



Humanist Society of New Mexico



February 2009

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

Quotes of the Month

“Truth is more of a stranger than fiction”

Mark Twain

“A man's feet should be planted in his country, but
his eyes should survey the world”

George Santayana

HSNM Family Co-op

Alternative Children's Sunday School

February 1st and 15th, 11:00 am

Regular Meetings

Ground Level, College of Santa Fe, Albuquerque
Campus, Pinetree Corporate Center

4501 Indian School Rd. NE

Santa Fe Humanists

Saturday, February 7th, 10:30am

Controlling End of Life Choices

Sarah Cook of Compassion and Choices

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

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

Upcoming HSNM Meetings

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

Saturday, February 14th

Informal Meeting

General Discussion

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

Refreshments: Marilyn Brownstein

Summit Apartments, 3901 Indian School NE

Saturday, February 21st

Topical Discussion

The Middle East: Is Real Peace Possible?

Special Collections Library, 423 Central Ave. NE

Saturday, February 28th

Speaker Meeting

The Human Condition, Creating a Future

McOwiti Thomas

Refreshments: Carolyn Glen Kaye

UNM Law School, Room 2406, 1117 Stanford NE

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.

PATRIOTISM AND COUNTRY VERSUS STATE

An Essay by Donald Gutierrez

"War Is the Health of the State"

Randolph Bourne, The State

"War is the State"

Kenneth Rexroth, The Dragon and the Unicorn"

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

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Jerry Wesner: Past President

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Membership Director: Open

Social Coordinator: Open

Publicity Director: 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.

As the USA Patriot Act (October 26, 2001) ominously implied that the "true patriot" had best keep his mouth shut about his government's actions no matter how evil, patriotism has become a word that would benefit from an iconoclastic embrace. One's immediate definition of patriotism is likely to be love of and dedication to one's country. This definition, though, is less one of instinct than of indoctrination encountered as part of one's upbringing. The indoctrination shifts us into something ultimately darker or narrower when patriotism is further defined or implied to mean approval of the economic "interests" and political-military authority and actions of one's country's abroad. The problem emerging at this point is that the idea of country has subtly shifted into another societal concept, the formidable abstraction and reality called the state.

One can love one's country in the form of, say, San Francisco's cultural liberalism, New Mexico's green chile and mountains, the Midwest's festive sense of Halloween, autumn in Vermont, the New York theatre or baseball world--or individuals, Thelonus Monk, Theodore Dreiser, Franz Kline, Eugene Debs, Dorothy Day, Susan Farrell, Cesar Chavez, etc. If, however, love of one's country means for example accepting the Yahoo battle-cry "My Country, Right or Wrong!" or Bush Sr. and Jr. threatening to declare war without Congressional authorization or Bush Jr. permitting Corporation-boardroom decisions that kill jobs for hundreds of thousands of Americans or further poison our air and water, then I am not a patriot. Put another way, one must differentiate "country" and "state" to get at a more satisfactory definition of patriotism, for to have to love both John Muir and Amnesty International U.S.A. on the one hand and Anthony Scalia and the current regressive tax system on the other is to ask of us a love that only a schizophrenic could provide.

To entertain a more resilient idea of patriotism, one

might reverse conventional or unchallenged acceptances. This latter practice could mean viewing the 1950s House UnAmerican Activities Committee itself or the White House's much more recent warrantless wiretapping or CEOs receiving seven-figure-salary bonuses for executing mergers that raise product costs for millions of Americans and throw many thousands out of work) as unpatriotic. Further, were not Trent Lott and Newt Gingrich depriving the American people of immense amounts of public wealth by trying to pass a bill in 1997 to subsidize the tobacco industry with \$50 billion? Is that not unpatriotic, even traitorous, behavior because it would have misused the American people's wealth and threatened their health? Or, today, is our Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson very possibly committing an act of vast treachery (backed by the White House) in bailing out Wall Street at the vast expense of the American people--and, if so, how do we define patriotism and America in terms of those two antithetical elements: former Goldman-Sachs CEO Paulson vs. the country? Was Daniel Ellsberg a patriot in the best sense when he turned over to the THE NEW YORK TIMES the Pentagon Papers, in which it was revealed that LBJ had secret plans for extending the war into North Vietnam while telling the public that he was for peace and planned to end the war? Isn't any American President or politician who draws the country into an unjust, illegal or unnecessary war unpatriotic, even traitorous? Are not activists like Father Roy Bourgeois and Kathy Kelly splendid American patriots in very vigorously condemning the brutal American methods of public control taught Latin American military and police officials at the (formerly named) School of the Americas?

