



The Enlightenment



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Ethics and Integrity in Politics

By Goldwin Emerson

Our upcoming federal election will be held on October 19, 2015. Thoughtful Canadians who are eligible to vote will be considering which candidates they wish to choose. In order to vote wisely we will need to inform ourselves about current issues and the positions taken by the various politicians. In addition, we should do our best to assess the general qualities that we would like to see in candidates running for office.

Over 2300 years ago Greece was the cradle of democracy. Ancient wise men of the day pondered the same questions about their politicians. Plato, born in 427 BCE, talked and wrote about good qualities of leadership. In his *Republic*, he stated that politicians should be chosen from the wisest and most reliable citizens. Political systems ought to be organized in such a manner as to prevent political corruption. Aristotle, born 384 BCE, was a student of Plato and later he too lectured and wrote about the need to choose the most ethical politicians. In *Nichomachean Ethics*, and his *Politics*, Volume 1, Aristotle stressed the importance of prior experience in the work-a-day world. He believed politicians should have the highest ethical principles and be known as virtuous characters.

Today, we too, are faced with questions about what qualities we want to see in our candidates for the upcoming election. Here are a few of my choices of desirable characteristics:

*Honesty and integrity which means people who can be trusted to spend our tax money wisely for our citizens' benefit.

*Caring and concerned candidates; people who have been involved in work other than full-time politics. If a candidate has worked at occupations that are necessary for the betterment of society this is a good indication of their political usefulness. These tasks need not always be charitable organizations, but also those who do important work in businesses, or trades or social work or health care, education, or other helping professions.

*Respectful of others. I am not favorably impressed with politicians who run negative advertisements or make negative statements about other competing candidates rather than presenting plans and clear statements about what policies they would promote. (Continued on page 3)

President's Remarks

In reading the articles in this latest issue of the Enlightenment, I'm struck once again by the relevance and power of a Humanist perspective on life. Humanism is not just about being a non-theist (what we *don't* believe in). More importantly, it's about seeking to live an ethical, meaningful life, treating others with fairness and compassion, and maintaining a sense of thoughtful openness, curiosity, and wonder in response to the world around us. While Humanism is not a well-defined creed or belief system, the 12 principles of Humanist Canada, presented on the last page of this issue, provide a nice summary of the values that most of us would agree with and seek to live by. Goldie Emerson's insightful article on ethics and integrity in politics reminds us of how these Humanist principles may be applied to the public sphere of politics and social action, providing us with a framework for thinking about the qualities and policies that are desirable in a member of parliament. These are valuable thoughts to bear in mind as we contemplate voting in the upcoming federal election. Don Hatch's thoughtful and rather moving article brings the focus more to the personal sphere of family and individual relationships, as he reflects on recent major events in his own life. He highlights the almost mystical sense of awe and wonder experienced at the birth of a great-grandchild at one end of the lifespan, and the way a Humanist finds meaning and consolation while grappling with the death of a spouse at the other.

As the summer winds down, I'm looking forward to seeing our HALA members and friends again at our coming meetings. We have lined up another series of very interesting, informative, and challenging speakers for the coming months, and we anticipate some lively discussion, as well as enjoyable opportunities for socializing and getting to know one another better at our regular meetings and social events.

~ Rod Martin

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	<u>HALA</u>	<u>HALA Limited</u>	<u>HC</u>	<u>Humanist</u>
	<u>Basic</u>	<u>Resources</u>	<u>Basic</u>	<u>Perspectives</u>
Single	\$20	\$10	\$40	\$25
Family	\$25	\$15	\$50	

(Ethics and Integrity in Politics continued)

*Candidates who can explain their policies clearly and avoid political baffle-gab. Granted some policies and goals are not easy to describe. For example, a system of “proportional representation” requires further explanation as to how and why Canadians could benefit by this new approach.

*Candidates who take an interest in world affairs. Politicians ought to have carefully thought out opinions on topics such as the following: climate change, environmental welfare, Canada’s military actions against ISIS, safety in disposal of nuclear wastes, a healthy balance in trade and economic policies and immigration policies that work towards Canada’s benefit.

*Policies which would bring fairness in dealing with our First Nations people.

*Openness toward supporting scientific research that can lead towards progress in understanding and sharing knowledge needed to make Canada a world leader in the development of science.

