

# The Enlightenment

The Newsletter of the  
**Humanist Association of London and Area**  
(An Affiliate of the Humanist Association of Canada)

Volume 1

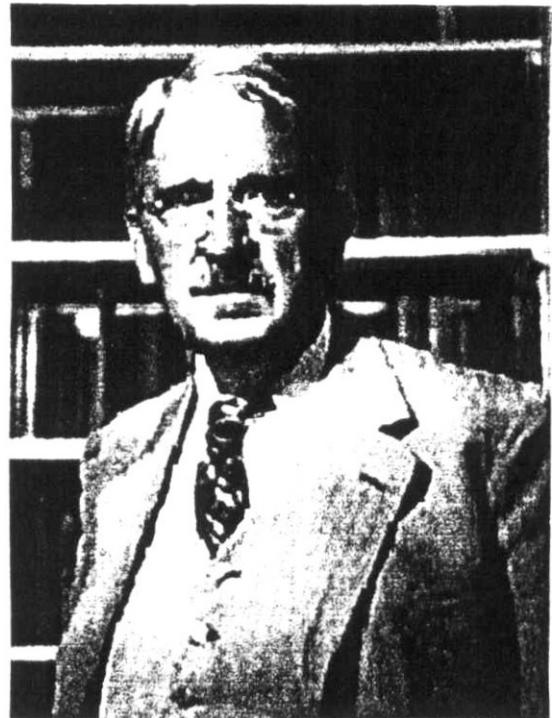
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## Philosopher and Educationalist

John Dewey was an American philosopher, psychologist, and education reformer, whose thought has been greatly influential in the United States and around the world. He is recognized as one of the founders of Pragmatism, a pioneer in functional psychology, and a leading representative of the progressive movement in U.S. education during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For Dewey it was vitally important that education not be the teaching of mere fact, but that the skills and knowledge which students learned, be fully integrated into their lives as citizens and as human beings. At the Laboratory School which Dewey ran with his wife Alice at the University of Chicago, children learned much of their early chemistry, physics, and biology by investigating the natural processes that went into cooking breakfast-an activity they did in their classes. This practical element-learning by doing-sprang from his subscription to the philosophical school of

Pragmatism. The most basic idea of John Dewey's with regard to education was that greater emphasis should be placed on the broadening of intellect and development of problem solving and critical thinking skills, rather than simply on memorization of lessons. Dewey honoured the important role that religious institutions and practices played in human life but rejected belief in any static ideal such as a theistic God. For him, God was the method of intelligence in human life that is to say, rigorous inquiry, or very broadly conceived, science. Dewey's philosophy has gone by many names other than "Pragmatism." He has been called an instrumentalist, and experimentalist, an empiricist, functionalist, and a naturalist. The term "transactional" may better describe his views. It was a term emphasized by Dewey in his later years to describe his theories of knowledge and experience. He could also be described as a great humanist.



John Dewey

(1859 -1952)

## President's Remarks

I'd like to say a thank-you to Barrie Zwicker, Craig Simpson, and everyone else who helped to make the recent joint effort of the Humanist Association of London and Area, the Council of Canadians, and People for Peace a great success. The presentation of Zwicker's film, "The Great Conspiracy" and the following talks offered by Zwicker and Simpson made for an interesting and intriguing evening.

Derek.

**Morgentaler Honoured.** We were most pleased to learn that humanist Dr. Henry Morgentaler has received the 2005 Couchising Award for Public Policy Leadership for his efforts on behalf of women's rights and reproductive health issues. This follows his receiving an honorary Doctor's Degree at UWO on June 16<sup>th</sup> 2005.

### 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. The Enlightenment is published quarterly in August, November, February and May.

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

## Important Notice

Starting with the Humanist Association of London and Area meeting on October 13th, our meetings will be held at the Cross Cultural Learning Centre at 505 Dundas Street in London. (Just west of Beat Tech.) Please note that we have moved from the first Thursday to the second Thursday of the month. Also note that the September 8th meeting will be at the Unitarian Fellowship, 557 Clarke Road on the second Thursday at 7:30 PM. See below.