Now if one wants to be a good citizen and a patriot to boot, how does s/he shape a viable sense of patriotism out of the above melange of diverse, polarized items? What is a patriotic response to an illustrious American painter like Mark Rothko on one the hand, and on the other to John Foster Dulles (roughly contemporaries), our ice-Cold-Warrior Secretary of State who during the 1950s brought the United States perilously close to precipitating nuclear war against mainland China? Deciding on these responses could be facilitated by viewing Rothko under the rubric of country and Dulles under that of state ("state" understood to mean country in its most abstracted, highly concentrated political-military coercive form). Rothko was a private individual, developing over the years his particular craft and genius as an artist towards the creation of majestic, non-figurative canvases of mystically luminescent and somnolent horizontal planes of color. His work did not glorify the Stars and Stripes or the Pentagon, and yet,

suddenly seeing his big canvases as I walked one summer in 1990 into the American Wing of the Musee Pompidou in Paris, I felt a thrill of patriotism.

One could, if not love, perhaps at least accept what Dulles or Henry Kissinger or Condoleezza Rice stands for, that is, the state, if one felt that their conduct as American statesmen protected or nourished the culture that makes or preserves a Rothko or a Billie Holliday or the Civil Rights Act of 1964 or Habeus Corpus or the poor, the young and the elderly of our country. People like Dulles or Kissinger or Donald Rumsfeld would instantly declaim that their foreign policies were dedicated to protecting basic American freedom and values and (especially) "National Security."

When high state officials like Dulles, Kissinger and Rumsfeld say that they are acting in the National Interest or defending the Free World, the American Way of Life, etc., by, respectively, threatening China with nuclear bombing, massively bombing Cambodia or devastating oil-rich Iraq, they are, again, urging the claim that the interest of the state is that of the country; they are protecting the country from the Chinese or the Viet Cong or Saddam Hussein. But this asserted coinciding of the interests of country and state is very disputable. A great deal of the hostility displayed by the American state and mass media towards international Communism, whether the Soviet Union, Mao's China or Castro's Cuba, was excessive and provocative. The Cold War was also an enormous windfall for special sectors of American society whose concerns were not really those of the country, that is, the great majority of Americans unconnected with the state in any way except income tax and their draftable children. It should be news of undying interest to the country financing them that the American defense industry and its investors profited enormously from the Cold War—and of course do so in the American state's current wars.

The Cold War also benefited the state by keeping the general public tractable and wage-earners deprived of at least a third to two-fifths of their rightful working income while intimidating the country for decades with dark warnings of black-booted Commissars ruling L.A. and NYC or nuking Disneyland. It is hardly unpatriotic to condemn the powerful individuals and institutions which wasted huge amounts of America's material wealth and emotional energy by first engendering the Cold War in the late 1940s under Truman and then inflating it to seem much worse than in fact it was. Perhaps the Dulleses, Nixons, Kissingers, Reagans, Bushes (among others) have been the betrayers—not only of the state, but of the country.

Patriotism is in itself a controversial and variable

concept. Integral to nationalism, it becomes more and more dangerous in a world that must surmount its jingoistic nationalism in order to form a comity of nations anchored in subordinating each nation to an authoritative internationalist polity and rule of law. Turning nation against nation and thus patriot against patriot is simply too risky in a world of spreading nuclear-arms capacity, increasing poverty and class differentiation, rising religious fanaticism and possibly uncontrollable population growth, and, recently, the global financial meltdown. Patriotism can embody a fulfilling sense of community if the essential values of state and country sizably and ultimately coincide. That they seldom really do should alert the country to the likelihood that the state could be up to something dubious at best and pernicious and even catastrophic at worst when it starts fanning the fires of patriotism and war. Whether, moreover, President-Elect Obama will be able to bring state and country into harmony is surely part of that Hope that fired his campaign and a multitude of supporters, but with Wall Streeters like Lawrence Summers and Robert Rubin and General Jim Jones and the Clintons close to Obama's ear, one is concerned that, once again, state might make short shrift of any bonding with country.

Economics Made Simple

Other than the family budget my only direct experience with what someone called "the dismal science" was as bookkeeper with my wife's drapery business. I learned that bookkeeping was indeed dismal, when there wasn't enough money to pay the bills, when "accounts payable" were larger than "accounts receivable." When there was good "cash flow," it was almost fun.

Economics has become the big story in today's news, overshadowing war, racism, hunger, weather and natural disasters. The media use the word "economy" to refer almost exclusively to Wall Street and the stock market. The stock market is part of the economy, but not near all of it. It is not even the most important part of it. Those who actually do the work are the most important part.

