



The Enlightenment



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John Stuart Mill – Philosopher and Political Economist – (1806-1873)

English philosopher and political economist John Stuart Mill was the most influential liberal thinker of the 19th century. He was an advocate of utilitarianism, the ethical theory that was synthesized by his godfather Jeremy Bentham. Born in London, he was educated by his father James Mill, whose aim was to create a genius intellect that would carry on the cause of utilitarianism after he and Bentham were dead. John Stuart Mill's most famous writings were *Principles of Political Economy* (1848) *On Liberty* (1859) and *Utilitarianism* (1863).

On Liberty involves an impassioned defence of free speech. Mill argues that free discourse is a necessary condition for intellectual and social progress. We can never be sure, he contends, if a silenced opinion does not contain some element of truth. He also argues that allowing people to air false opinions is productive for two reasons. First, individuals are more likely to



abandon false beliefs if they are engaged in an open exchange of ideas. Second, by forcing other individuals to re-examine and reaffirm their beliefs in the process of debate, these beliefs are kept from declining into dogma. It is not enough for Mill that one simply has an unexamined belief that happens to be true; one must understand why the belief in question is the true one.

During the period 1865-1868 Mill was an independent Member of Parliament and became the first person to call for women to be given the right to vote. In 1851 he married Harriet Taylor after 21 years of intimate, but platonic friendship. Brilliant in her own right, Taylor was a significant influence on Mill's work and ideas. He cites her influence in his final version of *On Liberty*. His book *The Subjection of Women* (1869) is one of the earliest written on the subject of women's liberation. He felt that the oppression of women was one of the few remaining relics from ancient times, a set of prejudices that severely impeded the progress of humanity.

Mill's famous formulation of Utilitarianism is known as the "greatest happiness principle." It holds that one must always act so as to produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. He also argues that intellectual pleasures are superior to more physical forms of pleasure. Mill distinguishes between happiness and contentment, claiming that the former is of higher value than the latter, stating that it is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. He was a skeptic of religious claims and could well be labeled a humanist.

Finally it is worth mentioning that John Stuart Mill was the godfather of Bertrand Russell. (The above information was obtained from Wikipedia)

President's Remarks

Everyone present thoroughly enjoyed Dr. Lynne Jackson's talk on "Religion and Prejudice: Cause or Cure" at our December meeting. At our AGM in January the make-up of the HALA Board of Directors for 2007 was decided and is shown below. This was followed by a video on Richard Dawkins' new book, *The God Delusion*. Lively discussion followed. Our new Program Committee of Goldie Emerson and Bill Chefurka has obtained a most interesting group of speakers for the next few months. The next four are listed on page 6.

Best regards, Don.

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

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The Humanist Association of London and Area meets at Cross Cultural Learner Centre, 505 Dundas Street in London, on the second Thursday of the months September to July inclusive at 7:30 PM. Please use the rear door off the parking lot. The Enlightenment is published quarterly in February, May, August and November.

Visit our web site at www.humanists-london.org Our Web Master is John Pope, jpope@wwdc.com

New members are welcome. Contact Membership Secretary John Pope at (519) 488-1562 jpope@wwdc.com or Ed Ashman at (519) 457-9982 edward017@sympatico.ca . 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				

THE GOD DELUSION: FACT OR FICTION?

Richard Dawkins' new book *The God Delusion* is climbing the bestseller charts and giving atheists everywhere powerful fuel for attacking religion. On November 9th 2006 about sixty people attended a debate sponsored by the Humanist Association of London and Area at the Cross Cultural Learner Centre on, "Is There A Loving Creator God?" Here are the key points by the debaters Dr. Bruce Tallman and Dr. Goldwin Emerson.

YES. THERE IS A LOVING CREATOR GOD

By Dr. Bruce Tallman

Nonbelievers usually do away with the idea of a Creator by ascribing God-like qualities such as infinity and eternity to the universe. However, Albert Einstein and Isaac Newton, the two greatest scientists who ever lived, both believed that the universe is finite, and modern astronomers all agree that the universe began with a Big Bang about fourteen billion years ago. They have also done computer projections that show that the universe will end in about one hundred billion years. Monotheistic religions believe that nothing caused God to exist, God exists infinitely and eternally by God's own nature, and God caused the Big Bang.

