



Humanist Society of New Mexico



November 2009

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

Quotes of the Month

In nature there are neither rewards nor punishment – there are consequences.

Robert Ingersoll

No one is more dangerous than he who imagines himself pure in heart; for his purity, by definition, is unassailable.

James Baldwin

Upcoming HSNM Meetings

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

Saturday, November 14th

Informal Meeting

General Discussion

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

Refreshments: Janet Johnson

Summit Apartments, 3901 Indian School NE

Saturday, November 21st

Topical Discussion

Guilt

Special Collections Library, 423 Central Ave. NE

Saturday, November 28th

Speaker Meeting

A Humanist Confronts Mortality

Harry Willson

Humanist Minute: Jerry Wesner

Refreshments: Laverne Rison

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, November 7th, 10:30am

How to Separate Church and State?

Meeting Room, Southside Branch of the
Santa Fe Public Library, 6599 Jaguar Dr.

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

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

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

New Thanksgiving Dinner Idea!

This year we're trying something new! We know that there are many of our members who are without family but would like to share a Thanksgiving meal with other Humanists. We are asking if there are any of our members that would like to host a Thanksgiving dinner for one or two other Humanists. Also we are interested to identify any of our members that would like to be invited to a Thanksgiving dinner. Then, hopefully we can match folks up with each other and create a wonderful holiday experience! If you are interested in either hosting a Thanksgiving dinner or being invited to one, contact Randall Wall at 271-1198 or email Paragon2012@comcast.net.

HSNM HumanLight Party 2009!!

Plans are in the works for something new this year! For the first time HSNM will be hosting a HumanLight Party this year. HumanLight has become a popular celebration for Humanists around the country.

Here's how www.humanlight.org describes it:

HumanLight illuminates Humanism's positive secular vision. In Western societies, late December is a season of good cheer and a time for gatherings of friends and families. During the winter holiday season, where the word "holiday" has taken on a more secular meaning, many events are observed. This tradition of celebrations, however, is grounded in supernatural religious beliefs that many people in modern society cannot accept. HumanLight presents an alternative reason to celebrate: a Humanist's vision of a good future. It is a future in which all people can identify with each other, behave with the highest moral standards, and work together toward a happy, just and peaceful

world.

This year Fred and Joan March have graciously offered their house for the occasion. We are also inviting the Atheists and Freethinkers of New Mexico to join us! The party will be held Saturday, December 19th from 11am to 3:30pm.

Hope to see you there!

Leveling the Hierarchy

By Donald Gutierrez

Part I

For a supposedly democratic, egalitarian society, traditionally idealizing the common man, the United States is an extraordinarily hierarchical society. According to Paul Fussell's *Class*, for example, America's civil service is divided into eighteen grades, from messenger at the bottom to high-level administrators. Granted, some hierarchy is unavoidable, even a good thing. Valuable, experienced workers usually deserve higher status and pay than younger or more inexperienced workers; they have earned it through years of service and increasing expertise.

Too often, however, such status becomes a means of rigidifying class and status. The whole system of employer/employee often embodies an enormous undermining of democratic, libertarian values. Walmart, as Barbara Ehrenreich has shown in her book *Nickled and Dimed*, tries to conceal this basic inequality by coercing its employees to regard themselves as employee associates, as if each \$7.00/hr. worker owned part of the business. But it is clear that in every Walmart, Walgreens, K-Mart, etc., one enters, the "grunts" performing the basic services are overseen by managers (often male), the latter in turn taking orders from higher-ups. Someone may have to organize and run an enterprise but that essential ordering has lent itself to excessively hierarchic stratification that seriously violates America's vaunted libertarian ethos.

Few question the caste character of military hierarchy, but they certainly should, not only because it contrasts strikingly with the democratic ideals of advanced democratic societies, but also because in the United States, military hierarchy as a model of organization has since World War Two substantially influenced the authority structure of American civilian institutions. This tendency is so pervasive that even civilian organizations as idealistically free of power structures as universities are markedly hierarchic, from the janitors and dormitory cleaning women (usually minorities) and department-office typists at the bottom to the presidents and regents at the top, undergraduates being not impressively higher in status than janitors.