## Past Event

Well over 300 people attended the showing of Barry Swicker's Great Conspiracy video at the Wolfe Performance Hall on July 7<sup>th</sup>. After the video, UWO Professor Craig Simpson presented an independent critique of the video, agreeing with some of Swicker's claims while challenging others. Craig's remarks provided a welcome balance to the evening. A poll taken before the video and after revealed that a considerable number of attendees were swung over to Swicker's contentions concerning the events of 9/11. The evening ended with comments and questions from the audience.

## Looking Ahead

September 8th 7:30 PM at the Unitarian Fellowship of London, 557 Clarke Road. The speaker will be: Dr. Vinay Sharma, Vice President of Customer Service and Strategic Planning at London Hydro. He will be talking about sources of energy, coal replacement plans, energy conservation and London Hydro's role in these matters.

October 13th To be announced.

November 10th To be announced.

## Some Enlightenment on the Enlightenment

Readers of the Humanist Association of London and Area newsletter are grateful to its editor and publisher, Don Hatch. Don has initiated our newsletter called *The Enlightenment* and he invites interested readers to offer their own submissions for future editions. Since The Enlightenment uses a title that is similar to the historic period of the Enlightenment a few words about the importance of that period of history seem appropriate.

The historical Enlightenment emerged in Europe in the 17th century and through to the 18th century. It was characterized by ideals which were liberal, secular, and democratic. Emphasis was placed on the importance of reason, experience, and upon a distrust of religion and traditional authority. The Enlightenment movement included the writings of Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, David Hume, Adam Smith, Rene Descartes, and Immanuel Kant. Although each of these thinkers would disagree on some aspects of philosophy, they were united in a materialistic and utilitarian approach to society and ethics.

Members of our local Humanist Association of London and Area wish to express our thanks to Don for his choice of The Enlightenment as a title for our newsletter. We are also grateful to Don for his hard work and devotion in producing The Enlightenment. Keep up the good work Don!

Goldie Emerson

## **Report on the 2005 Humanist Association of Canada Conference in Ottawa**

Simon Parcher, conference chairperson, and his crew of about seven volunteers did a super job in organizing and carrying out this event. The accommodation was excellent and everything proceeded pretty much on schedule. Doctor Buckman set the tone in his "Keynote Address," stating that we need to be constructive not destructive, and stop being critical of religious people. Instead, promote the positive attributes of humanism while pointing out the hazards of things like radical fundamentalism.

The line up of speakers was impressive and the talks covered a wide range of topics including women's rights, critical thinking, the environment, skepticism, international terrorism, medical quackery and democracy. I thought Henry Beissel's presentation on participatory democracy was particularly interesting and I hope it appears in print in a future humanist publication.

The two highlights of the conference were Doctor Morgentaler's talk on Reproductive Choice and the presentation of the Humanist of the Year Award to Evelyn Martens for her successful work on assisted suicide and her subsequent acquittal. Gary Bauslaugh provided much needed support to Evelyn during her trial.

There was no end of criticism of George W. Bush and there were many references to the threats of radical fundamentalism, both Muslim and Christian, and concerns for maintaining the separation of church and state. Other issues discussed included the public funding of Catholic schools, Sharia Law, and gay and lesbian marriage.

The HAC Annual General Meeting was held on the Saturday morning. There was a lot to be discussed and the meeting strayed off course from time to time, but we must remember that all Board members are volunteers doing their best, and those who were at last years AGM said this one was a great improvement. Much time was spent discussing a proposal from the Humanist Association of Toronto suggesting that HAC be set up as federation of local Chapters with each Chapter delegating a representative to sit on the Board along with the regular members. Details of the proposal were supposed to be handed out with the material received at the start of the Conference but unfortunately this did not happen. This proposal will receive due consideration by the Board and hopefully details will be made available to all members for consideration and comments in the not too distant future. A by-laws committee was set up to revamp the existing by-laws and Marlene Koehler is on this committee.