Believing scientists like Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, an expert on the fossil remains of evolution, have noted that evolution on our planet has proceeded from matter (rocks and water) to life (plants and animals) to thought (humans) to spirit (the great religions that continue to spread across the world because humans are "homo religiousus", that is, "hardwired for God"). The fact that the whole natural world has evolved in a spiritual direction, from matter to life to thought to spirit, is evidence that God is directing the whole evolutionary process.

Many nonbelievers say they only believe in things for which there is scientific evidence. Although we cannot scientifically prove there is a God, there is evidence of the creativity of a Creator all around us: the sun, lightning, rainbows, flowers, mountains, peacocks, giraffes, children, and on and on. It's as if the whole creation is shouting, "There is a God!" As one contemplative said, "If you want to see God just open your eyes and wake up!"

Just as there is plenty of evidence that there is a creator God, the evidence of a loving God is all around us. First of all, there is far more good than evil in the world. Evil is always only a corruption of something that was originally good. For example, illness is always only a corruption of original health.

Doctors estimate that only about three percent of the population has a major illness at any one time; health predominates by far. If there is seven percent unemployment it means there is ninety-three percent employment. Criminologists estimate only two percent of the population are criminals, the other ninety-eight percent are law-abiding citizens. So good is foundational; evil is secondary. We take the good for granted because it is just so everyday and commonplace. Again, we need to open our eyes.

The greatest proof that there is a loving God is that love is the central thing in life. This requires no argument since lovers, poets, philosophers, and mystics have been proclaiming it for centuries, and we all know in our hearts that it is true. If there is no God of love, why is good far more predominant than evil, and why is love the central thing in life? Atheists have no good explanation for this.

Although God is loving, all-powerful, and all-knowing, God is also self-limiting. Natural laws serve us well the vast majority of the time, so God chooses not to interfere with them. If God interfered with them every time they might cause suffering, the world would be chaotic. Similarly, God chooses not to take away our free will, even when we misuse it and cause suffering, because otherwise we would be robots and there would be no real love in the world.

God constantly works within us, trying to motivate us to love one another, prevent suffering, and bring greater good out of evil, and indeed life is full of the overcoming of suffering. However, sometimes we disobey God and cause suffering on a massive scale such as killing millions of innocent people in the twentieth century. The real question here is not “How can God allow suffering?” but “How can human beings allow it?”

God *does* allow suffering, but only so that the highest human virtues: compassion, wisdom, heroism, service to others, and self-sacrifice can emerge in response. If God took away all suffering, life would lose its profundity.

The crucifixion of Christ is the great symbol that God suffers with us and is right in the center of our pain, trying to alleviate it. And the resurrection of Christ is the great symbol that all suffering is finally overcome by God in heaven.

The facts of life are that life on Earth is evolving in a spiritual direction, religion and spirituality constantly spring up everywhere because we are hardwired for God, good is foundational, love is central, and there are answers to suffering. All these things testify that there is indeed a loving, creator God.

Dr. Bruce Tallman is a London spiritual director. For contact information go to www.bruceallman.com.

NO. THERE IS NOT A LOVING CREATOR GOD

By Dr. Goldwin Emerson

The Christian God is reputed to be an all-knowing, all-powerful, benevolent, supreme being, who created the universe, answers prayer and influences events on Earth. He is also believed to have sent his son to Earth for the purpose of atoning for the sins of humankind. This description causes skeptics to ask the following:

1. If the deity is all-knowing, he would know when disasters such as earthquakes and hurricanes are about to happen, and if he is all-powerful, why does he not stop these catastrophes and prevent the death of innocent people?
2. If this deity is all-powerful and benevolent, why does he allow humans to be born with defects and incurable diseases?
3. Millions of believers pray to their deity asking that he intervene in events on Earth. Why are so many prayers not answered?
4. Why do Christians claim that Jesus is divine, requiring worship, when no other monotheistic religion makes this claim for their prophets?

