



Humanist Society of New Mexico



December 2009

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

Quotes of the Month

Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one.

Albert Einstein

I'm not crazy about reality, but it's still the only place to get a decent meal.

Groucho Marx

Upcoming HSNM Meetings

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

Saturday, December 12th

Informal Meeting

General Discussion

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

Refreshments: Barbara White and Ruth Sawyer

Summit Apartments, 3901 Indian School NE

Saturday, December 19th

Topical Discussion

Preempted by Winter Party

Special Collections Library, 423 Central Ave. NE

Saturday, December 19th

**HSNM Humanist Light Winter Potluck
Party**

11am to 3pm

Please see announcement on Page 2

HSNM Family Co-op

Alternative Children's Sunday School

Call 505-292-4375 for meeting times

Santa Fe Humanists

Saturday, December 5th, 10:30am

Deficits and the Federal Reserve

The Cafe 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.

HSNM Humanist Light Winter Potluck Party at the Home Of Fred & Joan March

Joan and I are delighted to host our HSNM Humanist Light Party on Saturday December 19th from 11 AM to 3 PM. Atheists and Freethinkers of New Mexico are invited to join us. Please RSVP at 323-6784 to let us know that you are coming and what food you would like to bring from the following categories: salads, appetizers, cooked dishes, sliced meats, cheese, breads and desserts. We will provide beverages, plates and utensils. I will send a map with directions to all that respond prior to December 16. My e-mail is fmarch@thinkwellassociates.com.

As is the custom at our winter party we are requesting donations to the Road Runner Food Bank in the form of canned and boxed foods, or checks made out to the the Road Runner Food Bank. We will arrange to have all items forwarded to them.

Fred March, President

Our Problem is Fear

By Harry Willson

Halloween decor was everywhere -- in the Senior Care Clinic, in Walmart [hundreds of orange plastic pumpkins stacked high and far], in and on junk mail, as background for the muted TV ads -- "Beware! Beware! Beware!"

Noting all that helped me see that this holiday is a celebration of fear, or mock fear. Why are we making children's playmates out of ghosts, ghouls, devils and demons? No one is really afraid of goblins, right? But then, thinking about it some more, I understood that for our people and our culture generally, our problem is fear. This is true in three major areas: money, war, and health care.

[1] Money. For those who have money and for those who don't the problem is fear. Those who have money, or access to money, fear that they'll lose it. Those who have a lot of money are really afraid of

losing it. People have been known to commit suicide because of "paper losses," the loss of imaginary wealth, one could say.

Those who don't have money, fear homelessness, cold, rain, starvation. An increasing number of people in this country are being forced into this state of mind. Looking at the entire planet the quantity of suffering caused by what is so glibly called "poverty" is shocking and shameful. We here all have so much more than our share.

Another fear connected to money is one that has made me thoughtful from time to time. I fear that the money could become totally worthless, and that everyone, rich and poor, will have nothing. It has happened in Germany, in China, in Argentina, in Zimbabwe. Of course, money itself works because of trust, and very much of my cynical thinking could lead to disaster.

I remember President Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms," for which we fought World War II. One of them was "Freedom from Fear." Which leads us to the next area:

[2] War. The U.S. is involved in two overt wars and uncounted covert ones. "Why?" one could ask. "Because of the attack of 9/11," is the answer. When the little girl asked Peter Jennings the next morning, "Why do they hate us so?" no one had the courage to answer her. Many Americans still do not know the answer to her question, which is, "Because the U.S. has been waging war against poor people for too many years."

The fear of a repeat of 9/11 has us spending annually more money on war and war preparations than the next ten countries taken together. Hundreds of billions of dollars, to kill, burn and demolish. The military industrial complex encourages that fear on purpose, in order to cash in. War is very profitable for some, even though it is horror and misery for others.

[3] Health care. All the recent blather about health care -- I was going to call it "debate" or "discussion," but those words don't describe what we've been watching -- is rooted in two fears. They are: the fear of pain and the fear of death.

Some individuals are more tolerant of pain than others. But as a people we have become obsessed with finding a pill or a plaster that will remove pain. Millions are spent on research, trying to get rid of pain. Millions are spent by "consumers" on the relievers we already have: aspirin, Excedrin, Bufferin, Advil, Aleve, Tylenol, Ibuprofen, et al.

Insurance sells the way it does because of this fear of pain, and the fear of death. And it has a very subtle effect. Most people who don't have it wish they did, and those who do have it think to themselves, "If I don't go to the doctor often, I'm not getting my money's worth."

Waiting lines are unbelievable at clinics in search of access to doctors. Hypochondria is rampant.

Fear of death is at the bottom of the health care frenzy. No one, except the seriously mentally ill, wants to die early. But pretending that one doesn't want or intend to die ever is childish and silly. Whole industries, besides the health care and insurance industries, are based on this fear. Morticians are especially clever. Their alliance with lawmakers makes them very powerful. Laws about embalming, about transporting dead bodies, about cremation and other matters, combined with this widespread fear, make the morticians wealthy and the rest of us poorer.

