



The Enlightenment



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Ten Commandments for Humanists, Free Thinkers and All Secularists

1. Be open-minded and be willing to alter your beliefs with new evidence.
2. Strive to understand what is most likely to be true, not to believe what you wish to be true.
3. The scientific method is the most reliable way of understanding the natural world.
4. Every person has the right to control of their own body.
5. God is not necessary to be a good person or to live a full and meaningful life.
6. Be mindful of the consequences of all your actions and recognize that you must take responsibility for them.
7. Treat others as you would want them to treat you, and can reasonably expect them to want to be treated. Think about their perspective.
8. We have the responsibility to consider others, including future generations.
9. There is no one right way to live.
10. Leave the world a better place than you found it.

President's Remarks

As we see in some of the articles in this issue of the Enlightenment, the concept of spirituality generates a great deal of heated debate among Humanists. On one side, some argue that spirituality implies a belief in supernatural entities and pseudo-scientific thinking, and the word should therefore be entirely expunged from our vocabulary. On the other side are those who argue that spirituality is a very important and meaningful part of human experience that does not necessarily involve supernatural beliefs, and should be valued and celebrated by Humanists. Many of those taking this position describe Humanist spirituality in terms of feelings of awe and wonder in response to the mystery and beauty of the universe. Carl Sagan and Albert Einstein have both espoused this point of view. Sam Harris, in his recently published book *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality without Religion* goes far beyond this "awe and wonder" view. Indeed, he sees this as a very impoverished way of thinking about spirituality. In his previous books, including *The End of Faith* and *Letter to a Christian Nation*, Harris has clearly established his credentials as a leading atheist and no friend of supernatural religion. In this more recent book he describes how he spent a number of years exploring Buddhist meditation and mysticism while living in the Far East, before pursuing a PhD in neuroscience. Although he is a hard-nosed atheist and rejects all supernatural notions, he still practices meditation and believes that, when the religious gobbled-gook is removed, such Eastern religious practices offer a profoundly meaningful way of abandoning illusions of consciousness and self-identity and waking up to a richer life, more connected to everything around us. In his book, he explores the completely natural, neurological bases of these sorts of spiritual experiences, which have been discovered and perfected by religious mystics over many centuries. He argues that we should be careful not to fall for pseudo-science on one hand or pseudo-spirituality on the other. I'm not sure how many Humanists will take up Harris' challenge to pursue this path of transcendent spirituality, which he sees as important for harmony and peace, both within the individual and among humankind. But he is certainly pushing the debate about spirituality among Humanists, and atheists generally, in a whole new direction. ~ Rod Martin

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Comments on Spirituality

The January 2015 *Enlightenment* contained an article on spirituality by Adriaan Mak. Here are some more comments on the subject by Adriaan, followed by an interesting interview by Steve Paikin with scientists Richard Dawkins and Lawrence Krauss.

Spirituality . . . in Another Word – by Adriaan Mak

Maybe there is no other word for spirituality because it embraces so many meanings, often mutually exclusive. The word became popular again after the 60's with a variety of "new age" movements such as the Neo-Pagans", Wicca, and groups borrowing ideas from Taoism, Sufi or Hindu spirituality, such as Transcendental Meditation, channelling, out-of-body and ecstatic experiences, etc. These movements rejected both religious fundamentalism and scientific rationalism, but might include ideas such as mysticism, devotion, contemplation and even piety.

When Carl Sagan used it he related it to a sense of awe and wonder about the immensity of time and space, and the new discoveries in scientific fields. Richard Dawkins and Lawrence Krauss, both secular humanist scientists, have also expressed that the new discoveries leave them with feelings of beauty and awe and wonder.

Steve Paikin in an Interview on April 30, 2013, Asked Both Krauss and Dawkins: *)

"How would you characterise the following person; he, or she, is utterly uninterested in the question of whether God exists but he or she considers himself, or herself, deeply spiritual. How do you characterise that kind of a person? "

Richard Dawkins replied:- *"Well I consider myself deeply spiritual in one sense, in the same sense that, perhaps, Carl Sagan would have done where I feel deeply moved in a poetic way by the sight of the milky way, by contemplation of the size of the Universe, by contemplation of the immense span of geological time, by looking down a microscope at a single cell, and seeing the intricate structure of a single cell and then reflecting that that cell is multiplied up trillions of times in my own body"...*

