



Humanist Society of New Mexico



June 2009

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

Quotes of the Month

Civilization is a movement and not a condition,
a voyage and not a harbor.

Arnold J. Toynbee

If everyone is thinking alike, then someone's
not thinking.

George S. Patton

Upcoming HSNM Meetings

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

Saturday, June 13th

Informal Meeting

General Discussion

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

Refreshments: Mina Yamashita

Summit Apartments, 3901 Indian School NE

Saturday, June 20th

Topical Discussion

How to Finance Health Care

Special Collections Library, 423 Central Ave. NE

Saturday, June 27th

Speaker Meeting

*A Smattering of Re-Visionist American
History*

Jay Lee Evans

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 at the

College of Santa Fe

Albuquerque Campus

4501 Indian School Rd. NE

Santa Fe Humanists

Saturday, June 6th, 10:30am

Tortuous Paths

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

For more information contact Barbara King
(505) 471-9255

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

Jeff Cornelius: Family Co-op

Randall Wall: Newsletter Editor

Janet Johnson: Book Club

Ted Cloak: Community Liaison

Phil Smith: Webmaster

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.

HSNM 2009 Picnic!!

The picnic will be at my home: 1023 Tramway Lane on
Sunday, June 14 from 10 AM to 12 noon. People are to
bring picnic foods suitable for a brunch such as fruit and
veggie salads, burritos, egg casseroles, cheeses, muffins,
bagels, and lox. We suggest bring enough for four
persons. We will take care of coffee and juice. People
needing directions should e-mail me at
fmarch@thinkwellassociates.com or call me at 505
366-8721.

Fred March

**“Where Is the Humanity?” America's Use of
Excessive Force Over *There***

By Donald Gutierrez

Concluded from May 2009 Issue

Journalist Martha Gellhorn once said “I thought it would
be fine if the ones who ordered the bombing and the
ones who did the bombing would walk on the ground
sometime and see what it is like” (The Face of War).
Indeed, one would love to take the Pentagon brass, the
President and Congress for a compulsory walk to look
close up at what American bombing has actually been
doing to Afghanistan and innumerable other civilians.
Howard Zinn in a Nation article entitled “The Others”
(February 2, 2002), provides that closer look at the
“collateral damage” caused by American bombing in
Afghanistan. First, he gives us various examples of
excuses offered by the Pentagon for bombing “mistakes”
(observing that such events get little attention on
national television): “incorrect coordinates had been
entered,” “the village was a legitimate military
target...” (Zinn’s accounts, only a small sampling,
derive from sources like The New York Times, The
Times of London, Reuters, The Washington Post).

A family in the village of Madoo states that 15
houses were bombed. A young man named Paira Gul,
deeply embittered that his sisters and their families were

killed, says: “Most of the dead are children” (10). The village of Charyhari on December 12 was bombed by an American B-52. The villagers claim 30 people died. One man, Muhibullah, had his daughter killed and son injured by cluster bombs, not to mention six of his cows and the loss through burning of all his rice and wheat, all this representing a catastrophic loss. Bombs began dropping around 7 p.m. near Torai village, killing 20 villagers: “I saw the body of one of my brothers-in-law being pulled from the debris,” Maroof said. “The lower part of his body had been blown away. Some of the other bodies were unrecognizable. There were heads missing and arm blown off...” (18). In the town of Kabul /Sunday/, a bomb hits a “flimsy mud-brick house, “blowing apart seven children at they ate breakfast with their father...” (18) Next we hear of a sobbing middle aged man “cradling the head of his baby, the rest of the baby’s body” lying beside the bodies of 3 other children...” (18).

Perhaps the most chilling event occurred in Quetta, Pakistan. A man, awakened by bombs exploding, watches with his daughter as *civilians* “who survived the bombing run, including his niece and a woman holding her five-year-old son, were gunned down by a *slow-moving* /itals. added—D.G./...aircraft circling overhead” (18), leaving 25 civilians dead. According to the Pentagon, the village was a legitimate target. As for civilian casualties, one American official stated, ““We don’t know. We’re not on the ground” (19). Finally, in one village (Kama Ado) that no longer exists, B-52s dropped dozens of bombs, killing 115 men, women and children. The Defense Department insists that nothing happened: “It just didn’t happen” (20) This cavalier dismissal looks all too much like the arrogance and contempt of the super-strong towards the super-weak. Even trees are not spared. “Our trees,” says Muhammed Tahir, ‘are our only shelter from the cold and wind. The trees have been bombed. Our waterfall, our only source of water—they bombed it. Where is the humanity?’” (19)

