raise a child. Let me explain. A child needs an extended, legally established family. The benevolent uncle is most likely to be somebody like Ted Kennedy, a married man with children of his own. I have come back

to thinking that we humans have homosexuals in our societies because those adults who aren't tied up with seeing their kids are cared for have time and energy for such creative pursuits as government, science, the arts, etc. (the same reason we had slaves before the invention of machines to take their place.) What pulled me away from that idea was E.O. Wilson's conclusion that since they don't reproduce, homosexuals must play a vital role in the survival of those most closely related to them. I have since decided that they can and do reproduce. Most can go either way. They'll remain a significant minority because they choose the less stressful life of not spending their lives caring for children. That's the same choice many heterosexuals are making now that they understand birth control. I can't understand why are they now focused on the idea of legalizing gay marriage when a growing number of heterosexuals are refusing to make the commitment.

I've been searching the web for answers. I thought I'd found some when I came upon a number of studies by The Family Research Institute. Then I learned they aren't taken seriously in the academic world and are called a hate group by The Southern Poverty Law Center. I found a critique of their scientific method; but no counter studies to prove them wrong. For example, they say homosexuals die a lot sooner than the rest of us. If their studies are flawed, where are the counter studies telling us the truth?

I think the Humanist magazine (and you) owe people like me some properly researched answers. My hypothesis is this: Married couples who keep their families together provide us with the lion's share of good citizens for the next generation, and what can be more important for the survival of any society than that? Darwin taught us about survival of the fittest. Legally sanctioned man-woman marriage has been part of the human experience in every successful society since the beginning of history. That's called Human nature.

If we Humanists are guided by science and reason, let's take a good objective look at this issue which seems to be dividing us into opposing political camps. I should explain just to you what changed my mind. E.O. Wilson is so brilliant that I couldn't argue with him. But after challenging other Humanists to show me where I was wrong, I had no problem disagreeing with people like me.

*Laverne Rison*

## **Let's Lighten Up!**

There was this guy at a bar, just looking at his drink. He stays like that for half of an hour. Then, this big trouble-

making truck driver steps next to him, takes the drink from the guy, and just drinks it all down. The poor man starts crying. The truck driver says, "Come on man, I was just joking. Here, I'll buy you another drink. I just can't stand to see a man cry." "No, it's not that. This day is the worst of my life. First, I fall asleep, and I go in late to my office. My boss, outraged, fires me. When I leave the building, to my car, I found out it was stolen. The police said that they can do nothing. I get a cab to return home, and when I leave it, I remember I left my wallet and credit cards there. The cab driver just drives away." "I go home, and when I get there, I find my wife in bed with the gardener. I leave home, and come to this bar. And just when I was thinking about putting an end to my life, you show up and drink my poison!"



### **Friendly Philosophers**

**Monday, July 6<sup>th</sup>**

Open Forum

Bring a Your Own Topic for General Discussion

**Monday, July 20<sup>th</sup>**

*Big Bang and Creationism*

Attila Csanyi

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

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### **Atheists/Freethinkers Meetup Group**

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

**Sunday, July 5<sup>th</sup>, 9am**

Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice, 202 Harvard SE

**Tuesday, July 21<sup>st</sup>**

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

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### **New Mexicans for Science and Reason**

There will be no meeting in July

UNM Law Building

1117 Stanford NE, Room 2402