



# Humanist Society of New Mexico



January 2010

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

## Quotes of the Month

Conservative: a statesman who is enamored of existing evils, as distinguished from the Liberal, who wishes to replace them with others.

Ambrose Bierce

A liberal is a conservative who's been arrested.  
A conservative is a liberal who's been mugged.

Wendy Kaminer

## Upcoming HSNM Meetings

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

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**Saturday, January 9<sup>th</sup>**

**Informal Meeting**

*General Discussion*

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

Refreshments: Jerry Wesner

Summit Apartments, 3901 Indian School NE

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**Saturday, January 16<sup>th</sup>**

**Topical Discussion**

The True Believer by Eric Hoffer

Special Collections Library, 423 Central Ave. NE

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**Saturday, January 23<sup>rd</sup>**

**Speaker Meeting**

*The Becoming of Age*

Pamela Gravagne

Humanist Minute: Randall Wall

Refreshments: Randall Wall

UNM Law School, Room 2406, 1117 Standford 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, January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 10:30am**

*Freethought and Free Action*

Community Room, La Farge 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.

**President's Message**

Joan and I thank those who attended the winter Humanist Light party at our home. The day was bright and sunny, and there was lots of conversation, wonderful gourmet offerings to the pot luck, and a full box of food offerings along with some checks for the Roadrunner Food Bank.

Unfortunately Harry and Adele Willson could not attend. Ron Herman has kept us apprised of Harry's progress following surgery to remove a growth from the bottom of his spine. When Joan and I visited him he said he had good early signs in response to an intense regime of physical therapy. He was in good spirits and his mind was clear in spite of his medications. He said the nursing staff was both loving and competent, and he gave them copies of his book "Myth and Mortality." As a writer Harry routinely adds to his personal journal, and has resumed doing so during his recovery. I think we can depend on some very insightful essays from his experience. He also thanks us all for flowers that we sent him on behalf of HSNM.

Joan and I were in New Zealand from October 23 to November 16. We had the opportunity to visit with Humanist groups in Auckland and in Wellington. The former hosted a barbecue party, and the latter a public presentation of my lecture "The Human Nature of Religion and Science" attended by about 40-45 people. The reception was warm as some people added support to my views, while others contested some of them.

Statistically speaking New Zealand must be among the most enlightened nations on Earth. According to Iain Middleton, President of the Wellington group. Middleton, who also edits and writes for the "New Zealand Humanist" reported in 2009: "Of particular interest is the growth of those with no religion from 30 people in 1910, to 19,000 or 1 % of the population in 1956, and then to 1.297 million or 32% in 2006. Since 1991, the numbers of those with no religion have exceeded the largest single religious group." Nevertheless Middleton believes that there are serious challenges to separation of church and state in NZ, and that humanists must remain vigilant.

On the lighter side Joan and I visited the impressive volcano, which served as the set for the Lord of the Rings' Mount Doom. While Mount Doom did not erupt while we were there (eruption response instructions were posted in our room,) it was indeed in an awesomely remote and forbidding environment and a violent winter storm swirled around our isolated lodge the first night. We also learned that there are clubs in the English speaking world that travel to NZ to visit the various sites where Lord of the Rings was filmed, and in their spare time played a version of Scrabble that only permits words used in the movie series.

I very much regret to report that Caroline Kaye, our HSNM secretary informed me that she would no longer serve in that capacity because of other personal commitments. I want to express my sincere appreciation for her service on the HSNM Board. We now have Board vacancies for Secretary, Membership, and Social positions. Please contact me if you are willing and able to consider supporting the HSNM in one of these capacities.

*Fred March, President*

## Treasurer's Year End Report 2009

Submitted by John Waldrop, Treasurer

Account Summary 12/17/2009

Code	Account title	Balance
	Wells Fargo Checking	\$16,083.18
<u>Income</u>		
	AdultEdu	\$6,596.22
	Advertising	\$422.01
	COTG/AHA Grant	\$0.00
	FamilyCoop	\$2,022.06
	General	\$1,254.83
	Kochhar School Fund	\$5,788.06

### Significant Events:

There were no significant events for the Adult Education, Advertising, or General accounts in 2009.