Steve Paikin interjects:- *"That's not the spirituality that I'm thinking of."*

Richard Dawkins resumes:- *"Well it's the spirituality I'm thinking of..."*

Lawrence Krauss then contributes:- *"And it's a better spirituality, I've said this again publicly too, I think one of the big misunderstandings and abuses of the discussion of science is that science takes away spirituality, which is really awe and wonder and a sense of something bigger than oneself, but the stuff that is bigger than oneself doesn't have to be unreal - it can be real and part of an amazing cosmos, as I like to say - being completely insignificant is uplifting and can be a spiritual experience - ... the spirituality of science is better than the spirituality of religion because it is real. But I will say that I think the person you are describing, and there's many of them, is a new breed of people, more and more*

people are becoming disillusioned by organised religion because of information, by realising how silly it is ultimately, but they don't want to lose what they are getting from organised religion so they transfer to this concept of spirituality - a oneness with the universe - and I think that people like that - we are hard wired, I think, to want that and there are many things that religion provides that we are hard wired for, the key thing for me is sure we recognise that religion provides things consolation, community, but the key thing is that it doesn't have to be religion that provides those things."

Steve Paikin interjects:- *"Did I hear you just say we are hard wired to find spiritual meaning in life."*

Lawrence Krauss resumes:- *"I think, certainly, yea, I think we are - there are evolutionary advantages I think..."*

Steve Paikin:- *"So the quest for God, or a belief in God, is not illogical at all? We are hard..."*

Richard Dawkins to Steve Paikin:- *"You just said to me that that is not the kind of spirituality I'm interested in. What kind of spirituality are you interested in?"*

Steve Paikin:- *"Well I guess I was thinking about ... people may not feel the need to go into a house of worship and yet they somehow still have a connection to the morality that comes out of religion..."*

Richard Dawkins:- *"Morality is another matter....."*

Lawrence Krauss to Steve Paikin:- *"You just jumped in - you said that wasn't irrational - the point is just because we're hard wired to do something doesn't make it rational. We're hard wired to do a lot of things that aren't rational. We're hard wired to be xenophobic in some ways, its not clear love is rational, and so there are lots of aspects of being human that don't relate to being rational - and understanding that is important if we want to deal with the real world and to try to make the world a better place."*

Steve Paikin:- *"So Science can be spiritual?"*

Richard Dawkins:- *"You are playing with words ... It depends what you mean, if you mean something supernatural, no, if you mean what Lawrence just called awe and wonder, and what Carl Sagan would have called awe and wonder, yes, certainly."*

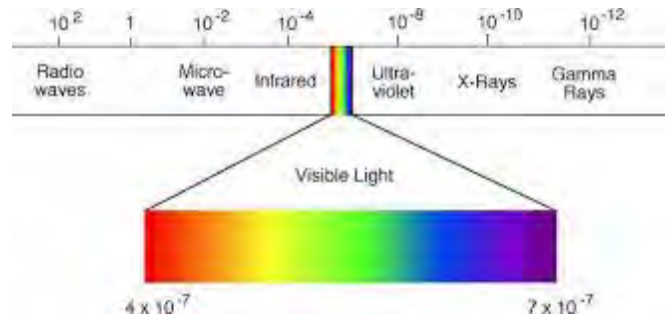
Lawrence Krauss:- *"And we should celebrate that - that's the point - I mean people think science takes away - I mean we're not the first ones to say this - as Richard said, Carl Sagan said it, you know - Richard Feinmann - talked about how understanding how a rainbow worked doesn't make it less beautiful - it makes it more beautiful, but somehow people get the sense that science is cold hard facts, and therefore boring and also dehumanising. . . and I think my goal, and I believe Richard's goal, is to disabuse people of that misconception. Science is wonderful, it's fun, its exciting, its enjoyable and pleasing to understand as listening to a sonnet or listening to a beautiful piece of music."*

***) For the interview see: http://www.age-of-the-sage.org/richard_dawkins/science_vs_religion_quotes.html**

More on the Intriguing Subject of Spirituality – or – Awe & Wonder – by Don Hatch

There seems to be a never ending argument about the use of the term “spirituality,” because of spirituality’s long-time association with religion. To get around this concern, in this article I am going to use the term “awe and wonder,” in place of spirituality as both Dawkins and Krauss have done in the interview above. I agree with Krauss when he says the awes and wonders of science are greater than anything religions can offer or provide, because they are real, and I will use a few personal example to substantiate this.

