

# The Enlightenment

Volume 1

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The Newsletter of the  
Humanist Association of London and Area

## President's Remarks

Hello, and welcome to the first edition of The Enlightenment, the official Newsletter of the Humanist Association of London & Area. To begin, I'd like to thank our founding and current vice-president Don Hatch for taking the initiative in putting this project into motion.

I feel that the establishment of this quarterly is a definite step forwards for humanism in London and its neighboring towns and cities. A regularly published Newsletter does much for an organization's image and visibility to the public.

If you'd like to contribute an article or announcement to The Enlightenment, please contact Don or myself. Enjoy!

Best regards to all, Derek Kaill

### **The Steering Committee of the Humanist Association of London and Area**

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The Humanist Association of London and Area meets at The Unitarian Fellowship of London, 557 Clarke Road in London, on the first Thursday of the months September to May inclusive.

Visit our web site at [www.Popamoto.net/Humanist/Humanists.html](http://www.Popamoto.net/Humanist/Humanists.html) Our Web Master is John Pope, [jpope@wwdc.com](mailto:jpope@wwdc.com)

**New members are welcome.** Contact Secretary Harold Koehler at (519) 453-5452. Membership fees are listed below.

	<u>HAC Basic</u>	<u>HAC Limited Resources</u>	<u>HIC magazine Optional</u>	<u>London</u>
Single	\$30	\$15	\$18	\$10
Family	\$35	\$20	\$18	\$15
Life	\$500			N/A

## **Introductory Remarks**

This is the first quarterly Newsletter of the Humanist Association of London and Area. Our aims are threefold.

1. To inform members of up-coming meetings and events.
2. To present interesting and sometimes provocative articles that invite comments, discussion and criticism.
3. To print articles written by our members and others, that will be of interest to humanists.

**Please Note** This Newsletter is being sent to all current members and also to those who have attended our meetings and expressed an interest in Humanism during the last year. Non-members wishing to remain on our mailing list, and receive copies in the future, are asked to contact Don Hatch at (519) 472-6167 or e-mail at [dahatch@rogers.com](mailto:dahatch@rogers.com)

## **Up-coming Meetings**

For our next meeting on April 7<sup>th</sup> we will be attending a presentation put on by the Unitarian Fellowship of London at 7:30 PM. There will be a video on the current Israeli/Palestinian situation.

The May 5<sup>th</sup> meeting will be a review and discussion of Pat Duffy Hutcheon's book, *The Road to Reason*. Copies of the book are still available for \$11.00. Call Don Hatch at 472-6167 or e-mail [dahatch@rogers.com](mailto:dahatch@rogers.com) to reserve a copy. Meeting time 7:30 PM.

## **In This Issue**

The Editorial printed below contains a few comments on Hutcheon's book, plus some general comments by the editor, as well as other comments on both Humanism and Unitarianism.

Also included in this issue of *The Enlightenment*, is an article by Goldie Emerson, titled, *A Rose by Any Other Name*, used in a discourse a couple of years ago at a UFL Sunday service. The theme of the article is that upon reflection, differences are often not as far apart as they might first seem. It is always a pleasure to read Goldie's work, written in his own distinctive style.

## **Editorial**

The book, *The Road to Reason*, contains the following statement by the German philosopher and scientist Ernst Haeckel, "compared to the remarkable advances in the physical sciences and technology, the entire network of human social moral organization has remained in a state of barbarism." How true. The advances in science, (including medical science), and technology in the last two hundred years have been nothing less than spectacular. Humans, at least in the developed countries, have been relieved of much suffering and drudgery and can now engage in interesting careers, and travel and communicate on a world wide basis with little effort, not to mention the fantastic achievements in space travel. So why has human social and moral organization "remained in a state of barbarism?" Why do humans still  
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condone violence and wage wars, why are humans still intolerant of others not like themselves, and why do many people exhibit greed and envy in no small amounts?