The "science" has become very esoteric, requiring advanced degrees in mathematics to be able to decipher the "models" presented. But I can't help thinking that the questions, and the answers and the required decisions, are all really quite simple. To wit:

1. Inflation. I used to worry about what I was calling "Cheney's stunt" -- whatever horror the current administration could perpetrate during the lame duck period. Now I see it was not bombing or invading somebody -- it was the seven hundred billion dollar giveaway to the bankers. Now there is no money left for

the new administration to do any of the wonderful things promised during the election campaign. The skyrocketing deficit can only mean one thing -- the money becomes worth less, which is inflation. They can't cut interest rates "to control inflation" any further. So the money loses value. Printing more money, to do necessary things, devalues the money, and steals from those who have the least, who need what money they have to be worth something in order to buy necessities, like food.

2. Tax cuts and stimulants. It is now widely admitted that the "trickle-down," or "tinkle-down," theory of prosperity has been proven to be fraudulent. It does not help "the economy" to cut the taxes of those who have the most already. Really, it has been perfectly obvious all along. The government has to get its income by taxing those who have something. The least painful way would be to tax those who have something extra. It is obvious that, if we want a government that does for us what we want done, we will have to get the tax rates back to the progressive levels of the 1950s. Those who have the most pay the most.

Those who have the least are the ones who need a tax cut, and that would stimulate the whole economy, because they would spend the newly available money on necessities immediately. The self-employment tax is a glaring example of what needs correcting. As of now, the small business owner owes 15% of the very first dollar he earns. Allowing a modest untaxed initial income would stimulate the bottom levels of the economy greatly.

3. Bail-outs. "Too big to fail" means too big. Small is beautiful. It is interesting that the Congress was quickly ready to give 700 billion to the banks which caused the economic crisis, with almost no strings attached. Rewarding the mistake-makers -- or were they criminals? -- is not good economics. It would make more sense to punish the perpetrators and assist the victims.

Then the Congress stalled when asked for one-fiftieth as much -- 700 divided by 50 equals 14 -- \$14 billion to bail out the U.S. car industry, which impacts millions of American workers. Many in Congress used the occasion to attack the labor unions, as if the workers were the cause of the problem. It's another case of ideology creating bad economics.

When those who do no useful work are paid several hundred times as much as those who actually do do the work, trouble is bound to turn up in the long run. CEOs and bankers -- those in neckties, one could say -- will finally have to be reined in and brought back to reality.

4. Social Security. The last hope of many humble ordinary people is Social Security. It's what's left of the

solidarity net holding up the whole enterprise. Thieves want to steal it. Persons of questionable ethical sensitivity have already "borrowed" from the trust fund, which should be sacrosanct.

Now those who have cast greedy eyes on that fund say that it is "in trouble," that someday there will be no money to make payments. So, they want us to give what there is left to them, through Wall Street transaction commissions. Bad economics, except for the thieves.

There are two simple solutions to the imaginary Social Security "problem." [a] Keep the Pentagon's hand off the trust fund. [b] Remove the cap on the income amount taxable for Social Security. As it is now, persons making more than around \$80 thousand per year pay only a fixed amount. Remove that cap, so that everyone is paying at the same rate. When that is done, there will be plenty of money. As it is now, the poor are paying much more than their share. Bad economics, again.

5. The Pentagon. The hole in the bucket of the Federal Budget is the Pentagon. War, weapons of mass destruction, shock and awe bombing from remote places, and all forms of organized state-sponsored violence will have to be renounced, as not useful instruments for enhancing national policy. We'll simply have to quit it. It is terrorism, and we as a nation are opposed to it. That is, we pretend to oppose it, but lately we have been committing it on a huge scale. It is really quite simple. Just stop. We did it once already, in Vietnam. It ended, when we quit.

Then the economic correction can set in. Reduce the Pentagon budget by half annually, until all that's left are pensions for the ex-personnel. That will make a lot of money available for other useful purposes.

Harry Willson

Helluva Bad Idea

Excerpt from *The Laughing Jesus, Religious Lies and Gnostic Wisdom*, by Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy, Chapter 9, also entitled *The Laughing Jesus* – Submitted by Lois Kimbrell

“If you can stand back far enough from your cultural conditioning, the Literalist Christian message looks absurd and grotesque. You were born in sin and deserve to be punished. So God sent his own son, Jesus, to planet Earth to suffer horribly on the cross to pay for your sins. Jesus died for you then resurrected and went to Heaven. And, if you believe that this really happened, you will also go to Heaven when you die, where you will have a very nice time forever. But if you don't believe that the resurrection really happened, when

you die you will go to Hell to be subjected to really horrible tortures for all eternity. By a God of love!