When I was a teenager, one of my hobbies was building radios. I was truly amazed that it was possible to transmit voice and music through the atmosphere and hear these sounds in a receiver that I had built. I wanted to learn more about the science behind this phenomenon so I bought a book entitled *Radio Physics Course* by Alfred A. Ghirardi. This large tome explained everything I ever wanted to know about radio theory, but specifically, I want to mention the awe and wonder



The Spectrum

I experienced when I first discovered the Electromagnetic Spectrum in this book. I could hardly believe that radio waves, microwaves, light, X Rays, and cosmic rays, were all electromagnetic emanations differing only in wavelength and frequency. Furthermore, this phenomenon could be represented mathematically by the simple equation:

$$\text{Wavelength in Meters} = \frac{300,000 \text{ Km/sec (The Velocity of Light)}}{\text{Frequency in Khz}}$$

This blew me away. Wavelength times frequency always equals the velocity of light. As the wavelength gets shorter the frequency increases to the point that the rays can penetrate as in X rays and become radioactive as in gamma rays. What simplicity! What awe and wonder! The radio waves being received in my antenna, have a relationship to the light displayed in the colours of the rainbow. It blew me away then, and still does now. As Krauss states in the Paikin interview, this scientific awe and wonder is real and better than any kind of spirituality associated with God. Yes indeed, scientific awe and wonder is real, unlike a supposed supernatural God who is not real but a phantom created by humans long ago. Yes, spirituality associated with an unreal deity is itself unreal. Nevertheless, devout believers will claim that they do experience genuine spiritual feelings when they feel God’s presence and non-believers really have no cause to deprive them of these feelings that are personally beneficial to those who believe in God. The point is that for non-believers, equal or greater feelings of awe and wonder are available in the scientific and other realms.

For example, I have experienced feelings of awe and wonder in churches, but it had nothing to do with God. It was because of inspiring music. I once heard the Mormon Tabernacle Choir in Salt Lake City sing the Gloria from Mozart’s twelfth mass, and it was so inspiring that at the end I was in tears. And the wonders of nature can also be awe inspiring. Standing on the edge of the Grand Canyon provided me with an exhilarating experience, as does observing the beauty of a rose, and admiring the architecture of a magnificent cathedral. Then there are the feelings of falling in love, the miracle of the birth of a child and

the miracle of life itself. And it goes on and on. It is just a fact of life that humans can experience great feelings of awe and wonder that have nothing to do with religion or God.

But, it is also a fact of life that many humans do experience what they call spiritual feelings associated with God, although they may have difficulty defining God. Recently I discussed these matters with two friends who respect that I am a humanist without belief in God, but they themselves are unable to make the leap from believer to non-believer. My older friend does not believe in the “Guy in the Sky” God and believes that Jesus was not supernatural, but was fully human. Nevertheless, he believes there is a mystical presence “out there” that is divine in some way. He says it is as important to him as being able to breathe. This is very comforting to him and I have no need to, nor any intention of changing his outlook.

My younger friend is a pilot like myself, and like me he is fascinated by the experience of flight. When I lift an aircraft off the ground I am enthralled as I gain altitude and freedom from the “surlly bonds of Earth.” And I am equally thrilled when I make a successful landing. My friend is also enraptured by flight and particularly admires John Gillespie Magee’s poem *High Flight* saying he feels God’s presence as he reads this poem. Without doubt, poetry can be truly inspiring and I print *High Flight* below because it has been inspirational to many pilots including myself.

High Flight

Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth
Of sun-split clouds, — and done a hundred things
You have not dreamed of — wheeled and soared and swung
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there,
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air. . . .

Up, up the long, delirious burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace
Where never lark, or ever eagle flew —
And, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.

Yes indeed, poetry can instill feelings of awe and wonder, and as a pilot, I admit that every time I read this poem, I tear up a bit. I fully understand why my friend feels the way he does and I have no intention of attempting to influence his belief in some sort of deity, even though he is not able to define what he calls God. Although it is a mystery for him, it is something truly satisfying. We can remain friends while respecting each other’s beliefs.

So where are we on this subject of spirituality, AKA awe and wonder? We can if we wish, leave the word spiritual to the religious, although there is no reason they should have exclusive use of the word. But, because of the long-term association of spiritual with religion, secularists have the option of employing the term awe and wonder as an alternative. Nevertheless, it should never be assumed that secularists cannot experience feelings of awe and wonder equal to or even superior to the spiritual feelings of believers as Lawrence Krauss implies in his interview above with Steve Paikin.

The Interdependent Web

By Goldwin Emerson

People of good conscience recognize that we have an obligation to preserve and protect our environment. This includes all parts of our planet, rocks, inorganic matter, energy, things living and natural resources. Even when we stretch our minds, we do not have the capacity to grasp all that exists. In fact, the universe is too complicated for us to fully understand. None-the-less, we can be conscious of the interconnectedness of our part of the universe, planet earth, upon which humans depend.

Since we are mainly interested in human aspects of the universe, ethical people think about our relationships to each other. We also ought to be concerned about connections with non-human aspects of the universe. A healthy environment becomes crucial to us as we increase our world population and presently have technology to either destroy or protect our natural resources.