A major decision facing the Board at the present time is how to deal with the \$200,000 gift to HAC from the late Vera Roberts. Chris Meidell suggested that some of the money might be spent on a project to increase HAC membership from the current paid up 500 members to about 5000. 4500 new members @ \$30.00 per year would increase annual income by \$135,000 or \$1,350,000 over the next 10 years if the membership remained the same. Unfortunately there was not enough time for Chris to provide all the details of his proposal, but no doubt we will be hearing more about how the Board decides to handle Vera Robert's generous gift.

In summary, this was a great conference when it came to matters of organization, selection of speakers and the presentation of awards. However there is more work to be done by everyone at the Board level and by all members in order for humanists to be a serious significant factor in bringing about desired changes for the betterment of our great country. (DAH)

## What Went Wrong?

*By Don Hatch*

In the year 306 BCE, the Greek philosopher Epicurus founded a school of philosophy based on humanist principles and on a philosophy devoid of the supernatural. The declared purpose of Epicurus was to free humankind from religious fear by asserting that the soul is material, and dies with the body. Epicurus, who believed that if gods exist, they cannot intervene to help or harm humans, was said to possess an unsurpassed kindness to all people. His school of philosophy survived until sometime in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, coincidentally, until about the time that the Roman Emperor Constantine firmly established the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE. The obvious question arises: Why did Roman Catholic Christian monotheism triumph over the humanistic philosophy of Epicurus?

Because monotheism, which gradually superseded the polytheism of Greece and Rome originated with the Hebrews, one could be tempted to credit the Jews for the expansion of Christianity whose roots were grounded in Judaism. However this claim would be unfair because Judaism, the religion of a specific race of people, does not proselytize nor attempt to inflict their beliefs on others. The Jews, by and large, rejected Jesus as the Messiah and merely wished to be left alone in their own country. Only a relatively small number of Jews followed the teachings of Jesus, and in the end the true founder of Christianity was the apostle Paul, who with the help of his cohorts, successfully established Christian communities among the Gentiles in the eastern Mediterranean countries. In the fourth century CE, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire after Constantine supposedly perceived a vision of the cross before his battle at Milvian Bridge on the Tiber, which he won.

At the time of Constantine, Christianity consisted of several sects including the Arians, the Gnostics, the Coptics, and the group that eventually formed the Roman Church. The latter group believed Jesus to be incarnate, the Son of God, crucified and raised from the dead. The other sects generally did not believe in the divinity of Jesus. This divisiveness bothered Constantine and to settle this dispute once and for all, he convened the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE as mentioned above. The end result was the invention of the Trinity, the Nicene Creed and the official founding of the Roman Church.

This is the point sometimes referred to as the time when western civilization took a very wrong turn. It is possible that if the humanist philosophy of Epicurus had survived and advanced, the dark ages may have been shortened, and science and technology might have evolved much sooner than actually happened. In other words, the advent and growth of the Roman Church is "what went wrong." Sadly, the humanists of the day were apparently no better organized than they are today, and in any case they were no match for the power of Constantine.

The growth and spread of the Roman Church was greatly influenced by men such as St. Augustine, recognized as the greatest thinker of Christian antiquity; St. Jerome, who was responsible for translating much of the Bible into Latin (The Vulgate); and priests including St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Dominic, who founded monasteries. St. Thomas Aquinas also influenced the evolution of the Roman Church into the form we know it today.

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*(What Went Wrong? continued)*

Unfortunately these same men can be blamed for the theological straightjacket in which the church found itself for over 1000 years, as well as for much of the sexism and discrimination against women.

