



# Humanist Society of New Mexico



September 2009

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

## Quotes of the Month

We've got to take back the ideal of justice, we've got to take back this principle of human dignity. We've got to take it back from vengeance, from hatred, we've got to say: look, we're all in this together. We are human beings.

David Kaczynski

You will never be happy if you continue to search for what happiness consists of. You will never live if you are looking for the meaning of life.

Albert Camus

## Upcoming HSNM Meetings

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

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**Saturday, September 12<sup>th</sup>**

### Informal Meeting

*General Discussion*

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

Refreshments: Shirley & Bill Little

Summit Apartments, 3901 Indian School NE

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**Saturday, September 19<sup>th</sup>**

### Topical Discussion

*A Humanist Look at Ethics in Science*

Special Collections Library, 423 Central Ave. NE

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**Saturday, September 26<sup>th</sup>**

### Speaker Meeting

*Varnashramadharmayoga – Religion We Know as Hinduism*

Bill Kimbrough

Humanist Minute: Shirley Little

Refreshments: Salem Smith

UNM Law School, Room 2406, 1117 Stanford 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, September 5<sup>th</sup>, 10:30am**

*The Supreme Court*

Community Room, LaFarge 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.

## **Anecdotal Evidence of Climate Change**

By Harry Willson

On the evening of the same day I finished writing last month's essay on disappointment with Obama, Bill Moyers had on his PBS program two young environmentalists, a man from Friends of the Earth, and a woman from Green Peace. They had just been bailed out of jail. Their crime was bannering Mt. Rushmore, in the name of saving the environment. Here was one more topic of disappointment over campaign promises that are now on the back burner.

At first scientists observed "global warming" and called it that. The oil companies and their purchased politicians of the Know-Nothing Party denied that it was happening at all. Some Senators called the entire notion a hoax, and still think that.

Since some of the effects in some localities of global warming include marvelous blizzards, the scientists moved to a more cautious and all-inclusive term for this change, and now most of them call it "climate change."

The important question is, "How much, if any, of this change is the result of human activity?" The Know-Nothings are quick to assert that the humans have nothing to do with it, that it's part of a natural cycle, that only God can affect the climate. But most scientists are now agreeing that human activity, especially the burning of fossil fuels, is one of the causes, probably the major cause, of the change. If that's so, then we are all to some extent, large or small, responsible for what is happening.

Some of us think about this kind of thing more than others I don't have precise scientific instruments or measurements, but I have a lot of memory, and here's some anecdotal evidence of climate change.

[1] So help me, it does seem warmer than before. I grew up in Pennsylvania and remember some very cold winters. We felt twenty below every now and then and on several occasions forty below. Snow piled up between the sidewalk and the curb of the street, so deep the kids dug igloos under there. Those temperatures and all that volume of snow isn't happening there the way it was.

In 1958 in northern New Jersey, where I was living at the time, it snowed three feet deep on the Sunday after

Easter. I spent Sunday and Monday shoveling snow, to get the car out for the commute to graduate school on Tuesday. Such a thing hasn't happened since.

That same year I moved to New Mexico. On the last Sunday of the year it snowed more than a foot in Bernalillo and Placitas, paralyzing everything and everybody for a week. I thought nothing of it then, since I was used to foot-deep snow, but such storms seldom happen here nowadays. Paralyzing snow in Albuquerque has become very rare.

In the early 60s I lost tomato plants in blossom to frost on May 20 in the North Valley in Bernalillo County. In recent years we have last frost much earlier in the year. It seems warmer.

[2] The local weather is changing. Can we dare call it "climate change"? Formerly there used to be several very hot spells in June in Albuquerque, over 100 degrees. Not this year. One year is not "climate change," but the change is notable.

Light-skinned people needed a hat to protect themselves from the direct sun. The newspapers kept track of how many days in a row we had direct sun. Now we have much more cloud cover than previously. We hear people complain about how dark it is, and how many dark days in a row we have had.

We used to have wind in the spring. For some of us the wind made spring the least pleasant season of the year in New Mexico. For the past year we have had wind more or less all the time, or so it seems. It feels like something is changing.

[3] One can imagine that global warming could cause some animal species to migrate. We are aware of one instance. In 1975 we visited Casas Grandes in Chihuahua, Mexico. The ruins were marvelous, but what struck us as most remarkable was the infestation of screaming birds in the trees in the downtown plaza after dark. There were so many birds, and so much shiny white excrement, that the people weren't using the plaza under the trees. One boy threw a rock at the nearest tree, knocking down a bird. He did it a second time, and I asked him what he was doing. "To feed my dog." I asked him the name of the bird. The noise was deafening, but I thought he said, "Chanita."