COTG/AHA Grant: A check was written on 2/27/09 to Michelle Watson in the amount of \$663.69 for

development of lesson plans, which depleted this account.

Family Coop: A check was written on 2/27/09 to NACH/HI in the amount of \$380 for tuition for Jeff Cornelius.

Kochhar School Fund: A check was written on 6/1/09 to Michelle Watson in the amount of \$600 for completion of lesson plans.

Future Adult Education Plans: The HSNM board met on August 9 and approved the following:

1. Ron Herman will be hired as a contract employee with compensation of no more than \$430 per month to move ahead on the adult class. His responsibilities will include 1) fundraising, 2) curriculum development and 3) publicity. This will be paid from past and future fundraising.
2. School funds are being kept separate from other funds, and a minimum reserve of \$3,000 will be maintained in the Adult Education fund. Ron will submit monthly invoices to the Treasurer.

According to Ron, \$30,000 in additional fundraising will be required over the next eighteen months. Ron emphasized that the adult classes are designed for those who have not self-identified as Humanists. He recommended that another type of class be developed for current members.

### Future Children's Education Plans:

Ron Herman has created a Meetup group to expand the Family Co-Op Sunday school and get the classes started again. A kickoff seminar is being planned with a guest speaker, possibly Dale McGowan again, which will require some spending from the Kochhar fund for expenses and maybe an honorarium. He is exploring the possibility (and costs) of returning to the previous class site on Indian School near San Mateo.

### Internet Users: Did You Know?

... that the we have an Internet "blog" in the form of a Yahoo! Group? If you join, you can send e-mail to many members of HSNM all at once. Just go to [www.groups.yahoo.com](http://www.groups.yahoo.com) and type Humanist Society of New Mexico in the search field. Then click on the blue field to "join this group." Create a user ID and password, and you are now "in the loop" to receive or send news about HSNM members, activities, and Humanist issues. (Be careful about replying, though, because replies go to everyone in the group.) We currently have about 75

members in this group and would certainly like to have you involved.

## Leveling the Hierarchy

By Donald Guitierrez  
Part II

What is most pernicious about American political, social and economic hierarchy is the extreme power it gives to people at or near the top such as CEOs of mega-corporations and investment banks, the President and key senior senators, Pentagon generals and admirals, owners of major print and other communications media. These individuals command enormous power and/or wealth, and the average American who thinks s/he simply can walk into the grand offices of these personages and discuss or even criticize policy harmful to the general public's interest will be lucky if he's not thrown out the front door.

These moguls in their chauffeured Lincoln Continentals, their \$7,500,000 Long Island or Connecticut retreats, their lavish penthouses, their Lear Jets, their interlocking corporate board-of-Directorships, their memberships in the Knickerbocker and Petroleum Clubs of the world, their revolving-door connection with Washington, their making more money in an hour than most Americans make in a year, their policy-writing chairs in the inner sanctum of key Congressional committees, their regentships on Boards of prestigious universities—these magnates constitute the most serious undermining of American democracy because of the quantity and quality of their institutional connections and influence.

These individuals will always imperil democracy, as long as vertical power structures are tolerated by the public or are supported by a tax structure unfair to wage-earners and by government “incentives” providing subsidies, tax breaks and repeated tax cuts to big-business, industrial and War-Department institutions. Most of them think they fully deserve their power, wealth and complex connections in the power world of finance, industry, mass media that allow them to go on possessing their almost 90% of America's wealth. More to the point is that their institutionalized attitude, wealth and influence over society make a mockery of the democratic ideals propagandized through school, mass media and politicians.

Enforcing social and economic equality is impossible and would be absurd. People will always possess differing abilities, skills, ambitions and goals, and a genuinely democratic society can and should

accommodate these differences. But the disparity gap between not only the rich and the poor in America but between the rich and the shrinking middle class has obviously grown so wide and deep that the country has once again become a pronounced plutocracy. The United States has of course always been a class society. Women, Blacks, Indians and unpropertied Whites were denied voting rights by our Founding Fathers. Going to Yale places one in quite another universe than attending Arizona State U.