Aristotle stated that it is the duty of the statesman, (notice he did not say politician), to provide conditions for the good life for all citizens. Surely it is also the duty of both religious leaders and philosophers to spare no effort to suggest and provide actions to help keep people on a sound moral and ethical track and help make the world a better place. Unfortunately most religious leaders have become bogged down in hierarchy, ceremonies, dogmas, questionable creeds and supernaturalism, instead of concentrating on promoting the basic morals and ethics of their founders. Is not the most important commandment, you shall not kill? Yet religious leaders have been woefully unsuccessful at convincing certain of their followers that negotiations are preferable to settling differences by means of vicious wars. And while philosophers such as John Locke and Thomas Paine both made important contributions by suggesting ways to improving democratic processes, many others have not had much influence in any practical way, such as improving the morals and ethics of the masses. Philosophers have often been academics proposing concepts for other academics to cogitate on. Nevertheless, although philosophers may not have made great strides in changing human behavior for the better, they have, by and large, not caused any great harm. The same cannot be said for religious leaders. History is rife with religious atrocities including crusades, inquisitions and senseless religious wars.

So what went wrong and what can be done to save our wondrous planet from the mess we are in today? Ours is a planet with haves and have nots, a planet where humans have developed the means to destroy it, a planet where the environment is being ravished, and a planet rife with greed and envy where international corporations are becoming more powerful than many governments.

It may be considered futile to ask 'what if' questions, but they do provide interesting speculations and might just possibly point the way to a better future. One interesting "what if" questions is: what if the naturalistic humanism of the Buddha, Confucius, Epicurus, and Omar Khayyam had prevailed throughout the west and near east in place of the three monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam? I think it can be said without fear of contradiction that the world would be a better place. And I also think a strong argument can be made that only if naturalistic humanistic principles eventually replace all the existing monotheistic religions, will world peace come about. Such a radical change will of course take decades if not centuries and can only happen by starting now to educate children with scientific truths as advocated by humanists such as John Dewey, Isaac Asimov, and Carl Sagan. Only by teaching naturalistic humanism in place of supernatural dualism, will positive results start to appear. Perhaps most importantly, the hatred being engendered in the Islamic Madrasah schools must be brought to an end.

Pat Duffy Hutcheon calls naturalistic humanism a philosophy, and if it is to be the philosophy of the future, where does religion fit in? Most humans have a built in desire to belong to institutions composed of people with similar beliefs and interests. Religions fill this social and spiritual need for many and in the reviewer's opinion, only an all- inclusive Unitarianism can adequately fill this need in the long term future. Dare one hope then, that Unitarianism and humanism could be the principal religion and principal philosophy at some time down the road?

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Taking a realistic stance, this is not likely to occur if Unitarianism and humanism remain in their present form because neither group is experiencing any significant growth. The Unitarians need to decide once and for all that they are a religion and not a philosophy, and promote the finer points of all existing religions. The humanists need to consider themselves as a philosophy and include agnosticism as well as atheism in their approach, because the masses are not yet ready for atheism and may never be. They must do more than write interesting philosophical articles in magazines and start to become more pro-active in promoting worthwhile causes such as combating the infiltration of governments by the religious right. Let the Unitarians provide a sanctuary with some amount of a non-theistic spirituality in their services, for those who are inclined to belong to a religion, and let the humanists champion and get involved with major worthwhile causes that can lead to a truly democratic compassionate society. Many people will of course want to belong to both and if each group recognizes what they truly are, there should be complete harmony because neither group has a dogmatic creed but a set of principles that are not far apart as the following demonstrates.

### **Unitarian Principles**

They covenant to affirm and promote:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations;
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in the congregations;
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within the congregations and in society at large;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part .

### **Humanist Principles**

- Hope, rather than despair
- Critical thinking, in place of dogma
- Education, in place of ignorance
- Logic, in place of irrationality
- Compassion, rather than indifference
- Tolerance in place of bigotry
- Love, instead of hate

Both groups are passionately concerned about protecting and preserving the environment. (There are longer versions of Unitarian and humanist principles but the two above serve to illustrate the compatibility of the two groups.)

I would not expect everyone to agree with everything contained in the above editorial. I invite comments and criticisms that can be discussed in future issues of *The Enlightenment*. We welcome articles from members and also ideas on how to improve the Newsletter. (Don Hatch, Editor.)