By being poorly informed by our leaders about the casualties on the “other” side, Americans are denied a sense of the graphic reality of the experience of Afghanistan, Iraqi, Yugoslavian victims of Washington’s enormous violence. This of course is what the American leadership wants. It may, if pressed, insist it wants to protect the public from the concrete horrors of war. Its real motivation, however, is surely to still public protest about the White-House- Pentagon war mode of extreme force. The media in turn helps the state to minimize coverage of military and civilian wounded and dead on the other side. CNN CEO Walter Isaacson, for example, issued a memo to his staff to downplay

Afghan sufferings, or to qualify any data on it.

But, one is reminded, they “did” it to us. Moreover, al-Quaidan terrorists have shown themselves brutally indifferent to *American*-civilian casualties. Still, these charges clearly do not apply to these Afghan civilian “casualties.” The people killed in September 11 never deserved such a death. Nevertheless, is the occurrence of 9/11 sufficient grounds for killing what now amount to at least 4000 Afghan civilian deaths—or for projecting a war against Saddam Hussein in which probably many thousands of innocent Iraqi civilians will die? Besides increasingly alienating Western allies and allied Arab nations with its upcoming Iraq “plan,” Washington, according to Noam Chomsky, has likely used countries like Iraq, Yugoslavia and Afghanistan as testing grounds for its high-tech ordnance. If that sinister tendency continues, accelerated by our munitions industry and White House war zealots, the crucial ethic of humane treatment of enemy civilians and military will go on being misrepresented or ignored.

What will it take to make the average American realize that in modern wars, it is mainly civilians who get blown to bits by bombs, and that the civilian (usually non-White) “foe” obliterated are as human and as vulnerable to pain, terror and grief as we are? And what can be done to evolve social institutions that better inform its citizens of, and empower them against, massively evil violence perpetrated by Washington abroad? It is a strong possibility that more September Elevens can be avoided if America truly joined the “comity of nations” by not placing its geopolitical “National Interests” abroad above everything else.

Are We Making Any Progress?

By Harry Willson

One of our favorite magazines is THE PROGRESSIVE, which has now been published for one hundred years. The current issue, celebrating that fact, dedicates one page for every one of those one hundred years. I have read every word on every page, and what struck me most was that the problems we as a nation face today are not really very different from what's been confronting us for a century. It is amazing how the very same language is used, then and now, to describe each problem.

It became clear as I read all that that the very name of the magazine is full of irony. THE PROGRESSIVE. “Progressives” were a political/philosophical movement, beginning before 1900 -- pro-labor, pro-family-farmer, anti-monopoly business, anti-war. The Progressives

hoped to improve the lot of farmers and laborers and their families, through political action, forcing government action. They elected senators, like Bob LaFollette of Wisconsin, founder of the magazine, and they did bring about change, like the passage of laws which prohibit child labor.

"Progressive" contains the word "progress," which implies improvement. Nowadays the word is often used simply to refer to change, often needless change, but the original meaning of "progress" was "betterment." Yet the problems confronted in THE PROGRESSIVE, over the last hundred years, are still with us.

[1] Money in politics. In the first year of publication, 1909, THE PROGRESSIVE stated: "Money Should Not Buy Office. The qualifications of two men being equal, the power of the one with a large amount of money to spend should be no greater, in securing votes, than the one without money." Another article in 1927 made the same point, even more forcefully, "Expenditure of Huge Sums for Seats in Congress Cannot Be Justified." It's still true, and still a problem.

[2] Distribution of Wealth. Senator Borah in 1931 told how our wealth was divided. "Let five apples represent all the wealth in the nation, and let 100 people represent the entire population of the United States. Then 96 people would have one apple, and four very rich people would have one apple apiece!" The numbers now may be slightly different, but there has been no real progress in dealing with this matter.

[3] Wire-tapping. In 1928 Senator LaFollette wrote at length in his magazine, objecting to government wire-tapping and the Supreme Court's approval of admitting evidence secured that way. It seemed so modern, such an up-to-date debate -- ongoing for more than eighty years. I wasn't aware that there was any such thing as wire-tapping in 1928.

[4] Punish Law-breakers. "Punish the Real Offenders," says the headline, in 1911. "Is it punishment merely to compel the Standard Oil Company to change its form of organization? What about the men under whose direction these illegal practices were carried on? Are they not to be called to account? [The offenses] were the work of human hands and human brains, and the men responsible for them should be summoned to court." Some of us have wondered about torture, authorization of torture, lying to Congress, illegal wire-tapping, outing CIA agents, and other serious crimes.

