



The Enlightenment



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

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Thomas Paine - Intellectual, Scholar, Revolutionary and Idealist

Thomas Paine (1737-1809) is widely recognized as one of the Founding Fathers of the United States. A radical pamphleteer, Paine anticipated and helped foment the American Revolution through his powerful writings, most notably *CommonSense*, an incendiary tract advocating independence from Great Britain. An advocate for political liberalism and constitutional republican government, he outlined his political philosophy in *The Rights of Man*, written as a general political philosophical treatise. He was also noteworthy for his support of Deism, taking its form in his discourse on religion, *The Age of Reason*, as well as for his eyewitness accounts of both the American and French Revolutions. A few of his pithy thoughts on religion follow.

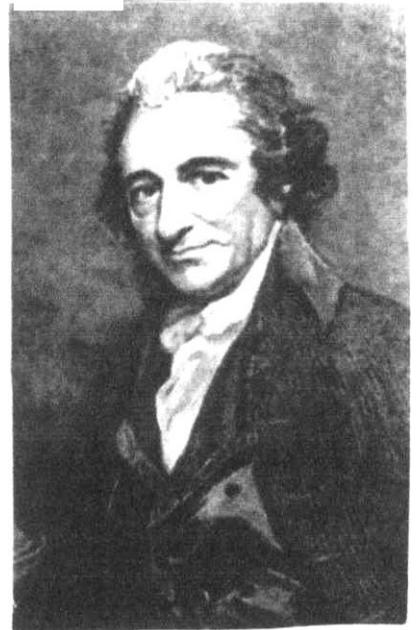
He believed in the equality of humans and that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy and endeavouring to make humans happy.

Christianity is really a pious fraud encouraged by the interest of those who make a living by preaching it. The church has set up a system very contrary to the character of the very person whose name it bears.

The age of ignorance commenced with the birth of Christianity and remained until the Protestant Reformation, which allowed science and reason to evolve. Unfortunately the Protestant churches have segmented into a plethora of denominations. Paine's church was his own mind. True religion is an appreciation of the creations of God and applying fair treatment to ones fellow humans.

There are three principal means that have been employed in all ages to impose beliefs on humankind. They are mystery, miracles and prophecy. Mystery and miracles are incompatible with true religion and prophecy is suspect.

If ever a universal religion should prevail, it will not be by believing anything new, but instead in getting rid of redundancies. Paine and other Deists abhorred organized religion.



Thomas Paine

President's Remarks

This is my first opportunity to offer a few words as your 2006 President of the Humanist Association of London and Area. There are a few changes on the Board as indicated below. We welcome two new members, Claire Van Daele-Boseret as Treasurer, and Ed Ashman as Membership Secretary. We thank Richard Gibbens for acting as treasurer for the past two years. He is now our Research Resource. We congratulate our former President and new Vice President Derek Kaill, *on* his appointment to the Board of The Humanist Association of Canada.

We face many challenges ahead in our efforts to promote the numerous attributes of Humanism and make ourselves known to the general public. We need to attract more members by conducting interesting meetings that will entice people to attend. The Board welcomes all ideas that can help us achieve these objectives.

Best Regards, Don.

The Board of Humanist Association of London and Area

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The Humanist Association of London and Area meets at Cross Cultural Learning Centre, 505 Dundas Street in London, on the second 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 Our Web Master is John Pope, jpope@wwdc.com

New members are welcome. Contact Membership Secretary Ed Ashman at (519) 433-9418

Membership fees are listed below.

	<u>HAC</u> <u>Basic</u>	<u>HAC Limited</u> <u>Resources</u>	<u>Humanist</u> <u>Perspectives</u>	<u>HALA</u> <u>Basic</u>	<u>HALA Limited</u> <u>Resources</u>
Single	\$30	\$15	\$22	\$20	\$10
Family	\$35	\$20	\$22	\$25	\$15
Life	\$500				

Haiti...a Country In Crisis

At a former meeting, our Secretary Harold Koehler addressed the Humanist Association of London and Area concerning the plight of the people living in Haiti, while outlining many of the deplorable conditions existing in that country. Two recent magazine articles, one in the September issue of the CCPA Monitor, and another in the December 19th issue of Maclean's, further highlight the seriousness of the situation in that country. A summary of the Maclean's article follows and the CCPA article is reprinted in its entirety.

Mother Teresa is said to have described the slums of the Haitian capital, Port au Prince, as the "fifth world." This was not hyperbole. Per capita income in the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere is \$440.00, with most of the population living on less than \$1.00 a day. Life expectancy is only 49 years. More than one in ten children die before the age of five. Literacy is low and kidnapping for ransom is widespread.