*Economic policies that lead towards stability and financial growth.

*Support for public radio and television services such as our CBC.

*Openness in sharing goals and policies with the general electorate, both before and after being elected.

* Policies that continue to make our health care a priority rather than policies that may erode publicly funded health care.

* Laws that control political perks and special entitlements provided to politicians.

* A clear policy on how to either abolish our unelected Senate or control the excesses of the Senate.

* Politicians who are actively involved in creating job opportunities for citizens who are eager and willing to work.

No doubt there are important points that could be added to this list or some with which thoughtful readers may disagree. Some politicians have not served us well, but there are others who have given their entire commitment to improving government. The latter group has often behaved as true statesmen or stateswomen. They have worked far beyond the majority of politicians and have made lasting contributions to Canadian welfare.

We as voting citizens can improve our political system by selecting the best candidates for Canada’s first fixed-date election, October 19, 2015. Collectively, it is our responsibility as voters to choose the best political leaders for the next four years.

Birth and Death – Two of Life’s Significant Milestones

By Don Hatch

Within the last year, my family and I have lived through the occurrences of a life coming into the world and a life departing. With the indulgence of *Enlightenment* readers, I would personally like

to relate some of the happenings of these two events and comment on the emotions I felt, as well as offer some comments on our experiences with the Ontario health care system. First: a new life.

On November 1st, 2014, my granddaughter Hilary gave birth to a healthy baby girl. Since Hilary's father is Irish, she gave her daughter the delightful Irish name Maeve. During Hilary's pregnancy, she seldom saw her family doctor. Instead, she made regular visits to a midwife for check-ups. In the hospital a midwife handled the delivery, although a doctor could be called if there were complications. Fortunately Hilary had an easy birth, and she was back home three hours after the baby arrived.* Follow-up visits were made to her home by midwives for about six weeks. Now she visits her family doctor periodically for immunization shots etc. Things have certainly changed considerably since my children were born. Visits to doctors rather than midwives were the norm, and doctors handled the delivery. Mothers stayed in the hospital for several days before going home. These changes have obviously taken place in order to reduce costs and Hilary says the system worked without a hitch for her. It has been a delight watching Maeve progress as she is able to do more and more things. She is now crawling all over the place and will soon be walking.

On seeing Maeve for the first time, I couldn't help thinking that she was indeed a miracle. This healthy little girl was the result of about three and half billion years of the evolution of life forms, as well as centuries of chance encounters between individuals in various countries including England, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, Russia, Lithuania and Canada. And I cannot stop marveling at the physiological processes that enable the creation of all the different diverse organs of a fetus. How this instructional information is encoded into the DNA of an embryo is truly amazing. To repeat; yes indeed, conscious human life is a miracle, and surely the greatest sin anyone can commit is to take the life of another human being.

I expect that Maeve will be raised in a secular environment. She will not be indoctrinated with confusing religious untruths such as belief in a supernatural deity or belief in an afterlife. She will receive ethical and moral instructions from her parents and possibly other non-religious sources. She will be encouraged to strive for the obtaining of an education suited to a career of her choice. Hopefully she will attempt to live every day to the fullest extent possible, realizing that this life is all there is.

Unlike many children born in the developing world, Maeve has a head start in that she was born in Canada as were many of us. Our parents passed on to us a heritage of prosperity and freedom, and it is up to us to pass these attributes on to our descendants. We must do everything in our power to not let them down.

Having considered the first milestone in a person's life, we must now consider the last. Death is a reality that everyone must face. Sooner or later we need to think about the end times in order to insure that we will hopefully be able to die without undue suffering and with dignity. Perhaps the best way for an older person "to go" is to suddenly die in one's sleep. This sometimes does happen of course, but often older people just gradually slow down and eventually require some form of assistance to keep on living in a dignified manner until the end. Many of those suffering from debilitating diseases such as ALS would like to end their suffering through assisted dying and the recent ruling by the Canadian Supreme Court should make this possible in the not too distant future.

About two and a half years ago, my wife Winnagene (Winn) was diagnosed with cancer of the liver. Doctors at the London Regional Cancer Clinic considered various treatments including

operating, radiation and chemotherapy. Because of the position of the two cancerous growths, they thought neither operating nor radiation was advisable and they opted for chemo. Four different types of chemo were tried, but none of them worked. All through this Winn remained surprisingly positive and continued with normal activities realizing that the end might not be too far away.