Twenty years later, we heard much the same bird-noise, not so loud, in the trees at a shopping center in the South Valley. I looked up "chanita" in the Spanish-English lexicon. I couldn't find it but spotted "chanate -- Mexican blackbird." Could chanita have moved three hundred miles north in twenty years? I don't think they used to be around here. Now I hear them, hollering in our mulberry trees.

The weather [or is it the climate?] does seem to be changing. What to do about it is going to take more

thinking and soul-searching. If we lived in one of those Pacific Island nations that is being engulfed by rising sea level, it would feel more urgent, probably. It still doesn't seem to bother very much those Americans who live at the sea shore, even though they are in danger.

## **Attending College Could/Should Be Free Again**

By Donald Gutierrez

### Part I

Anyone watching the news has heard horror stories about college students sunk deeply in debt to student-loan businesses. An average debt recently quoted there mentioned a figure of \$22,000.00. The debts of students going into pre-professional graduate programs are far worse, piling up to six-figure digits, often due in part to usurious interest rates from those loan companies. Individuals in circumstances preventing prompt repayment (single parent, loss of job or of residence, health-crisis costs) not only get interest added to interest but start receiving endless calls from collection agencies that must come to seem like messages from Hell.

When I attended the University of California, Berkeley in the early 1950s, California colleges were virtually free. There was something called an "Incidental Fee" (\$35.00 per semester) that covered such privileges or needs as use of gym facilities or the campus hospital (as well as free psychiatric services!) and of course a first-rate scholarly library. Course books were relatively inexpensive, and used copies were readily available at local bookstores. Now, even at a state university like Berkeley, the cost per year for an undergraduate, according to the U. C. Office of the Registrar, is almost \$5,000.00 a semester and for a state-non-resident over \$16,000.00, while enrolling in Berkeley's Boalt Hall School of law costs almost \$18,000.00 per semester—all this without including living expenses and expensive books.

Although attending private colleges are far more expensive, even state school fees such as Berkeley's involve debts that can thus imprison students financially for years, even decades. As a result, medical students, for example, are going into higher paying specializations rather than becoming General Practitioners, though the nation sorely needs the latter. This kind of high-fee expense can be found generally at other state universities such as the University of Michigan and the City University of New York. In California, moreover, at least twice as much money is

utilized towards building and sustaining penal institutions as is directed towards the state's educational needs, an ominous funding mis-proportion in a supposedly democratic, libertarian society.

Extreme financial stress on college students is outrageous on many grounds. Higher education should be free to all young people who show an aptitude for and aspiration to advanced learning and professional or technical training. Society will need doctors, nurses, teachers, scholars, engineers, lawyers, philosophers, architects, scientists, artists, writers and other experts in the future, and if these high debt hurdles exist and persist, the consequences are obvious and pernicious—only those youths from wealthy or well-off families will be able to afford college, especially quality colleges, and the result is not only a class-based educational structure—Yale vs. Lordsburg City College-- but the hardening of a class-structured society. The crucial ideal and reality of democratic, egalitarian institutions of higher education open to all who qualify for it on the basis of intelligence, aspiration and dedication, rather than only through family income and/or name or connections, will have vanished.

Though I am a first-generation American of Central-American parents and came from an upper-lower-class/bohemian family, I was able to attend a major university not only because I received two different scholarships, but because state residents, as in my case, could attend a school like Berkeley at small cost. One major reason for this was that wealthy and well-off Californians paid a sizable, progressive-tax share of property taxes. This all changed in 1978 when there was a California “revolution” brought about by an anti-property-tax activist named Howard Jarvis. Strongly appealing to the rich and to landlords, Jarvis's Proposition 13 cut property taxes by 57% and allowed property to be taxed only during sale, no longer annually. This “relief” to the state's rich and well-off made millionaires and multi-millionaires even richer. It also had a devastating impact on California's county and city budgets, with the consequence, among other things, of public libraries in the state being unable to expand and thus, being unable to meet the reading needs and interests—especially among poorer families-- of a rapidly enlarging population. University and grade-school budgets were of course affected as well, in part due as well to sizable slashes in state educational budgets made by Republican Governor Pete Wilson. And though Berkeley continues to have full enrollments and high ranking nationally among state universities, not anyone who merits attendance can any longer attend; s/he can't afford it. And Pell Grants having in recent years been reduced almost by half only intensifies the

debt burden for many students. Proposition 13 is considered to be a major factor in California's current budget crisis so that law remains a disaster for the state's available public funds.