But the problem of hierarchy goes deeper than this, deep enough to be an ongoing crisis many Americans are either unaware of or too apathetic or powerless to concern themselves with. As already mentioned, the crisis is that the economic, political and military leaders of the United States possess so much power that they really are our rulers and think of themselves as such. And the recent and ongoing Meltdown, rather than humbling our titans of finance, has rendered them more rapacious and arrogant than ever; they not only, as Senator Durbin recently declared, run Washington; they control Main Street as well.

Some might contend that a democratic ethos is sufficiently flexible and pervasive in America to absorb such extreme social and class differentiation. In the richest country in the world, there is enough wealth and opportunity to surmount such differentiation, thus rendering the basic needs and satisfactions of life and society widely available. However, the facts contradict this supposed democratic breadth and flexibility. If almost fifty million Americans lack medical insurance in a society that demands it, if one out of ever six children in the country either goes hungry or is part of a family living under the poverty line, if millions of senior citizens have to use a sizable part of their food funds for medical prescriptions, if 1 % of the population possesses more wealth than most of the rest of the population, if minority children are being increasingly re-segregated educationally and thus encountering markedly substandard educational facilities (thus further disqualifying them from college), then we behold an American society stripped raw of actualized democratic values. And if the average American begins to smell a rat, there is always a war or war threat—currently Iran--yanked down on the nation by Washington to distract us masses from the grossly inequitable distribution of our country's wealth and power.

The Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave consequently encourage neither freedom nor bravery, because neither mean much in a society in which wealth and power have been monopolized by and institutionally sanctioned for a deeply embedded oligarchic plutocracy.

## Aggressive Atheism vs. Friendly Atheism

*A weekly commentary by Hemant Mehta, adapted from his blog "The Friendly Atheist."*

*HumanistNetworkNews.org  
December 9, 2009*

**Stephen Prothero**, the author of *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—And Doesn't*, wrote an article for *USA Today* about how atheists could benefit from some new voices.

Specifically, friendlier, female voices--as opposed to the "angry white male atheist" voices, from which we already hear plenty. (There's been plenty of discussion on how that stereotype isn't very fair or accurate--Richard Dawkins, for example, isn't an "angry" guy; he's just perceived as such because he's passionate when discussing the harms that religion causes. But I won't dwell on that right now.)

Prothero also mentions William Lobdell and me as examples of "male types who also qualify as kinder, gentler atheists." It was nice of him to include me in that list, and I could easily mention several other men and women (several of whom contribute to and comment on this site) who belong there, too.

What I did want to talk about was the following excerpt from Prothero's *USA Today* article, which describes his reaction after attending an event for the Boston Coalition of Reason and hearing speeches from several old school (angry, white male) atheists and one friendly, female atheist:

I heard two very different arguments at this event. The first was the old line of the New Atheists: religious people are stupid and religion is poison, so the only way forward is to educate the idiots and flush away the poison. The second was less controversial and less utopian: from this perspective, atheism is just another point of view, deserving of constitutional protection and a fair hearing. Its goal is not a world without religion but a world in which believers and nonbelievers coexist peaceably, and atheists are respected, or at least tolerated.

These competing approaches could not be further apart. One is an invitation to a duel. The other is a fair-minded appeal for recognition and respect. Or, to put it in terms of the gay rights movement, one is like trying to turn everyone gay and the other is like trying to secure equal rights for gay men and lesbians.

I think there's a lot more overlap in the atheist

community than Prothero is giving us credit for.

The "aggressive" types want to both increase the respectability of the atheist viewpoint, while at the same time persuading others that it's the most rational point of view.

The "friendly" types want to both increase the respectability of the atheist viewpoint, while at the same time persuading others that it's the most rational point of view.

The difference is that the aggressive types don't care who they offend. They'll go after religion in all its forms--it doesn't matter if they criticize the Vatican or the local church down the street or your sweet neighbor who happens to be religious.