## *A Rose by Any Other Name*

© Goldie Emerson

*Unitarian Fellowship of London 18 May 2003*

There is an old saying that "opposites attract." This saying has been around for such a long time that there is probably some measure of truth in it. Often this expression has been applied to people who admire each other for their differences in abilities or in knowledge. Sometimes these words may pertain to friends or even to lovers who admire each other because their partner's individual talents complement those which they find missing in themselves. Other applications of the "opposites attract" principle can easily be found in the physical world of science, such as when negative and positive electrons are attracted to each other or when the magnetic polarization of north and south are drawn together.

But today I want to turn this "opposites attract" saying on its head and argue that it is often the case that the true nature of opposites is badly misunderstood. This misunderstanding is most clearly seen in the study of logic as a part of philosophic inquiry. A common mistake in logic is to think that because things differ from each other, they are therefore opposite. For example, if I were to tell an acquaintance that he tended to be rather emotional, he in turn might well respond with the words, "No, I think I'm pretty rational." This response would likely occur because in my friend's mind emotion and rationality are viewed as opposites. However, in the opinion of many, such as the psychologist/philosopher John Dewey and the logician/psychologist Jean Piaget, emotion and rationality are not true opposites at all. In fact, Dewey would argue that people can not think rationally without emotion, nor would they even care about rationality without having an emotional commitment to doing so. Emotion, in its etymological sense, is connected with motion, motivation, and movement, and emotion provides the impetus to strive for clear thinking. While emotion by itself doesn't guarantee thinking, without some emotion much of our thinking would, in fact, soon come to a halt.

There are many examples of this confusion between true opposites and simple differences which are regarded in everyday conversation as opposites. Slow, for example, is not the true opposite of fast. If I am walking quickly in the direction of north and I then turn around and walk slowly in the direction of south I will then be walking in the opposite direction but the fact that I am now walking slowly will not mean that my style of walking is the opposite to before. It will simply be one of many different styles but not an opposite style. In this example, while north and south may be true opposites, slow is not a true opposite of fast.

By this time, no doubt, you may wonder what all of this has to do with our Unitarian religion. I believe that many of the concerns, anxieties, disputes, misunderstandings and differences of opinion that are not uncommon within the history of our Unitarian religion, and occasionally within our own Unitarian Fellowship of London, may find their origins in the same confusion between true opposites and simple differences of opinion.

First, I should say that this is not a new idea which I alone can take credit for. It has often been discussed in philosophy and from time to time it has been written about in the UUA journal, *The World*. More recently, it was an idea clearly presented by our own Rev. Leaf Seligman in one of her two excellent sermons presented here at the UFL last April and May.

I believe that Rev. Seligman used the term dichotomies rather than opposites, but her idea was the same. That is, if we regard two ideas as opposites when they really are not, we set up false

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dichotomies that may needlessly create divisions and arguments among us. As long as we perceive simple differences of opinion as being entirely opposite, then solutions and compromises are particularly hard to find.

There are numerous examples of this unfortunate practice and I would like now to discuss a few:

1. A worship committee is very similar to a program committee. It would be a false dichotomy to think that somehow these two expressions denoting the same thing were at odds with each other or opposite to each other. It would be an even worse mistake to argue over terminologies that convey ideas which are nearly indistinguishable in meaning, practical function and purpose.
2. When a member of our Fellowship tells us that he/she is looking for something a bit more spiritual at our Sunday services it would be a regrettable mistake to conclude that this person was now seeking to become less reasonable or less rational. Of course, it would be equally unfortunate to conclude that a member who was looking for a more rational approach was ready to abandon all interest in spiritual matters. Even a secular humanist such as I may still find meaning in the term spiritual. In my case, I think of spiritual qualities as those attributes that unite one to a larger part of the universe than that which is normally experienced by an individual. Spiritual experiences often provide an "aha" feeling or a "eureka" response. For me, such experiences offer a feeling of "at-one-ment" or in traditional religious language, "atonement." But my main point here is that spiritual and rational are not necessarily at odds with each other, nor are they true opposites. They are simply different ways of viewing the same universe. For me, these "aha" experiences may come about through seeing a beautiful scene in the natural world, or through listening to music, or viewing art; or perhaps it is a new scientific discovery that fills me with wonder, or a peaceful political solution that opens to me a larger, more comprehensive view of the kinship of humankind within this vast universe.
3. The ordination of a minister or a chaplain *is* not very different from the installation or the acceptance of a minister or a chaplain, and these terms are not opposites. At the most, they are simply slightly different pathways to securing the direction and expertise of professionally qualified leaders within our religion.
4. Some Unitarians prefer to call our book *Singing the Living Tradition* a hymn book. Some call it just a book of songs and responsive readings. And, for some, their previous experiences in more traditional religions causes them to feel a warmth and happiness from what they have learned to call their hymn book. For others, there may be unpleasant memories from such religious practices, and so they prefer to call *Singing the Living Tradition* a song book. But we are still talking about the very same book and not about two opposite books, and the good that is included in *Singing the Living Tradition* is still available and valuable to each of us no matter what we call it.
5. A sermon, a lecture, and an address are all very similar. This is especially true when each is related to our seven excellent Unitarian principles. And when they are not related in some important way to at least one of these seven principles, they are probably not serving our Unitarian religion in a productive way, and their value may not be of much importance to us regardless of what these speeches are called. And, by the way, it won't make too much difference whether we deliver one of these talks or speeches from a lectern or from a pulpit.

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6. Some of us like to refer to this room as a sanctuary and some are more comfortable with calling this our meeting hall. The important thing about this beautiful room is not so much what we call it as what we do with it. That is, what we do with this space is more important than the name we give it. Many members and friends call this place the Unitarian Fellowship, and some call it our Unitarian Church. I suppose that in some official circles one term is preferred over the other or one is probably more technically correct than the other. However, in everyday use it doesn't make too much difference whether we call it a Church or a Fellowship.
7. Meditation and prayer are two different terms that Unitarians use for more or less the same activity. But like the space we meet in each Sunday service, the value of either meditation or of prayer depends upon what's going on inside our heads and our hearts. If we concentrate our minds upon how fortunate we are as individuals and upon how we can help others, then these few minutes that we take each Sunday service will be time well spent. If we let our thoughts drift to figuring out our grocery list or some anxiety about our daily work, or an argument we've had with our neighbour, then the time may be wasted regardless of whether we call it meditation or prayer.
8. Two terms that seem to get Unitarians anxious about other Unitarians are the use of the terms God and atheism, or I could say theism and atheism. This anxiety is unfortunate because usually when Unitarians use either of these terms, they are not so far apart in their views as the two words imply. Most Unitarians who call themselves atheists simply mean that they are atheistic, or non-believers in the traditional and old-fashioned view of God sitting in heaven like a giant man with a gray beard seeing all and judging all that he sees. And those Unitarians who do claim belief in God usually do not believe in the concept of God that is rejected by atheists. They are more likely to think in terms of God as "ground of our being" or as "ultimate reality," or as the "creative force" in the universe, and they rarely think of God in a bodily form at all. In other words, when you talk to either group of Unitarians long enough, you usually find that they are not so different in their ideas as these two words imply. More importantly, belief in God and atheism are rarely used among Unitarians as complete opposites.

I am sure that there are more examples of terms that are inaccurately used as opposites than I have listed this morning. In fact, the number of things upon which we could disagree, if we chose to, may be almost inexhaustible. Fortunately, the list of things upon which we can agree is also very lengthy and of much more importance.

## **Conclusions:**

So what conclusions come from what has just been said? Here are a few:

1. Relax and enjoy each other's differences in language. These differences are usually not complete opposites, but they are likely variations on the same theme. They also represent a degree of healthy individual freedom that one should expect and even hope for in a liberal religion.
2. When you recall conversations which you may have had with non-Unitarians you will likely also remember deep divisions between your opinions and theirs about God, heaven, salvation, and their view of what is good or evil in the world. I am still visited about once

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a month by two Jehovah Witnesses. Our conversations are always polite, but when they leave I am fully convinced that their convictions are so different from my own that they depart each visit without much understanding of me or of my values or beliefs. Although they look upon me with kindness, I sense that they also pity me as a lost soul who without their view of Jehovah has no chance of understanding either morality or mortality.