The church fathers believed that Catholics were superior to non-Catholics and that the only way to salvation was through the church- there just was no other way. This dogmatic belief encouraged Catholics to force the conversion of non-Catholics, particularly Jews, sometimes on the threat of death. An important feature of the Catholic Church is the Transubstantiation Eucharist, the doctrine that the wafer and the wine are literally the body and blood of Christ. (Some cynics consider this to be bordering on cannibalism.) Catholics are encouraged to partake of the seven sacraments which are baptism; learning the catechism; confirmation; regular attendance at mass, which includes the eucharist; the confessional; marriage by a priest and the last rites. Reasonably rigid adherence to these sacraments is believed to guarantee a place in heaven - it's as simple as that. Catholics who do not agree with the established dogmas and tenets risk excommunication and the threat of roasting in hell.

A central feature of the Catholic religion is its militaristic organization, headed by a pope and supported by an army of cardinals, bishops and priests. In former years popes wielded great power, both religiously and politically, until 1870 when the Papal States were taken over by Italian rulers. To help compensate for this loss, the ridiculous and spurious concept of papal infallibility was devised at the first Vatican Council. Regrettably, it is still in effect today.

A historical fact that has been suppressed by the Catholic Church, is the atrocities committed over the centuries against the Jews. Christian hatred of the Jews, who have frequently been accused of being Christ killers, goes right back to the gospel of John, where in Chapter 8, verse 44, Jesus says to the Jews, "you are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires." Two of the largest slaughters of Jews ironically occurred in Germany at the times of the first and second Crusades, and these were followed by the iniquities of the Spanish Inquisition. Some popes tolerated the Jews while others did not and forced them into ghettos. The atrocious treatment of Jews, which culminated in the holocaust, is thoroughly documented in James Carroll's book, *Constantine's Sword*. This book chronicles the last 2000 years of Christian and Jewish history and should be read by every Christian in order to understand how we have arrived at our present sorry state.

By the start of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, certain priests including Erasmus and Martin Luther, recognizing the corruption within the Church, and the atrocities being committed, pressed for reform. In 1517 Luther broke from the Church and started the Protestant Reformation. He rejected the top down hierarchy of the Catholic Church and organized the Lutheran Church whereby local churches had an element of freedom and some influence in church operations. Luther eliminated indulgences and some of the sacraments, specifically the confessional and the last rites. He changed the eucharist by stating that Christ was present, not bodily in the host, but instead in spirit (consubstantiation). For Luther, the way to salvation was through faith. He regarded Jews as lesser people, but did not engage in their persecution.

The Protestant Reformation had many positive attributes. It provided an atmosphere that tolerated scientific inquiry, unlike the climate of persecution experienced by Galilee at the

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hands of the Catholic Church, encouraged the furtherance of The Enlightenment and aided the development of democratic governments. This greater freedom however, unfortunately resulted in numerous breakaways from the Lutheran Church, which ultimately led to the plethora of Christian denominations, sects and cults that we have today.

So what went wrong? Why did the Christian churches survive and grow and overshadow the humanist teachings of Epicurus? One reason has to be the powerful hierarchy of the early Catholic Church. Without the backing of the rulers of the Roman Empire, and later of the Holy Roman Empire, it would have been most difficult for any religion or philosophy to survive. Another reason has to be the simplistic Christian message of Christ's atonement for original sin and the promise of a life in the hereafter, in contrast to the rejection by Epicurus of the concept of an afterlife. Thus by indoctrinating the minds of impressionable youth with the Christian articles of faith, and by instilling an element of fear by preaching that those who do not abide by the tenets of the Church will not be welcomed into heaven, the churches have had a powerful influence on how western civilization has developed. Another important factor must be the apparent "hard wiring" of humans to look for some sort of spiritual anchor or God. All of these things have combined to contribute to the problems we face today in the western world. Admittedly, there are more serious problems in the Muslim world, but these are beyond the scope of this discourse and require a separate analysis.