The environment leaves many things to consider. These include energy sources, clean air and clean water, arable land, the production of food, safe pollution-free means of transportation, and climate change with its potential for destruction. In addition, knowledge about productive environments involves a thin layer of topsoil, usually less than six inches deep. World-wide, this layer of topsoil, crucial to food production, covers only a small portion of the planet's surface and we are fortunate to have rich topsoil in parts of South Western Ontario and in our Prairie Provinces.

Protecting the environment, involves saving some parts of the planet while learning to safely contain or destroy other parts. Plastic cartons and ubiquitous water containers and dangerous chemical products are in the former category while nuclear wastes and dangerous contaminants are in the latter. Learning to reuse plastic containers is, at best, a partial solution, while learning how to store nuclear waste safely is a gargantuan task.

While sharing food and distributing it to alleviate global starvation in large parts of our planet is theoretically possible, our best efforts fall short. Advanced practices in agriculture may help to provide just enough for everyone globally. As efforts on relieving starvation continue, problems of sharing and re-distributing wealth are exacerbated by a population that now exceeds seven billion and enlarges each year. Even using best farming methods and careful distribution, a growing world population may, at some point, surpass our improved agricultural technology and defeat our best efforts at feeding those who are daily dying from starvation.

Last, but not least, demands for energy presently expand more rapidly than do ways of producing it. One case in point is our heavy reliance on oil production, whether oil comes from resources under our oceans or is found in the oil sands of Alberta. In both cases, the potential for destruction of our environment seem obvious.

Nature has its limits. Fortunately, progressive thinkers are abandoning old ideas about nature's abundance. We do not hear much talk nowadays that we, as God's people, are to multiply and be fruitful and inherent the earth. Religions, less frequently than in the past, tell us that animals exist mainly for human consumption and convenience. So now modern religion has the opportunity to be on the same side as modern science and help to be an important asset in a healthy ecology.

Sometimes, extremes in political ideologies cause environmental problems. For example, harsh dictatorships and extremes in capitalist systems driven by greed, prevent reasonable solutions. In Western thought we sometimes confuse capitalism and free enterprise with democracy. Some Canadian mining companies working in third-world countries pay little attention to good ecological practices. To put the message more positively, we must learn to respect the worth and dignity and needs of other people, including those who live outside Canada.

Acknowledging that I have not presented clear or lasting solutions, but what I offer is but a first step in the recognition of growing ethical problems that will continue to expand if we fail to respect our environment. When it comes to solving our environmental problems much effort from many sources is necessary. We are all in this ethical challenge together.

Starting to Get Realistic About Radical Islam

As the Islamic State continues to commit more atrocities, and isolated Islamic terrorists attack targets in countries such as Australia, Canada and France, we are finally seeing comments in the press saying it is time to stop being apologetic and time to stop calling Islam a religion of peace. The evidence is otherwise. There is definitely a faction of Islam that carries out kidnapping and murder and wants to establish Sharia Law wherever it can. To date, we have heard little from moderate Muslims calling out for reform, but this is the only way change can occur. Surprisingly, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's New Year's Day address, reported by Shillman Fellow Raymond Ibrahim, has done just that. Unfortunately, the mainstream media ignored this important and astonishing speech, but we need to ponder these words now, while many leaders continue to deny the Islamic roots of the latest jihadist murders. Here is what the Egyptian President said:

“It’s inconceivable that the thinking that we hold most sacred should cause the entire umma [Islamic world] to be a source of anxiety, danger, killing and destruction for the rest of the world. That thinking—I am not saying “religion” but “thinking”—that corpus of texts and ideas that we have sacralized over the centuries, to the point that departing from them has become almost impossible, is antagonizing the entire world. It’s antagonizing the entire world!”

“Is it possible that 1.6 billion people [Muslims] should want to kill the rest of the world’s inhabitants—that is 7 billion—so that they themselves may live? Impossible! I am saying these words here at Al Azhar, before this assembly of scholars and ulema—Allah Almighty be witness to your truth on Judgment Day concerning that which I’m talking about now. All this that I am telling you, you cannot feel it if you remain trapped within this mindset. You need to step outside of yourselves to be able to observe it and reflect on it from a more enlightened perspective.”

“I say and repeat again that we are in need of a religious revolution. You, imams, are responsible before Allah. The entire world, I say it again, the entire world is waiting for your next move ... because this umma is being torn, it is being destroyed, it is being lost—and it is being lost by our own hands”

This speech should be an encouragement for moderate Muslims to speak out and call for reform in the same manner that Judaism and Christianity reformed. But how can more moderate Muslims be motivated to get involved and call for reform. Perhaps if more non-Muslims keep pointing out the reality that religious extremist Islamists are indeed not welcome as members of a religion of peace, they might start to get off their collective rears and help bring about badly needed reform. (DAH).