## Part II

As the United States still regards itself as the richest country in the world, what's happening to the monies needed for something as crucial to a democratic society's future and well-being as a flourishing, egalitarian higher education? We should consider, among other venues, the kind of monies available in some American financial institutions and the military sector. Extremely wealthy investors contribute billions of dollars to hedge-fund managers who transmit these monies electronically around the world in seconds. People criticizing Americans' money-salary culture tend to focus on the huge corporate and banking CEO salaries, and within the context of the average American's salary, these CEO salaries certainly are brutally outsized. Yet compared to the kinds of monies being invested and acquired by extremely rich people and by unregulated “too big to fail” banks, these CEO salaries, though deeply offensive, are, as economists like Paul Krugman have observed, sideshows.

Trillions of dollars are being circulated electronically—to make more money—nor is it only a matter of where that comes from (a crucially important subject in itself). The issue here is that wealth has been structured in our country in such a way that vast sums of money acutely needed and deserved for social, public needs have been privatized. This complex, devious activity has evolved and ramified in too many ways far beyond my capacity to describe except to mention that Congress has played its nefarious part in the past three decades in creating regressive taxation and providing huge tax breaks and subsidies to big corporations. Enormous sums of money that should be accessible for America's infrastructure, schools, medical health programs and facilities, cultural venues, are pouring into corporation, defense industry, bank, and private-investor coffers. The public is being robbed. The most egregious manifestation of course is the recent financial meltdown in which the individuals and financial institutions that have devised and profited from deregulated financial dealings are now “solving” the crisis by using public monies to restore their former financial status quo and CEO bonuses in what might well be the most heinous robbery of public monies in history.

One institution using massive amounts of public

monies with very little critical media attention or evaluation is the Pentagon. A recent *Mother Jones* ongoing report entitled “Shock and Audit: the Hidden defense Budget” (June 6, 2009) suggests that the Pentagon budget is monstrously large. After being informed that “cost overruns for current major weapons programs now /are/ \$296 billion,” the report indicates that the 2009 budget President Obama requested is \$534 billion and that the 2010 Pentagon budget will be \$707 billion. Those two sums would, combined, amount to \$ 1,241 trillion. But that's not all. According to *Mother Jones*; adding such additional costs (not to mention others that are classified) as monies for the Department of Veterans Affairs (\$55.9 billion, and for the department of Homeland Security, \$54.5 billion) gives us a 2009 military budget of \$816 billion. This would—one would hope-- include the immense cost of some 725 American military posts spread around the world, which, according to Chalmers Johnson's *The Sorrows of Empire* have “a total replacement value of \$118 billion” (154)—plus over 900 bases in our country.

As if all this isn't enough, the Pentagon has a \$300 billion twenty-year-plus program to build F-35 Joint-Strike-Fighter warplanes. Though this ambitious and extremely costly plan will be done in league with eight “partner” nations, the United States plans to foot much of the bill—so much for the “savings” supposedly made from no longer continuing the multi-billion dollar F-22 extravaganza). Finally, as if to fantasize about more ways to spend American taxpayers' money, the Pentagon harbors a high-placed senior officer named Michele A. Flournoy with the formidable title of Under Secretary of Defense for Policy whose job it is in effect to conceive and plan new wars which involves, according to *The New York Times* (July 4, 2009) “preparing for conflicts that could tie up American forces for decades...” and which offers “the concept of 'hybrid' war, which envisions the conflicts of tomorrow as a complex mix of conventional battles, insurgencies and cyber threats.” The golden era of peace that was supposed to follow the demise of the Cold War is thus to continue being wiped out by Washington's endless lust for wars and the Pentagon's endless demand for more ordnance, unrelenting imperial drives that will, among other things, not only abolish democratic educational possibilities in America but impoverish and further endanger our country for generations.

No one in their right mind can prove that national security demands the expenditure of such mountains of money. It is well known by now that the American defense budget is larger than that of all other nations' war budgets combined. That not only suggests that the United States is the most omnipotent military power in

history, but that its immense power and expense pose a threat both to the world and to its own population . If one thinks in terms of a National Security State in America, it could be claimed that. in some essential respects, the fundamental interests of the state and the public are polarized. In the public being forced to lose its monies through regressive taxations and Bush-style fear-mongering about terrorism, the public will and the public need are sacrificed to a centralized policy of imperial power and “full-spectrum-dominance” that can—and should--be literally defined as fascism.