Haiti is an economic and political disaster area. It is also a place on earth where Canada behaves and is treated as a superpower. Canada has played a key role in recent attempts to help Haiti get back on track. It has never been easy, and there's real debate over how much we have accomplished, or can ever hope to. But one thing is certain, Haiti needs help, and there may be no country better equipped than Canada. Canada and Haiti share a common language, each has a large diaspora community and we have a Governor General who was born in Haiti. This Caribbean island is literally on our doorstep. We have been Haiti's second largest source of tourists and the third largest buyer of the country's few exports. In 1994 and again in 2004 Canadian military forces intervened to help change Haiti's government, and Canadian soldiers and police officers have served long tours of duty there. But can we do more? Given Canada's foreign policy's growing focus on helping the world's worst basket cases, shouldn't Haiti be at the top of Canada's "to do" list.

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has been and is currently sending aid to over 150 countries with African countries getting priority. It's hard to know just how much has been accomplished by the billions handed out over the years, and the viability of this strategy of a little bit to many is now being questioned. Danielle Goldfarb of the CD Howe Institute points out that Norway, Australia and New Zealand have zeroed in on just a few countries, rather than spreading too much too thin. This allows donor countries to focus more accurately on the specific needs of a particular country and most importantly, get a handle on the success of the programs. Beginning in 2010, CIDA plans to deliver two-thirds of its aid to a short list of 25 countries. This should be an improvement but in the meantime Haiti needs more help.

Two major problems in providing aid to developing countries are corruption and politics. Canadian Stephen Lewis, the UN Secretary-General's special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, outlines these problems in detail in his latest book, *Race Against Time*, which was written for the 2005 Massey Lectures recently aired on CBC radio. In particular, he is most critical of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and of the special interest groups in the wealthy countries that in some cases, want to tie aid to the privatization of utilities. This situation is illustrated beautifully as it applies to Haiti, in an article in the CCPA Monitor by Stephen Lewis' daughter-in-law, Naomi Klein, reprinted on page four. In this article she describes a visit with Jean-Bertrand Aristide in South Africa to get his slant on the situation, and also details the high-handed action of the US government in tying aid to the takeover of utilities by private interests.

So what can Canadians do now to help the plight of the Haitians? Unfortunately Haiti is not on the list of the 25 countries mentioned above, so surely Haiti should be treated as a special case because of the urgent needs and because it is relatively close to us. We can help by e-mailing our MPs and those connected with CIDA urging them to keep our existing presence in Haiti, and try to insure that the aid we supply, hopefully in increased amounts, gets to those in need, and not to corrupt officials.

Haiti's president ousted for refusing to privatize key services

By Naomi Klein

When United Nations troops kill residents of the Haitian slum Cite Soleil, friends and family often place photographs of exiled President Jean-Bertrand Aristide on their bodies. The photographs silently insist that there is a method to the madness raging in Port-au-Prince. Poor Haitians are being slaughtered not for being "violent," as we so often hear, but for being militant—for daring to demand the return of their elected president.

It was only 10 years ago that President Clinton celebrated Aristide's return to power as "the triumph of freedom over fear." So what changed? Corruption? Violence? Fraud? Aristide is certainly no saint. But even if the worst of the allegations are true, they pale next to the rap sheets of the convicted killers, drug smugglers and arms traders who ousted Aristide and continue to enjoy free rein, with full support from the Bush Administration and the UN.

A few weeks ago I visited Aristide in Pretoria, South Africa, where he lives in forced exile. I asked him what was really behind his dramatic falling-out with Washington. He offered an explanation rarely heard in discussions of Haitian politics—actually, he offered three: "privatization, privatization, and privatization."

The dispute dates back to a series of meetings in early 1994, a pivotal moment in Haiti's history that Aristide has rarely discussed. Haitians were living under the barbaric rule of Raoul Cedras, who overthrew Aristide in a 1991 U.S.-backed coup. Aristide was in Washington and, despite popular calls for his return, there was no way he could face down the junta without military back-up. Increasingly embarrassed by Cedras's abuses, the Clinton Administration offered Aristide a deal: U.S. troops would take him back to Haiti—but only after he agreed to a sweeping economic program with the stated goal to "substantially transform the nature of the Haitian state."

