



# The Enlightenment



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## Honesty is the Best Policy for Leaders

*By Goldwin Emerson*

One of the best policies a political leader can have is honesty. Of course, leaders need many other good qualities such as wisdom, being good listeners, and caring about those for whom they make decisions.

In modern times, countries are now drawn closer together through technology, trade, and mutual partnerships including defense alliances. Agreements on production and international cooperation on environmental protection, climate change, and concerns about human health are part of the responsibilities of good leadership. The sharing of beneficial medical knowledge now becomes more important and urgent as countries are drawn into closer contact with each other.

To be a good leader in modern times is a very demanding task. It is too much to expect that a single leader can make good decisions about a multitude of important matters which need to be handled wisely and quickly. The more complex decisions become, the more good leaders need to surround themselves with teams of experts on various important aspects of their decision-making. These tasks will involve trade, immigration, defense, production, human and environmental health, and adequate levels of employment. Leaders who change their minds frequently and unpredictably about their hastily made decisions are not likely to be successful. This fact is probably equally as true within democracies as it is within dictatorships.

Good leaders need to make their own intentions and aspirations clear to their supporting cabinets and government ministers. It can be very frustrating to have leaders who continuously change their minds on important government policies. This leaves government support staff confused and at odds with their leaders. Leaders who are not honest with their supporters will bring disarray and confusion among those who are there to assist them. It is also true that leaders from competing countries will feel confused and threatened by statements or policies which emerge from leaders with whom they differ on important topics.

Now that many smaller countries have nuclear weapons or at least nuclear knowledge regarding advanced nuclear technology, it becomes important that leaders of these countries can be trusted to act in a responsible manner. It is more crucial than ever that leaders speak with honesty and integrity. They need to be unambiguous and clear when talking to foreign governments. In recent years the number of nuclear nations has expanded to include India, Pakistan, North Korea, probably Israel, possibly Iran, and perhaps

others as well that presently have the knowledge and technology to be on the verge of nuclear proficiency. The world cannot afford to have erratic leaders who are unpredictable and untrustworthy.

In democracies, freedom of speech is of great importance. For example, in the United States, freedom of the press is reinforced in the first amendment of the American constitution. It is of great importance in democracies that news media are permitted to print and speak freely on matters of government, scientific advancement, religious expression, and on honest and open opinions on public matters. When free speech is threatened or silenced or controlled by leaders or labeled as “fake” news, this ought to be regarded as a serious attack on free speech within good democratic practice. In order to vote wisely and choose good leaders, voters in democracies need to have access to as much accurate knowledge and truth as possible. As Timothy Snyder wrote in his 2017 book, *On Tyranny* (Penguin, Random House), “to abandon facts is to abandon freedom. If nothing is true then no one can criticize power, because there is no basis on which to do so.”

Good leaders need to protect honesty and freedom of speech. They should not vacillate and change their stories frequently about ideas they regard as true one day and then reinvent new and changed versions, sometimes even within a few days. Leaders who do so have little regard for truth and honesty.

As the ancient Greek philosopher, Plato, warned us over two thousand four hundred years ago in *The Republic*, written in 380 BCE, good leaders ought to be the kind of political leaders who are in power to serve others with truth and honesty and who are not in politics to serve themselves. Honesty is still the best policy for good leadership just as it was in ancient times.

## An Intriguing Poem

HALA member Andrew Szemeredy has an internet friend, Kate Jones, who has written the following poem. Andrew believes it will be of interest to *Enlightenment* readers.

**Ten powerful thoughts iambically defined:  
Ten syllables in rhymes to tease your mind**

*by Kate Jones, SRFSP*

## **From Singularity to Infinity, A Roundtrip Through Epistemology**

- 1. *Being***—the interface to *understanding*  
I am; what is it; and what does it do;  
And what should I do with it, and with you?
- 2. *Understanding***—encoded through *mathematics*  
Well, let us say that one and one is two.  
That seems to fit, and so it must be true.