5. As scientific knowledge advances we learn that many of the world's problems of pollution, war, global warming, hunger and disease are human-made problems which, if they are to be solved at all, will need to be solved by human-made solutions, not by God. Why are religious believers not willing to accept a rational scientific approach to human-made problems?

6. Why is it that Christians claim that belief in God is necessary for moral and ethical behaviour? Effective ethical codes were established in various early civilizations prior to the existence of the monotheistic religions.

When asked why their omnipotent loving God allows so much misery in the world, believers say God moves in mysterious ways, or the universe is unfolding as it should. These answers are hardly satisfying to skeptics, and one is tempted to side with Sigmund Freud (1870-1937) who said:

“a personal god is nothing more than a father figure: desire for such a deity sprang from infantile yearnings for a powerful, protective father, for justice and fairness and life to go on forever. God is simply a projection of these desires, feared and worshiped by human beings out of a sense of helplessness. Religion belongs to the infancy of the human race; it has been a necessary stage in the transition from childhood to maturity. It has promoted ethical values which were essential to society. Now that humanity has come of age, however, it should be left behind.”

For non-theists the conclusion is that there is no God. On the other hand there are alternative ways of viewing what has been called God. In the seventeenth century the Dutch philosopher Spinoza proposed that the belief in God's activity in the world was merely a way of describing the world's mathematical and causal principles. For Spinoza there was no need for the concept of divine law; the best guidance is the eternal laws of nature. A similar view has been expressed by the famous physicists Stephen Hawking and Albert Einstein and by many other scientists and philosophers. Others may think of God as a quality within themselves or as the Ultimate Reality or as the Ground of All Being instead of believing in the traditional Christian concept of God.

Most liberal Christians accept the firm scientific evidence that the universe is billions of years old and that life on Earth evolved over millions of years; nevertheless, they may still believe that in some mysterious way God is a prime mover in this evolution. While religious people also credit God with the origin and existence of love, humanists believe love is actually a product of evolution. The emotion of love, particularly in mammals, enhances the survival potential of offspring. Considering God as a creator begs the obvious question: Who or what created God? For humanists, the answer is simple: humans created God.

It seems that primitive peoples looked for explanations of how the world works and created numerous spirits and gods to account for natural happenings. Over the centuries many different gods were invented by ancient civilizations including Egypt, Greece and Rome. One exception was the monotheistic God of the Hebrews. We now accept that the multitude of ancient pagan gods were created in the minds of humans. It is reasonable to conclude that Yahweh also was created in the minds of the Hebrews and became entrenched in the myths contained in the book of Genesis. Thus humans created God in their own image, rather than the other way around.

Humanists are guided by the principles of rational thought, scientific inquiry, responsibility, ethics, compassion, fairness and equality, and find it difficult to believe in the Christian concept of God. Instead, humanists believe that God was created in the minds of early Hebrews. Rather than worshipping the Christian God, humanists celebrate the opportunity of living on our wondrous planet and having the privilege of enjoying the many good fortunes available to us. In other words, they try to follow a philosophy of loving and revering life, in the same manner that believers love and revere God.

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Concluding Remarks

The two statements represent different ways of viewing our universe. One is religious, the other non-religious. These two positions are offered so that readers may have a better understanding of both and may make their own choices on these important concerns.

Up-coming Meetings

February 8th 2007 - Regular Meeting of the Humanist Association of London and Area
“Evolutionary Psychology” by Dr. Peter Ossenkopp, Department Chair, faculty of Social Sciences, UWO. Evolution has created physical changes that enabled our ancestors to survive. Our speaker will also explain the role of evolution in the function of our brains.

March 8th 2007 – Regular Meeting of the Humanist Association of London and Area
The speaker will be professor Lorne Falkenstein, Department of Philosophy, UWO. The topic will be Superstition and Enthusiasm in Hume’s psychology of religion.

April 12th 2007 – Regular Meeting of the Humanist Association of London and Area
Mr. Jim Cranwell, long time member of HAC and the Kitchener/Waterloo/Cambridge/Guelph, Toronto and London Area Humanist Associations will explore the question of “Tolerance for the Religious Views of Others,” in light of the writings of Daniel Dennett, Barbara Smoker, Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris.