Aristide agreed to pay the debts accumulated under the kleptocratic Duvalier dictatorships, slash the civil service, open up Haiti to "free trade," and cut import tariffs on rice and corn

in half. It was a lousy deal, but, Aristide says, he had little choice. "I was out of my country and my country was the poorest in the Western hemisphere, so what kind of power did I have at that time?"

But Washington's negotiators made one demand that Aristide could not accept: the immediate sell-off of Haiti's state-owned enterprises, including phones and electricity. Aristide argued that unregulated privatization would transform state monopolies into private oligarchies, increasing the riches of Haiti's elite and stripping the poor of their national wealth. He says the proposal simply didn't add

up: "Being honest means saying two plus two equals four. They wanted us to sing two plus two equals five."

Aristide proposed a compromise: Rather than sell off the firms outright, he would "democratize" them. He defined this as writing anti-trust legislation, insuring that proceeds from the sales were redistributed to the poor and allowing workers to become shareholders. Washington backed down, and the final text of the agreement—accepted by the United States and by a meeting of donor nations in Paris—called for the "democratization" of state companies.

But when Aristide began to implement the plan, it turned out that the financiers in Washington thought his democratization talk was just public relations. When Aristide announced that no sales could take place until Parliament had approved the new laws, Washington cried foul. Aristide says he realized then that what was being attempted was an economic coup. "The hidden agenda was to tie my hands once I was back and make me give for nothing all the state public enterprises." He threatened to arrest anyone who went ahead with privatizations. "Washington was very angry at me. They said I didn't respect my word, when they were the ones who didn't respect our common economic policy."

Aristide's relationship with Washington has been deteriorating ever since: While more than \$500 million in promised loans and aid were cut off, starving his government, USAID poured millions into the coffers of opposition groups, culminating ultimately in the February 2004 armed coup.

And the war continues. On June 23, Roger Noriega, U.S. assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, called on UN troops to take a more "pro-active role" in going after armed pro-Aristide gangs. In practice, this has meant a wave of Fallujah-like collective punishment inflicted on

neighbourhoods known for supporting Aristide. On July 6, for instance, 300 UN troops stormed Cite Soleil, blocking off exits and firing from armored vehicles. The UN admits that five were killed, but residents put the number of dead at no fewer than 20.

Yet, despite these attacks, Haitians are still on the streets—rejecting the planned sham elections, opposing privatization, and holding up photographs of their president. And just as Washington's experts could not fathom the possibility that Aristide would reject their advice a decade ago, today they cannot accept that his poor supporters could be acting of their own accord—surely Aristide must be controlling them through some mysterious voodoo arts.

"We believe that his people are receiving instructions directly from his voice and indirectly through his acolytes that communicate with him personally in South Africa," Noriega said.

Aristide claims no such powers. "The people are bright, the people are intelligent, the people are courageous," he says. They know that two plus two does not equal five.

(Naomi Klein is the author of No Logo and Fences and Windows, and is active in the global struggle for social and economic justice.) **T**

The Shell Game

By Goldwin (Goldie) Emerson

Magicians are very aware of the importance of distractions and diversions designed to concentrate the attention of their audiences on exactly the wrong things to watch out for. This allows them to proceed with sleight of hand movements that enable them to perform tricks which seem to defy logic and make their observers feel that they are witnessing the "impossible".

The old shell game is a case in point. By using some purposely awkward, but clever diversions the audience which watches as closely as they can are led to believe that they have actually seen the magician stuff a small ball or marble under one of a number of inverted half shells which are moved quickly around on a table top. When a member of the audience identifies what he or she believes to be the shell under which they "saw" a soft flexible ball being placed, they feel certain that this time they have actually caught the magician in the act and that they have identified the correct shell. But alas, it doesn't make any difference which shell the audience chooses because at this stage of the trick none of the shells contains the ball.

Today's topic is about another kind of shell game. This time, let's spell Shell with a capital letter and let's think of a huge international petroleum company called Royal Dutch Shell Group which has its headquarters in Amsterdam, Holland. For each of the past six years Shell has conducted an international writing contest. Usually contestants are asked to write an article on a topic designed to convey the impression that the Shell Group is very concerned about the environment. Last year's topic was called, "Do We Need Nature"? The answer to this question obviously seems to be "Yes". One can hardly imagine someone winning the contest by writing an article in which they have stated that we don't need nature and the topic is cleverly designed to divert any criticisms that Shell has not always been a caring corporation concerned about a clean and healthy environment. The prize for the winner is very generous. It is equivalent to \$20,000 USA funds. This amount of money is usually sufficient to interest some of the very best writers throughout the world. In last year's competition there were well over 7000 participants.