It's a gruesome doctrine and inherently flawed. Surely, for any compassionate person, the existence of Hell must make the enjoyment of Heaven impossible. How could anyone with an ounce of kindness enjoy Heaven knowing that others languished in Hell, simply for not believing in an historical even for which there is no evidence anyway!”

National Secular Groups Join Forces to Send President-elect Obama a Message About the Boy Scouts

By Ruth N. Geller, Institute for Humanist Studies, Humanist Network News.org

The American Humanist Association (AHA), the Secular Coalition of America, the Institute for Humanist Studies, and more than a dozen other major nontheist groups sent a letter to President-elect Barack Obama asking him to decline the presidency of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA), an honorary role and title traditionally awarded to American presidents.

Humanist and atheist leaders are asking him to spurn the so-called "honor" because the BSA actively discriminates against both their nonreligious members and their nonreligious employees.

"We want Obama to get it, to recognize that he supports a group that discriminates against atheists and gays and lesbians," said Roy Speckhardt, executive director of the AHA

"This is the first time that so many secular groups have signed off and sent a letter like this," said Speckhardt. "It was a coalition effort."

The BSA's policy about religion, says, in part, that "no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing an obligation to God." The Boy Scout's Oath asks a scout to promise to do his duty to "God and my country."

According to the BSA's 2007 annual report, more than 2.8 million youth worldwide are involved in Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts or Venturing, a program for young men and women ages 14 to 20. The organization says it offers a "traditional program of citizenship, mental and physical fitness, and character development."

The Scouts have expelled members who were open nonbelievers. They also ban homosexuals from membership and employment.

So far, their legal right to do so has been upheld by

State Supreme Courts. The justification generally given is that the BSA is a private organization. However, given its size and influence, and the fact that it receives some public funding, civil rights advocates disagree with letting the group keep their discriminatory policies.

The letter to Obama says in part: "In light of your campaign promise to bring the nation together in a spirit of change we need, we, the undersigned nontheist organizations, urge you to take this opportunity to signify that discrimination against atheists, agnostics, humanists, and other nontheists will not be condoned." (The full text of the letter can be found in a press release posted on the AHA's web page.)

Referring to Obama's mother, whom Obama has described in writing as a secular humanist, David Niose, AHA president, said, ..."if he were to accept the current Boy Scout standard, he would be endorsing discrimination against the same value system under which he was raised."

The group letter came out of the fifth annual meeting of atheist leaders held on Jan. 10 of this year. The movers and shakers of 27 national atheist and humanist groups came to Washington, D.C. to share ideas and information, network, and discuss strategies for spreading the humanist message to the larger community. This year, the AHA organized the meeting.

According to Speckhardt, it was an "extremely positive event where people expressed more interest in collaboration and cooperation than ever before."

Letter to the Editor

To Humans It May Concern, (dated 12/31/08)

I know that I should at least speak out against the bombing, killing, wounding, and terrorizing of civilian populations by any military force. Whether it be "shock and awe" as was perpetrated by the most recent American administration run amuck, whether it be by militants bent upon revenge for perceived or actual wrongs imposed upon them, or whether it be touted retaliation for militant killings, I see little sense and plenty of opportunism in the waging of most wars.

One's perspective on almost any human issue is apt to be skewed due to the human tendency to protect self interest at the expense of probity and common interest. It is said of crows that, while building their nests, they steal nesting materials from each other's nests, making it a wonder that any nests get built at all. Yet, they do not routinely kill each other; they do not maim each other; they do not blacken our precious air with the sounds and

smoke of deadly explosions. "Well, they cannot," you might scoff, "or they might." I cannot answer this. What I do know is that we humans can be easily swayed by fear mongers to make war upon each other. We can absorb and enlarge upon lies which exonerate our any action, while those who profit from wars quietly smile and carry on with business as usual.

Allow me to step on a few toes; at this point in human history, it probably won't matter one way or another. My stance, World, is for humans to stop enriching munitions-makers.... and to begin worldwide family-planning, albeit belatedly. I think that the Chinese had it right with their one child per family plan. To our own detriment, we territorial humans are overrunning this planet. Truly, isn't it territory and resources over which the greatest brawls and human-directed destruction occur? All of which seems counterproductive to me.

We are all watching.

Anonymous

Friendly Philosophers

Monday, February 2nd

Open Forum

Bring a Your Own Topic for General Discussion

Monday, February 16th

Lincoln and Darwin: Could They Have Been Friends?

Ted Cloak

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>

Sunday, February 1st 9am

Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice, 202 Harvard SE

Tuesday, February 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, February 11th, 7pm

The E-Word: Evolution in the Land of Enchantment

Anne H. Weaver, Ph. D.

UNM Law Building

1117 Stanford NE, Room 2402