[5] War. THE PROGRESSIVE has opposed war in general and specific wars in particular very consistently, from 1909 until today. World War I, World War II even, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and wars

against Iraq and Afghanistan. "Take the Profit out of War," cried one headline from 1915. "Back of every big army and navy appropriation bill is the organized power of private interest, pressing for more battleships, more armor plate, more powder, more rifles, more machine guns, a larger standing army, a bigger navy." The following year brought more indignation: "The gentlemen who want war with Mexico are a very powerful lot. They own most of the United States and a good slice of Mexico. They are our Captains of Industry, our Masters of Finance. They own or control our great newspapers." The same indignation could apply to our current wars, and the Pentagon budget which is now up for debate.

[6] Banks and Bail-outs. The problem that seemed most stunning to me, in the language used to describe it, was an old one as well as our current one -- banks and bailouts. In 1934 the headline reads, "Businessmen, Then and Now." "They strutted up and down the avenue in those bygone days. They were free-born, 100 percent American big businessmen who took back-talk from nobody. Now they take a hand-out wherever they can get it. Billions will be ladled into the mouths of the very individualistic big businessmen who, five years ago, were yelling their heads off about 'no government interference with business.'"

The handouts, called bailouts even back then in the 1930s were labeled as "socialism" by some. Norman Thomas, that great Socialist, replied to that claim in 1936. "There is no Socialism at all about taking over all the banks which fell in Uncle Sam's lap, putting them back on their feet again, and turning them back to the bankers to see if they can bring them once more to ruin." It feels like what Yogi Berra called, "Deja vu all over again."

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Check out Harry's "Rant of the Month," at www.amadorbooks.com -- A library of old rants, more than a hundred of them, appear there, also.

Book Review

By Lois Reisz Kimbrell

The Jesus Mysteries by Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy, Three Rivers Press, 1999.

We have failed to stress major influences in the creation of Christianity. For example, we know that Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.E.) promoted Greek culture in the lands of the Mediterranean; that his city in Egypt, known as Alexandria, had a highly hellenized population at least half of which was Jewish; and that

Hellenized Jews translated the Jewish scriptures into Greek – the translation known as the Septuagint. In addition, we know that the oldest of the Christian gospels, the Gospel According to Mark, was written in Greek in Alexandria, probably by a Hellenized Jew, who did not know Israel because he made mistakes in the geography of that area. The Gospel According to Mark formed the basis for two other Gospels, Matthew and Luke. Hellenized Jews had much to do with the beginning of Christianity.

Even so, we persist in believing that the Jewish people resented and resisted anything Hellenic just as they resented and resisted anything Roman, and that was not quite true. If Jesus really grew up in Nazareth, he would have been within a day's walking distance of a fine Greek theater. True, there was some prudishness about Greek ways, but enthusiasm for anything Greek surged on.

In addition, we should realize the Mystery religions permeated the lands of the Mediterranean at the time Christianity began, and that all of the Mysteries told the same story about a godman, whose father was God and whose mother was a virgin, and who became a suffering, dying and resurrecting hero in order to erase the sins of the world. He was called Osiris in Egypt, Dionysus in Athens, Adonis in Syria, Bacchus in Rome, Mithras in Persia, and ...

Freke and Gandy use a great deal of fascinating research to establish that Christianity began as a Mystery religion like other Mystery religions and became dominant only because the Emperor Constantine backed it with the power of the Roman Empire.

I was looking through a book I had used as a text when I was taking a course in theater arts at the University of Illinois. That was before we entered World War II. The book was *New Theaters of Old* by Mordecai Gorelik who, in turn, was quoting from James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. The subject was the Athenian Theater of around 450 B.C.E. Dionysus was the god of the theater as well as of wine and was also associated with goats. The word "tragedy" means "the goat's song." To unite with the god, one had to drink wine and eat a bit of goat meat.

My young self picked up a pencil and scribbled in the margin: "interesting – Christian – the host."