On the other hand, I have often enjoyed conversations among Unitarians even if we are not in complete agreement. There seems to be a set of core ideas about which most of us agree. Almost always there is a common set of values consisting of respect for free speech, democratic ideas, lifelong self education, a desire to make the world better for others, and a recognition that most of the problems in the world are human made and will, in the end, need to be solved by human solutions rather than through divine intervention. On a less positive note, when I have discussions with my non-Unitarian friends, I spend a lot of my time trying to convince them that war is not a good solution; the bottom line for success is not always to be measured in terms of money; governments ought to be more open in sharing information; homosexuals and heterosexuals share the same and not opposite goals; and the extreme wealth of a few often is made on the backs of those who are poor. In the light of these differences of opinion, I think that my differences with Unitarians are rather insignificant.

3. I do not mean in what I have said that words and language are unimportant. In fact, the opposite is true. Because words are important, as Unitarians, we ought to allow others the freedom to use the terms and the language most meaningful to them. Having said that, we ought to realize that these different words are not always at odds with each other. A rose by any other name is still a rose. Or to quote more accurately from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet."
4. Let's not have too much mysterious talk about "factions" in our Fellowship. I suspect that the so-called factions are often not so much opposites as they are different ways of traveling to the same places. In any case, there is nothing productive or clarifying about such vague labeling of the opinions of others. Ironically, the labeling of others as part of a faction can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.
5. Let us try to be inclusive in our own language so that we do not alienate others, but equally important, let us be inclusive in our listening. That is, when we hear fellow Unitarians describing an idea or feeling in different language than we might use ourselves, let us accept their language and their thoughts as worthy of consideration.
6. Finally, our seven Unitarian principles, though not perfect, are really quite excellent. If we could take the time to read and absorb their meaning once every six months or so we would likely become better people and better Unitarians, and our Fellowship would be better off for it.

The seven Unitarian principles are listed in the Editorial.

Goldie J. Emerson

## A Few Quotations

**Confucius Said:** "If there is righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character. If there is beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home. If there be harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation. If there be order in the nation there will be peace in the world." (Too bad humanity has not yet learned how to adhere to these straightforward logical axioms from antiquity.)

**Einstein said:** "There are two things that are infinite. One is the universe, and the other is human stupidity, and I am not sure about the universe."

**Nietzsche asks:** "Which is it: is man one of God's blunders, or is God one of man's blunders?"

## A Little Bit of Humour

### How The Internet Really Began

In ancient Israel it came to pass that a trader by the name of Abraham Com did take unto himself a young wife by the name of Dot. And Dot Com was a comely woman, broad of shoulder and long of leg. Indeed, she was now and then called Amazon Dot Com.

She said unto Abraham, her husband, "Why doeth thou travel far from town to town with thy goods when thou can trade without ever leaving thy tent?" And Abraham did look at her as though she were several saddle bags short of a camel load, but simply said, "How, dear?"

And Dot replied, "I will place drums in all the towns, and drums in between, to send messages saying what you have for sale, and they will reply telling you which hath the best price. And the sale can be made on the drums and delivery made by Uriah's Pony Stable." (UPS).

Abraham thought long and decided he would let Dot have her way with the drums. The drums rang out and were an immediate success. Abraham sold all the goods he had at the top price, without ever moving from his tent.

But this success did arouse envy. A man named Maccabia did secret himself inside Abraham's drum and was accused of insider trading. And the young men did take to Dot Com's trading as doth the greedy horsefly take to camel dung. They were called Nomadic Ecclesiastical Rich Dominican Siderites, or NERDS for short,

And lo, the land was so feverish with joy at the new riches and the deafening sound of drums that no one noticed the real riches were going to the drum maker - one Brother William Gates, who bought up every drum in the land. And indeed did insist on making drums that would only work with Brother Gates drumheads and drumsticks.

Dot did say, "Oh Abraham what we have started is being taken over by others."

And as Abraham looked out over the bay of Ezekiel (or as it came to be known, "eBay"), he said, "We need a name that reflects what we are." Dot replied, "Young Ambitious Hebrew Owner-Operators."

"YAHOO!" said Abraham. And that is how it all began. So you see, it wasn't Al Gore after all.