I find it interesting to note how money seeps into the other fears. Is it all really about money? Well, in the long run, it isn't, as the preacher said to the fearful ones, "Even if you do have money to burn, you still can't take it with you."

Justice Scalia Denies Jesus!

By Ron Herman

A recent article in *Church & State* (Americans United, Bathija, Nov. 09) reports that Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia has concluded that the cross is merely a grave marker and should be used to mark the final resting places for believers of all faiths and non-believers. That would seem to imply that he rejects the cross as a symbol of the sacrifice and salvation of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. Maybe he is not such a strong Christian after all. I guess a cross is now just a plus-sign on a stick. Others are not so sure. Scalia's remark was made during arguments in the case of *Salazar v. Buono* concerning the large white cross in the Mojave National Preserve in California. An attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union, Peter Eliasberg, responded to Scalia, saying "I have been in Jewish cemeteries" and "there is never a cross on a tombstone of a Jew." I doubt that Muslims would appreciate such a universal marker for their buried dead, either. Atheists and Humanists? Well we might not care much, since we know it really doesn't matter who anyone prays to at our graves or whether or how those are marked for identification on the expected day of resurrection. But we would all agree that tax money should not be used to erect or maintain such a monument. Activists eagerly await the court's decision on whether this once-religious symbol can remain on public land.

What Book Club?

Query by Janet Johnson

Every month's HSNM newsletter includes in the "Officers" listing, "Janet Johnson, Book Club." And every month I feel guilty because we HAVE no functioning book club. It was "discontinued until further notice" a year ago, after I was the only person who showed up for the scheduled meeting.

Another member commented to me recently that he didn't know another group of people who read as much as we do, and as interesting in the variety of things read.

Will any members interested in resurrecting a Book Club please let me know (a) what topics you would like to include in book selections, (2) preferred times and/or days to meet, (3) whether monthly, bi-monthly or other, and (4) any other concerns or suggestions. I thank you. Phone 255-9477 or email janethjohnson7300@msn.com

In the meantime, I want to strongly recommend a book I just finished reading. I felt it was, in a nutshell, more informative than Dawkins, Dennett et al. It's a 234-page paperback, *The God Virus: How Religion Infects Our Lives and Culture*. The author is Darrel W. Ray, Ed.D.

Some Observations from *The Tao Te Ching*

By Paul H. Deal

Humanist Minute October 24, 2009

Twenty-five hundred years ago the Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu, in *The Tao Te Ching*, observes that, "Wisdom lies in recognizing the limits of one's knowledge." Lao Tzu understood a fundamental truth of modern science: that knowledge is provisional, always subject to revision in the light of new information. This humanist view opposes the position of ideologies that claim infallible truth. Unfortunately there are too many such ideologies in modern American society.

Lao Tzu, recognizing that, "In war even the victors celebrate with a funeral," counseled against war other than in self defense. Americans, knowing this truth, use convoluted arguments to convince themselves that their wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are somehow a benefit to themselves and the people of those countries.

Lao Tzu said, people should, "Abandon moralisms and legalisms and just do the right thing." Perhaps those who tie themselves in ethical knots with legal and moral arguments justifying torture, secret renditions, and imprisoning people without charge or trial might better serve themselves by paying heed to this humanistic advice.

"Accumulating more than is needed while others have too little is theft," said Lao Tzu. The uniquely American system of private health insurance, based on taking from those in need to fill the coffers of those with excess, looks less wonderful judged by this criterion. In fact unregulated capitalism in general looks less wonderful judged by this criterion.

Lao Tzu noted that, "Excessive and unjust laws encourage criminality," an observation that readily predicts the rampant drug-related crime in America.

Lao Tzu noted that, "The desire to rule over nature cannot be satisfied." We Americans, of course, know better as is abundantly apparent in New Orleans, that city marvelously triumphant over river, coast, and weather.

Lao Tzu noted that, "If the boss is untrustworthy the employees will be untrustworthy." Perhaps our bankers, politicians, corporate CEOs and other leaders seek only untrustworthy followers.

Lao Tzu noted that "Just government brings peace; unjust government brings rebellion." Of course, in Afghanistan and Iraq we call rebellion insurgency.

Finally Lao Tzu advised that, "A good person is kind to everyone." I find this observation the best expression of Humanism in Lao Tzu's writing, and perhaps the best advice any humanist can follow to move us toward a better world.

Just be kind to everyone.

The Atheists and Freethinkers of New Mexico

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

Sunday, December 6th, 9am

Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice, 202
Harvard SE

Tuesday, December 22nd

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, December 2nd, 7pm

*A World Without Ice: The Human Impact on Earth's
Climate*

Henry Pollack

UNM Law Building

1117 Stanford NE, Room 2402