By the beginning of March, 2015, she was no longer able to leave the house and I became a home caregiver wondering how our health system would come to my aid. The doctors at the clinic applied to the Community Care Access Centre (CCAC) for assistance and they sent a nurse every few days to check her vitals and make sure her pain medication was working. Then they provided a personal support worker (PSW) to give Winn a bath once a week. Later they sent a PSW every evening to help me get her into bed. They also sent an occupational therapist to arrange for helpful devices such as a walker. As long as she was able to walk, and get to the washroom, I could manage OK, but once she was immobile, I knew I needed more help. More PSWs were provided, but they were not always there when I needed them. Finally welcome relief came when a hospital bed was ordered in and twenty-four hour nursing care was procured. Winnagene passed away in her 85th year at about 4:00 a.m. on June 8th 2015, in the presence of my daughter, my son and his wife and myself, as well as a nurse.

I relate the details in the paragraph above in order to describe how the Ontario health care system came to our assistance and allowed Winnagene to die at home as she wished, rather than in a hospital. (There have, however, been reports in the media of cases where not sufficient help was provided, most probably due to cutbacks and budget constraints. Our medical personnel face daunting challenges ahead as the aging population increases in numbers.)

Winnagene was a professional musician having spent much of her life as an organist and Director of Music at various churches. In later years she also directed an English handbell choir. She composed and published over seventy pieces of choral anthems and handbell music. Having spent so much time in churches, she retained her Christian faith, never being able to subscribe to the non-belief of humanism. She wrote her own obituary and requested a Christian memorial service at which music by Bach and Vaughn Williams was to be played. I chose two hymns, added a piece by Mozart and sat down with a minister to outline a dignified celebration of her life with emphasis on music rather than theology. My son delivered an inspiring eulogy. An urn containing her ashes was placed in a niche at Mount Pleasant Cemetery in London in the presence of her family and close relatives.

Winnagene believed in the presence of a higher power, although she could not describe it. Whether or not she believed in an afterlife, I do not know because she never talked about it. Those who believe there is some sort of existence after death wonder how non-believers cope without this assurance. Well, non-believers know that they continue on in some fashion through the lives of their descendants and maybe as well by being remembered for good deeds they performed or by leaving a legacy of published literature, or great art, or great architecture, or great leadership, or as in the case of Winnagene, a legacy of published music that will be sung or played for some time to come. Yes, death is inevitable, but in the interim between birth and death, we are challenged to make the most of our lives and hopefully make at least a small contribution to the betterment and enrichment of society.

*It was unusual that Hilary came home from the hospital so soon. Most mothers now stay for about a day.

Declaration of the Principles of Humanist Canada

1. Humanism aims at the full development of every human being.
2. Humanists uphold the broadest application of democratic principles in all human relationships.
3. Humanists advocate the use of the scientific method, both as a guide to distinguish fact from fiction, and to help develop beneficial and creative uses of science and technology.
4. Humanists affirm the dignity of every person, and the right of the individual to maximum possible freedom compatible with the rights of others.
5. Humanists acknowledge human interdependence, the need for mutual respect, and the kinship of all humanity.
6. Humanists call for the continued improvement of society so that no one may be deprived of the basic necessities of life, and for institutions and conditions to provide every person with opportunities for developing their full potential.
7. Humanists support the development and extension of fundamental human freedoms, as expressed in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and supplemented by UN International Covenants comprising the United Nations Bill of Human Rights.
8. Humanists advocate peaceful resolutions of conflicts between individuals, groups and nations.
9. The humanist ethic encourages development of the positive potentialities in human nature and approves conduct based on a sense of responsibility to oneself and to all other persons.
10. A fundamental principle of humanism is the rejection of beliefs held in absence of verifiable evidence, such as beliefs based solely on dogma, revelation, mysticism or appeals to the supernatural.
11. Humanists affirm that individual and social problems can only be resolved by means of human reason, intelligent effort, critical thinking joined with compassion, and a spirit of empathy for all living things.
12. Humanists affirm that human beings are completely a part of nature, and that our survival is dependent on a healthy planet which provides us and all other forms of life with a life-supporting environment.