3. **Mathematics**—the matrix of *language*  
There's more—there's deca-, hecto-, mega-, giga,  
And peta-zetta-yotta, even bigga...
4. **Language**—the carrier wave of *thought*  
So words are handy to give things a name  
That others recognize to mean the same.
5. **Thought**—the vehicle of *Reason*  
The wetware chortles in its galloping growth  
And makes some rules to sort out what it knoweth.
6. **Reason**—the guardian of truth and *reality*  
Debunk the junk, each fallacy and fad,  
Though magicians show, illusions aren't all bad.
7. **Reality**—that which is, in any form and *structure*  
If it exists, it's energy or matter  
And other stuff, like cosmic background chatter.
8. **Structure**—the template of *evolution*  
Life's blueprint builds 'em, weird or elegant,  
Genes make both dust mites and the elephant.
9. **Evolution**—the ascent toward *infinity*  
New combinations play with what makes sense,  
Like fractals bounded by the longest fence.
10. **Infinity**—the birth place of *being*  
160 billion light years through,  
The Universe kept on till it made *you*.

And you, and you, each life just once appears,  
To carve its meaning from its earthly years.  
So, fill each unforgiving minute's span  
With all the verve and gusto that you can.  
The Universe, the world, and humankind:  
Their priceless heritage—the sovereign mind.

KATE JONES -- Hungarian-born Libertarian atheist/artist has worked in many media: graphic art, English-style ballroom dance, metagraphics (epistemological symbolism), geometric puzzles, poetry, and philosophy, particularly meme theory. She lives and works in Pasadena, Maryland, where she runs her company, Kadon Enterprises, Inc., to make and market "gamepuzzles"®, and does editing/proofreading on the side. She has, through her long life, variously lived in Hungary, Germany, New York, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Florida, Virginia, and Shiraz (Iran), and speaks all those languages. She has been intending to write her book about her Theory of Everything, especially human consciousness, for at least 20 years. Any day now...

## The Ongoing Evolution of HALA

The organization that is now HALA began 18 years ago as a study group at the Unitarian Fellowship of London. The prime mover was Harold Koehler. (Harold's daughter Marlene is now a member of HALA, having recently moved from Ottawa to London). At the beginning, the activities consisted mainly of monthly meetings with a speaker on a topic related to humanism, followed by an active discussion. In 2004 it was decided to become affiliated with the Humanist Association of Canada (Now Humanist Canada) which at that time was thriving with a well-known leader, the late oncologist Dr. Robert Buckman. Buckman was an effective spokesperson often called on by the media for his opinions on various concerns of the day. HAC held excellent annual conventions and had a very credible newsletter. Unfortunately, they are now just a shadow of their former self.

It was at the time of joining HAC that the London organization became known as the Humanist Association of London and Area (HALA) with a set of bylaws, and since then has continued to gradually evolve to what it is today. The first *Enlightenment* appeared in 2005 and the first Wolf Hall event occurred in 2009. We created a Constitution in 2010 allowing us to receive charitable status from the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) under the education category. This has provided funding for all Wolf Hall events to date. Along the way we added a web site and began to hold annual summer picnics and winter Solstice celebrations. A few years ago, various members began attending the annual London Pride Parade and we are now on Facebook. We have had one successful showing of a movie on a Sunday afternoon, added discussions at the Fox and Fiddle after meetings and held periodic games nights. Podcasts of monthly meetings are now being recorded and sent out to all members who are on line. This is especially valuable for members who are unable to attend any specific meeting. Another event being considered is the possibility of having a discussion on the topic of a previous meeting at a Sunday brunch in a restaurant.

All in all, much has been accomplished, but if we wish to continue evolving, we need to decide just what the way ahead should look like. During the last couple of years, we have been fortunate to have acquired a number of keen younger members who, among other things, are advocating the use of appropriate modern digital technology to enhance what we do. They are currently in the process of coming up with ideas on future possibilities for consideration by the HALA Board of Directors. (DAH).

### The Board of the Humanist Association of London and Area (HALA)

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