The immediate problems involve both the Catholic Church and the religious right fundamentalist Protestants. The election of the latest pope, who is known for his conservative and dogmatic views, is nothing short of a tragedy. Thinking Catholics know that reform is badly needed and advocate changes including married priests, women priests and artificial birth control. Some even speak in favour of abortion and same sex marriage. None of these common sense changes will occur until a future liberal pope calls a third Vatican Council and ratifies a new approach. In the meantime the Catholic Church is supporting the continuation of a population explosion the globe cannot sustain - not to mention the spread of AIDS. The radical fundamentalist Protestants are no better. They oppose abortion and same sex marriage but more worrisome is their infiltration of governments, particularly in the United States, a situation that poses a serious threat to the separation of church and state.

While humanists may have little concern about whether the Catholic Church accepts married or women priests, they are definitely concerned about things such as the population explosion, the spread of AIDS, the right of free choice for women, gay and lesbian rights, the right to die with dignity, the threats to the separation of church and state and other issues such as the public funding of Catholic and other religious schools. Realistically, progress in any of these areas will be slow, posing the question; can humanists do anything significant to speed things up and bring about needed improvements? The answer I am afraid is no, unless meaningful changes occur, because there are just not enough humanists to constitute a mass large enough to have the necessary influence. Admittedly, the brave and dedicated Dr. Henry Morgentaler proved that one individual can make a difference and get results, albeit with considerable personal suffering. There is also Evelyn Martens, the 2005 Humanist of the Year, who bravely risked imprisonment by being present at a pre-planned suicide in British Columbia. Fortunately she was acquitted, partly because of the backing and moral support of other humanists. There are not however, many Dr. Morgentalers or Evelyn Martens willing to risk their personal freedom for a cause in which

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they fervently believe. In any case, no single individual can take on the gargantuan task of challenging the religious right, which I believe should be a major concern of all humanists.

Why should the religious right be a major concern? The current situation in the United States, the world's only super power, is a threat to the democratic freedom of North American citizens and the principle of the separation of church and state, so enshrined by the founding fathers in the United States Constitution, is being blurred. If the religious right in the United States achieves its goals, the religious fundamentalists in Canada, whose churches are growing, will be attempting similar moves in our country.

The humanist organizations in both the United States and Canada have existed for some time, but they are by and large unknown to the general public. Consequently they are virtually powerless to achieve a great deal on their own. I believe they need to cooperate with other organizations that have similar concerns, even liberal Protestants, in order to form a critical mass that will be recognized and respected. Above all, they will need a brave well-known, well-informed, articulate spokesperson to lead the way.

This approach has been followed in the United States by humanist Edd Doerr, a former President of the American Humanist Association. He has worked for many years with other organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union, Americans for Religious Liberty and numerous others, lobbying governments with well-known well-informed humanists including Isaac Asimov and Carl Sagan, on issues such as free choice for women, opposition to the teaching of creationism in science classes, and opposition to government funding of religious schools. Sometimes they were successful, sometimes not. In a booklet titled, *My Life as a Humanist*, Doerr concludes with the following paragraph.

"Transcend parochialism. Millions of moderate, progressive, and liberal Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and others, are far removed from the various forms of fundamentalism and share a great many of our values. That is why we have been able to work so effectively in various mainstream coalitions with people of a wide spectrum of religions, philosophies, and worldviews such as the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, the Baptist Joint Committee, and Catholics for a Free Choice. Progressives cannot afford unnecessary and counterproductive divisions over points of belief."

Now back to what went wrong. As we have seen, organized Christianity has moved away from the basic teachings of Jesus, whose message was one of love and compassion, and has become bogged down in bureaucracy, while promoting spurious messages of salvation and fear. One may argue that Christianity has instilled sound moral teachings in its adherents, but it has also saddled us today with an archaic Catholic Church that refuses to move into modern times, and with evangelical/ fundamentalists that are threatening our hard won freedoms. When something goes wrong it should be put right, even if it takes a couple millennia to do so. If humanists and others with similar aims can work together to help reverse the trend of fundamentalist infiltration into governments, Epicurus would be proud.

### **A Couple of quotes**

We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools. - Martin Luther King.

There is no cure for birth and death save to enjoy the interval. – Mark Twain