Corporations, hospitals, civil service all share in the hierarchic gradation, professionals, physicians or employers usually called Doctor or Mister while the secretarial or clinical staff (usually women) are addressed by their first names, a differentiation matched by significant differences in salary. There is a pretense of democratic address in the ubiquitous first-naming in the business and medical worlds of customers and patients respectively, but one notices that it's one way: "John says secretary "Betty" to a 60 years old patient, your appointment with Dr. Jones is on July 1." There is also a vertical "relationship" between mass-media celebrities and their fans, who by idealizing their "god/desses," debase themselves. Such debasement is intensified by a society that pays CEOs and pro superstar athletes hundreds of times as much money as the average person earns.

Concluded in Part II next issue

Reality is Consistent

By Harry Willson

I woke up the other morning thinking, "I'm sure glad we live in a consistent and dependable reality!" We spend what feels like too much time looking for misplaced or "lost" items. Tools, my other glasses, my journal, the appointment calendar, the car keys -- NOW where are they? But my tools are where I left them. I forgot that I had leaned the hoe against the wall to do something else, and never went back for it. My glasses are in the pocket of the other pants. The appointment book is in the studio, right where I left it.

No gremlins, no goblin, moved anything. Of course a spouse, or a pet, or an offspring, or a burglar could move something, but in a consistent reality it is where I, or someone, left it. Inanimate objects do not just get up and go. I find that I am very glad that that is

so. Much of the "lost" business is caused, I think, by going through too much of life "on automatic," not paying enough attention to what is happening as it happens.

A consistent reality is comprehensible, or at least partly, maybe mostly, comprehensible. Logic works. The other day the car wouldn't start. I called my brother-in-law, Horacio, a professional mechanic. We jumped it and it seemed O.K. What caused that? Not sure. Next morning it wouldn't start. Probably needs a new battery. Horacio brought one, but before he took the old one out he said, "Let me try this." Experience and logic were in play. He spent quite a while cleaning the posts of the old battery, and it has worked fine ever since.

In a consistent reality I can have a dependable map in my head of where things are. My sense of direction works very well. Not everyone has such a map. Some people get lost easily -- not the keys, but the very self itself -- their map isn't much good, or they don't have one. The pace of demolition and reconstruction can befuddle anyone -- like North 4th Street here in Albuquerque -- but for the most part the inner map is very helpful.

Reality is more consistent than we are. Our perceptions and memory can deceive us. We don't always see whatever it is correctly. We are very clever at twisting memory to suit us. But Reality goes right on being what it really is, no matter what we say or think.

"Make believe" is for children. Fantasy exercises the imagination, but Reality perseveres. I can still hear my friend, Jay Evans, reminding us with reference to environmental questions, "Nature bats last." That's that consistent reality on view again.

* * *

Strange thoughts ensue, the morning after writing all that. My friend and neighbor, Ambrosio, spent a month in intensive care in the hospital with complications from pneumonia. He was expected to undergo one more simple procedure on Tuesday and be released. He died Sunday night.

I was feeling heavily weighed down, by mortality itself, after visiting the widow, Vivian. I'm thinking about mortality. An early thought: "Not everyone makes it." Ambrosio didn't make it. He didn't get to that scheduled surgery. Didn't get to come home from the hospital. Didn't get to visit with me any more.

Then Reality chimes in, more earnestly. "Nobody makes it, finally." In the abstract, it makes sense, looks reasonable. Then Reality speaks again, even more earnestly. "You won't make it."

Then one wants to say, while stalling, "Define 'Make it.'" Go on living. Not die. "Go to heaven" sounds like children's talk. Let's be serious. Let's be realistic. Let's be truthful. "No one makes it. Not you, not me, not anyone." Each one gets his turn, some early, some late, some with dignity, some without, some with company, some without, some willing and ready, some stalling and resisting and resentful. It's like the rest of life -- How you deal with it is in your hands. What "it" is isn't.

Nevertheless, I'm glad we're in a consistent, almost comprehensible, Reality. Excuses and loopholes and pardons and reprieves -- no, thanks.

Friendly Philosophers

Monday, November 2nd

Open Forum

Bring a Your Own Topic for General Discussion

Monday, November 16th

*Beyond the Bible Code: Hidden Messages
Everywhere*

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, November 1st, 9am

Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice, 202
Harvard SE

Tuesday, November 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, November 11th, 7pm

*Interstellar Bar Codes: Spectroscopy for the Rest of
Us*

Lisa Foley

UNM Law Building

1117 Stanford NE, Room 2402