### Part III

So how does the size of monies being spent in just these major categories—the military and financial corporations—relate to student college costs? Monies going through hedge-funds, corporation-taxable monies going to off-shore tax-havens, monies supporting our two current unnecessary and illegal wars coming to \$ three trillion over the next decade (according to economist Joseph Stiglitz), the enormous ordnance and military base costs and medical care of wounded soldiers—all of this involves sums of monies just a moderate portion of which would allow all young people qualifying in merit to go to college free. According to the journalist Adolph Reed Jr., “education is a social right, like health care “ (*Nation*, 6/29/09, 14). “The cost,” Reed continues, “of free college education is laughably low,” “about \$80 billion to make all public institutions free, much less than the recent bank bailouts,” urges Liza Featherstone (“Out of Reach; Is College Only for the Rich?” (Op. Cit., p. 14) That \$80 billion is less than ten percent of the current Pentagon budget. So America's leaders are apparently willing to reject the democratization of higher education in order to foment wars that are evidently designed to insure that America will dominate the world's energy sources and markets.

In the Nineteen Fifties the University of California Berkeley and other state universities throughout the country embodied a wonderful exemplification of democracy in a crucial area of our society's promise of a egalitarian future. We are now betraying that promise and ideal through a rigidly class-oriented structure of higher-education costs and access that will doom the United States as an open society of opportunity for all if education is not once again democratized as it was after World War II. Monies unjustly arrogated by America's financial and military sectors must be returned to essential civilian needs, among which higher education is crucial.

## Letters to the Editor

[Editors Note: The following letter was meant to be published in the August HSNM Newsletter but was not due to space considerations.]

Laverne Rison reports the Family Research Institute says, "homosexuals die a lot sooner than the rest of us." Well, other minority groups such as Native Americans and African Americans also have, on average, shorter life spans. The causes must be complex but it is reasonable to suppose that minority status itself has a lot to do with the tragic outcome. When people have to fight to gain equal rights it is not hard to imagine that they are, in fact, fighting for their lives. I support the National Center for Science Education which has fought in courtrooms all across the U.S. for decades against one particular type of religion-based pseudoscience, a religion masquerading as science. Fighting even one type of pseudoscience is labor intensive work and the laborers are few. There is also an abundance of weird ideas drowning our society. The Center for Inquiry publishes *Free Inquiry* and *The Skeptical Inquirer* both of which carry articles debunking a wide variety of fake science and superstitious belief. We owe it to ourselves, collectively, to seek the truth about serious questions. We are all in the same boat. I am now reading *Collapse* by Jared Diamond. The subtitle, "How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed" sounds like it should interest many of us.

Dale L. Berry

I was probably much younger than Marcia Stone was on arriving at an age when I couldn't do much more than write checks, and little ones at that. But I still gravitate to organizations that take action. So I was disappointed by Harry Willson's summary of the informal meeting discussion of Obama's presidency. I would have been most pleased if the report had concluded with "we decided to write letters to Congress members, Eric Holder, President Obama, the U.N., etc. demanding that the monstrous crimes of the last eight years be prosecuted in order to reduce the likelihood that they will continue or happen again." What is the point of making good laws if the executive branch can violate them with impunity?

Dale L. Berry

## Offer Made to Adam

God looks down and notices that Adam is all alone while all the animals have companions, so he decides to create a companion for man as well. He comes to see Adam and says to him, "Adam, you are my greatest creation and therefore, I am going to create for you the ultimate companion. She will worship the very ground you walk on, she will long for you and no other, she will be highly intelligent, she will wait on you hand and foot and obey your every command, she will be beautiful, and all it will cost you is an arm and a leg." Thinking for a few moments, Adam replies, "What could I get for a rib?"

Source: Aha! Jokes, <http://www.AhaJokes.com/>

### Friendly Philosophers

**Tuesday, September 8<sup>th</sup>**

**(please note date change due to Labor Day)**

Open Forum

Bring a Your Own Topic for General Discussion

**Monday, September 21<sup>st</sup>**

*The Big Bang: Problems and Alternative Theories*

Attila Csanyi

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, September 6<sup>th</sup>, 9am**

Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice, 202 Harvard SE

**Tuesday, September 15<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, September 9<sup>th</sup>, 7pm**

*Dave's Canadian Adventure: Science of Batholiths of the Coast Mountains of British Columbia*

Dave Thomas

UNM Law Building

1117 Stanford NE, Room 2402