As a humanist who believes in the importance of our principles, one of which states in part , "... our survival is dependent upon a healthy planet...", and not knowing anything in advance about the high calibre or number of writers with which I would be competing I naively submitted my article for Shell's consideration. Needless to say, I did not receive first prize.

I think, however, that in some ways I too was a winner. First, it was a humbling experience which forced me to think more about the value of our humanist principles. Secondly, it allows me to share my thoughts on this topic with readers of *The Enlightenment*. What follows is my submission to the writing contest.

Do We Need Nature?

One of several definitions of nature in Webster's dictionary defines "nature" as "the physical universe and the laws and forces which govern change within it." According to this definition and, in fact, according to all others given in the same source, the answer to the question as to whether or not we need nature is unequivocally "Yes."

As humans, we are inevitably and inescapably products of nature from the time of our conception to our eventual death and ultimately to our physical return to nature. The recognition of this fact is a necessary first step to understanding ourselves and nature.

An important second step which follows from the first is that we need to become more accepting of the concept of learning to live within the laws and the limits of nature.

Third, nature sustains us. We cannot live without it, but nature, on the other hand, can exist without us as it has for hundreds of millions of years prior to the dawn of human life on this planet. During those early eons of pre-human existence our planet was forming deposits of coal, natural gas, oil, gold, diamonds and other valuable minerals. Nature was forming a thin but essential layer of rich topsoil which later sustained forests and other flora including farm crops. Ocean life developed early in our earth's pre-historic times and from this sprung other resources which presently enable many life forms to survive on this planet.

With the advent of modern technology it is now possible and even likely that we may damage and threaten nature, but we do so at our own peril. In a very real sense, the harm or the good that we do to nature will determine how nature in turn shapes our lives and provides for our needs.

Humans have been slow in recognizing that while the resources of nature are vast, they are not inexhaustible. Fresh water, clean air, mineral wealth, abundant food supplies and other life-sustaining resources are not limitless.

For many years, people have too frequently believed that problems of global warming, erratic weather patterns, alternating periods of drought and floods, depletion of our fish stocks, and increasing global desertification of land were simply unfortunate events which were happening to us as though they were truly "acts of God". However, with better science we now know that each of these events has its own natural causes which have been exacerbated by human action or inaction or neglect. That is, they are not supernatural events. They are, instead, part of nature's own rhythms and nature's response to human action or inaction.

To take this concept of the effects of human actions a little further, we need to look at global problems in a broader sense. Consider, for example, the present problems of war, over-population, poverty and starvation, disease, shortages of natural resources, and global warming. According to many physical scientists as well as social scientists, these problems are, in large measure, caused by humans and will, in the end, have to be solved by human-made solutions if they are to be solved at all. As we come to understand the rhythms of nature we realize that everything that occurs in nature is more predictable than we had previously thought. The choices we make from day to day determine the degree to which nature can help or hinder the fulfillment of our human aspirations.

Nature contains vast resources which we need in order to survive. Fresh water, clean air, minerals, food, and energy resources such as coal, gasoline, and oil are an important-part of nature's global storehouse. Each day every living person uses some of nature's resources from the global "store". As our world population increases, nature's resources are threatened by contamination and depletion. The question of "Who is minding the global store?" takes on more importance and urgency as our population and life styles change and our needs for convenient energy resources continually increase. The short answer to "Who is minding the global store?" is that a combined effort is required in order to protect and preserve nature and to have nature provide for our increasing needs.

Minding nature's global store begins with a greater awareness of the *nature* of nature itself. The more

our young people can be educated about both the strengths and the limitations of nature, the more responsible they will become as future keepers of the global store. So the first step to minding the store is education. While most formal education occurs in schools, much is also handed down through parents, community values, the public media, and through accurate advertising and responsible business practices.

Business and commerce are well positioned to be on the front line for developing the best methods of preserving our natural resources. Along with input from scientists, businesses can promote ecologically sound methods of conserving what we already have while searching for new sources of clean energy consistent with a healthy environment. More energy efficient automobiles, better and cleaner disposal of wastes, scientific advancements in health care, and the development of safe and healthy foods are important ways in which business and commerce, combined with the best scientific knowledge, can preserve and protect our natural resources.

Politicians too have a very important role to play in overseeing nature's wealth and the state of its health. It is important to select politicians who are truly leaders; people who will think globally and who will serve as gate-keepers for the conservation of our natural resources. Our leaders should be people of sufficient wisdom and vision to balance the needs of both commerce and consumers so that all may benefit, not just for their term of office; but for the future as well.