Letters to the Editor

Fred March's reference to Dennett's "toxic religion" reminded me that as a teenager I started a list of toxic ideas. Now I don't remember what was on that list but

the project was one of those that kept coming back until now in retirement it captures much of my time, selects the books I read, and so on. Most recently it morphed into concern about a toxic social order, hierarchy. But back to ideas, I maintain that a true atheist is perfectly loyal to the "no other gods" rule (Exodus 20:3.) But there are "atheists", self proclaimed, who delude themselves. People who worship Stalin or Mao, for example. According to Karen Armstrong in *A History of God* there were Muslim philosophers in the golden age of Islam who seemed very close to that understanding. Christians who deify the Bible and Muslims who deify the Koran violate the "no other gods" rule too, I say. All major religions are actually eclectic, syncretistic. The claim of religious zealots that their religion is the one true religion, uniquely inspired and unchanging is a toxic idea. When asked his religion Gandhi said he was Hindu, Christian and Muslim. I am indebted to such a variety of religious and philosophical sources that my list of labels would have to be longer.

Dale L. Berry

You always include in our Humanist Newsletter this statement: "Humanism is a philosophy that derives its principles from science and reason" I'm asking that we take a scientific look at this controversial matter of gay marriage. I want it known that my objections are Darwinian rather than religious. If I'm wrong about that, I want somebody to show me the scientific evidence of my mistake.

Darwin, as we all know, promoted the idea of the survival of the fittest. Humanists have no problem in recognizing social evolution when it comes to the birds and the bees; but when it comes to human social evolution, they think we can change that. I make this statement because legally sanctioned man/woman marriage has been the norm in every successful human society since the beginning of history. I see that as human nature.

The February/March issue of *The Humanist* recently published a letter in which I hazard a guess that fully eighty percent of teenagers who get pregnant or have run-ins with the law come from single parent (never married and broken marriage) homes.

Rob Boston responded. "I never understood the argument that gay people must be punished because some heterosexuals have failed to keep their families intact."

I replied that I wasn't talking about gays. My hypothesis is this: Married couples who hold their families together provide us with the lions share of good citizens in the next generation, and what can be more

important to the survival of any society than that? Rewarding those who do it right isn't the same as punishing those who do it differently. That response went unpublished.

So what about gay marriage? E.O. Wilson, in his excellent book *On Human Nature*, says since homosexuals do not reproduce themselves, they must serve to ensure the survival of those most closely related genetically. Which brings me to the idea that I'd amend Hillary's statement, "It takes a village to raise a child" to read, "It takes a tribe to raise a child" That's a mother and father, grandmother and grandfather, benevolent uncle and maiden aunt. Should one fail, there's another to take up the task.

Should gay couples cut themselves off from those most closely related genetically and form artificial families with or without adopted children, they will abandon their role in perpetuating a society. Perhaps only suicide for them; probably for a whole society.

Laverne Rison

Let's Lighten Up!

While traveling separately through the countryside late one afternoon, a Hindu, a Rabbi, and a Critic were caught in the same area by a terrific thunderstorm. They sought shelter at a nearby farmhouse.

"That storm will be raging for hours," the farmer told them. "You'd better stay here for the night. The problem is, there's only room enough for two of you. One of you'll have to sleep in the barn."

"I'll be the one," said the Hindu. "A little hardship is nothing to me." He went out to the barn.

A few minutes later, there was a knock at the door. It was the Hindu. "I'm sorry," he told the others, "but there is a cow in the barn. According to my religion, cows are sacred and one must not intrude into their space."

"Don't worry, said the Rabbi, "Make yourself comfortable here. I'll go to sleep in the barn." He went out to the barn.

A few minutes later, there was a knock at the door. It was the Rabbi. "I hate to be a bother," he said, "but there is a pig in the barn. In my religion, pigs are considered unclean. I wouldn't feel comfortable sharing my sleeping quarters with a pig."

"Oh, all right," said the Critic, "I'll go sleep in the barn."

He went out to the barn.

A few minutes later, there was a knock at the door. It was the cow and the pig.

From The Tao of Piglet by Benjamin Hoff, Penguin Books



Do you know more New Yorkers are atheists than in other parts of the country? Because they know that the light at the end of a long tunnel is New Jersey!

Friendly Philosophers

Monday, June 1st

Open Forum

Bring a Your Own Topic for General Discussion

Monday, June 15th

Naught or Nice? The Theory of Naught Musik

Jane Ellen

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, June 7th, 9am

Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice, 202 Harvard SE

Tuesday, June 9th, 6pm

(note date change and venue change)

Special Guest: August Berkshire, VP of Atheists Alliance International

Copper Canyon Cafe (on Gibson just west of San Pedro)

New Mexicans for Science and Reason

Wednesday, June 10th, 7pm

More Harm than Good: Is Health Care Out of Control?

Al Zelicoff

UNM Law Building

1117 Stanford NE, Room 2402