The friendly types are willing to do some triage here. They're not going to spend the same amount of energy going after a local pastor or national politician who happens to espouse a personal belief in a god. There are more important battles to fight.

I would much rather keep as allies those religious people who do things like support sound science, fight for equal rights for the GLBT community and believe in separation of church and state.

I know others prefer a no-holds-barred approach, but I think that's counterproductive when dealing with the people we want to reach out to the most--those who are on the fence, somewhere between "I'm going to call myself an agnostic" and "I go to church on Christmas and Easter."

There are a lot of people in that mix, and I think we turn them off by not acknowledging that we can't offer everything that religion can at the present time. When we say that atheism is "obviously" right, we're not addressing their real concerns about losing all faith, and so they stop listening.

That's not to say the aggressive types aren't important.

They get the attention.

As openly-anti-theist Brian Sapien once said to me, the aggressive atheists provide a bitter pill for the religious to swallow; the friendly atheists are like the water that helps them get it down.

## Be good, with or without God

Letter to the Editor

HumanistNetworkNews.org

December 16, 2009

I can only appreciate the fair nature of the "Atheistic Campaign" recently launched by the AHA. But, as a seasoned connoisseur of the human nature, I am convinced that godless proclamations tend to reinforce the position of the believers, incrementing their intolerance.

I am an agnostic, humanist psychiatrist pursuing human rights, peace and universal values. I believe that we should not only be tolerant, we must also subscribe to shared values in order to achieve a fruitful interaction and a creative dialogue. (After all, we have always been completely tolerant, but reciprocation simply does not occur.)

I like to say that I have faith in our nature: we are born with an innate desire to help others and our brain is wired for empathy and solidarity, not only for aggression and competition as current cultural values suggest.

Of all faiths, this is possibly the most challenging and difficult to practice, given the daily bombardment of news emphasizing our aggressions, our miseries, our crimes and our errors. Many believers, giving up on our "sinful nature," seek shelter and forgiveness in a Superior Being; their faith completely bypasses our tangible and mortal existence.

On the contrary, we humanists are convinced that the precepts for adaptive living come from our gregarious condition, our inner goodness and our intelligent capacity to select the best of our nature in the service of the social group. We do not have the need to create a God outside of our own lives. We may not be religious but we relish our essence--and why not? Our mysterious and miraculous existence is in such intricate connection with the rest of the universe.

We must thus allow believers to perceive the "faith" we profess and the "reverence" for our lives in order to preempt their polarization and their aggression. In the following example, I suggest a message that should certainly resist vandalism, invite to dialogue and keep our dignity intact in the eyes of the reader:

"God can be our goodness or Goodness can be our God, but be always good for Goodness sake or for God's sake.

--Manuel Orlando Garcia, M.D., Staten Island, N.Y.

## 0 to 200 in 6 seconds

Bob was in trouble. He forgot his wedding anniversary. His wife was really pissed.

She told him "Tomorrow morning, I expect to find a

gift in the driveway that goes from 0 to 200 in 6 seconds AND IT BETTER BE THERE !!"

The next morning he got up early and left for work. When his wife woke up, she looked out the window and sure enough there was a box gift-wrapped in the middle of the driveway.

Confused, the wife put on her robe and ran out to the driveway, brought the box back in the house.

She opened it and found a brand new bathroom scale.

Bob has been missing since Friday.



### **Friendly Philosophers**

**Monday, January 4<sup>th</sup>**

Open Forum

Bring a Your Own Topic for General Discussion

**Monday, January 18<sup>th</sup>**

*My Trip to Israel*

Marshall Berman

Copper Canyon Restaurant, 5455 Gibson (opposite Lovelace Hospital) in conference dining room.

Dinner at 5:30; talk follows.

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### **The Atheists and Freethinkers of New Mexico**

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

**Sunday, January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 9am**

Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice, 202 Harvard SE

**Tuesday, January 19<sup>th</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**

**Wednesday, January 13<sup>th</sup>, 7pm**

*Explosive volcanism, oceanic iron fertilization, and their relationship to global cooling episodes*

Steve Cather

UNM Law Building

1117 Stanford NE, Room 2402