In one sense, the answer to the question of whether or not we need nature is so manifest that we run the risk of not giving this important matter enough consideration. The air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat are so much a part of nature and also of our constant needs that it is easy to take these aspects of nature for granted. Having nature's gifts in abundance is somewhat like having good eyesight or excellent hearing. For those of us who have these gifts of nature, we rarely think about their importance until we meet someone who lacks one of these abilities. Then we come to realize how enormously our lives would change without the use of either of these senses. Similarly, without clean air and water, or without healthy food our lives would not only change, they would be considerably debased and shortened.

I do not mean to suggest that everything in nature is automatically good. Lightning striking buildings or trees in a dry forest can be very destructive. Earthquakes can be disastrous. Even the tiny malaria parasite which enters the bloodstream of humans via the natural actions of mosquitoes is deadly to thousands of people every year. Our task as thoughtful human beings is not one of approving and promoting all that nature does. On the other hand, it is even more destructive to callously use up or destroy the resources which nature has to offer.

To face the challenge of preserving nature that is essential to our survival we need better education and better understanding of the natural world so that we can balance our actions in such a way that we can live in harmony with nature. While we cannot all be environmental scientists, it is possible through education to raise awareness of citizens about some of the most immediate problems threatening the natural world and consequently threatening us too. Developing sources of safe clean energy and using energy responsibly is more important today than ever before. The public needs to be more informed about the greenhouse effect and its causes as well as the steps that can be taken to reduce its negative impact on the environment. The more we learn to reuse and to recycle resources the better it will be for nature and for us as nature's creatures.

There are many more issues concerning nature that can fall within the understanding of most of us if we care to learn about them. Perhaps most important of all is the recognition that ordinary citizens can make a huge contribution in arriving at solutions to environmental problems. In a very real sense, we are all in it together. That is, no one industry or one country, or one leader alone can provide all the

solutions needed to keep nature healthy and working for all of us.

Do we need nature? While the question implies that the answer can be either "yes" or "no" it is hard to imagine that thoughtful people could answer "no" to this question. Is it possible to deny the need for something that is an essential part of our very existence? We are as much a part of nature as the rocks, the trees, the oceans and the other animals with which we share this planet. And sharing is a key concept in this matter. We share with other humans nature's resources, but we also share the responsibility of keeping nature as healthy as possible. We share the planet with our children and with future generations. We share a moral and practical responsibility to leave this earth and nature in at least as good a condition as we found it when we were children ourselves.

Do we need nature? Yes, we do, just as nature requires us to nourish and respect it, nature in turn will provide for us both now and for generations to come.

Memberships

The Humanist Association of Canada (HAC) has issued a new membership form. A copy of this form is enclosed for those who may not have renewed for 2006 but still wish to do so. The HAC fees have remained the same as in 2005, but in an effort to standardize the fees of local Humanist associations, the Humanist Association of London and Area, (HALA), fees have increased to the levels indicated below. Those who have already paid for 2006 are grandfathered at the old rates. The enclosed form is a combined form for HAC, HALA and also for a subscription to the quarterly magazine Humanist Perspectives if desired. The cost for the quarterly Humanist Perspectives is \$22.00. The completed form along with the required payment should be sent to HAC at the Ottawa address shown on the form.

For those who do not wish to belong to HAC, it is possible to join our local group, (HALA), at the rates shown below.

	<u>Individual</u>	<u>Household</u>	<u>Limited Income</u>	
			<u>Individual</u>	<u>Household</u>
Humanist Association of London and Area-	\$20.00	\$25.00	\$10.00	\$15.00

Should you wish to subscribe to the quarterly magazine, Humanist Perspectives, a separate fee of \$22.00 should be sent to: Humanist Perspectives, PO Box 943, Duncan, BC, V9L 3Y2.

HALA fees should be sent to Membership Secretary Ed Ashman, at 1849 Dundas St. Apt. C, London ON, N5W 3E6, or pay Ed at a regular meeting. Payments sent to Ed should be by cash or by cheque made out to The Humanist Association of London and Area.

Up-Coming Meetings

February 9th -7:30PM- Some Positive Attitudes About Living and Dying- Goldie Emerson.

March 9th -7:30PM- The Next Hundred Years- Don Hatch

April 13th – 7:30 PM - We Are All African- Our Great Diversity- Dr. Christopher diCarlo
(This April meeting may not be held at the CCLC, but at another location to be advised later)
Meetings are held at the Cross Cultural Learning Centre. 505 Dundas St. London. Use the rear door.