May 10th 2007 – Regular Meeting of the Humanist Association of London and Area
Dr. Arja Vainio-Mattila, Director for the Centre of Global Studies, Huron University College, UWO, will speak on “What is Africa to us in the 21st Century?” Dr. Vainio-Mattila received her PhD in Development Geography and has worked for two decades in development interventions in most of Sub-Saharan Africa as well as in Asia.

Volunteers

Most non-profit organizations rely heavily on volunteers in order to operate. Hala is no exception and we are most grateful to the following people, in addition to those on the Board of Directors.

Webmaster – John Pope.

Program Committee – Goldie Emerson and Bill Chefurka.

Refreshments – Jackie Emerson.

Music – Camille Van Daele. Research – Richard Gibbens.

Enlightenment Editor and Publisher – Don Hatch.

The Eternal Questions of Humankind

By Don Santor

Several years ago, in response to many student requests, I introduced a course on World Religions into the secondary school curriculum. The intent of the course was to teach young adults “about” religion, “not to instruct” them in religion. Since religion was, and is, a major factor in the historical evolution of every society and civilization, it was essential that it be understood. In a more pragmatic manner, world peace can never be achieved unless we understand the religious forces that have shaped both us and our society. Such an approach to religion avoids proselytizing and promotes real education, namely a dialectical search for truth.

The introductory lesson in this course was entitled, “The Eternal Questions of Humankind.” Students were individually asked to compile a list of questions that humanity has been trying to answer from times immemorial, questions that they would like answered as well. After working independently for a while, a composite class list of “Eternal Questions” was compiled. Most of the following questions appeared on every list:

- Who am I?
- What am I?
- Is there a god?
- If there is a god, what is god like?
- What is real? What is reality?
- Why are we here?
- Is there a purpose and meaning for life?
- How should we live?
- Where did the world come from?
- Is there an afterlife? If so, what is it like?
- If there is an afterlife, how do you get it?
- How can we tell right from wrong?
- What is evil?
- Why do things happen the way they do?
- Why do terrible things happen to good people?
- Does a god control events? Can a god control them?
- Are the gods part of one great spirit?
- Do the different religions worship the same god?
- What is the good life?
- What is true happiness?
- What is truth?
- Is there any such thing as bad luck?

In subsequent years I arranged for colleagues in different regions of Canada to pose the same question to their senior students and engage them in a similar exercise. Regardless of location—rural or urban, regardless of gender—male or female, and regardless of the school system—private, public or separate, the questions asked were largely the same. While the wording may have differed, a statistical analysis of the questions showed a similar distribution, in short a 92% agreement. In addition, the questions when asked by adult groups were quite similar.

This list of questions provided a database for further analysis. Students were asked to consider the characteristics of the questions they raised. They recognized most of the questions to be divergent or open-ended in nature. Few dealt with technical matters. Most dealt with spiritual and ethical matters. They invited a broad range of answers. Very few questions could be answered with a “yes” or “no” response. And even those that did had to be qualified. The rest of the course examined how the various religious worldviews attempted to answer these questions.

The answers to these questions also shared a number of characteristics. Each question invites a variety of answers. Most of the answers are based on opinion or on what a person believes, and much less on what can be proved. Further, almost everyone admitted that their answers might change over time, even those persons with a strong traditional religious commitment. When students were pressed to consider what might cause their answers to change, they responded by saying life experiences, especially tragedies.

When asked what influences how a person answers these questions, the following factors were mentioned: age, gender, parents, formal education, religious affiliation, and life experiences. What is the most important factor when you are an adolescent? A teenager? An adult? What factor, or factors, should be most important in determining how these questions are answered? What factors presently influence you? What factors should be of lesser importance? Why? All of these questions stimulated serious reflection and analysis.

When asked what was the most important question, there was general agreement: “Why are we here?” and/or “What is the purpose and meaning in life?” attracted most attention. This is a central question of virtually every religious tradition and worldview, and most individuals struggle with it sooner or later.

A short discussion established that the main reasons for changing one’s answers were education, maturation and life experience. Since there was unanimous agreement among the students in admitting that a person’s answers to these questions change over time, it was obvious to ask them, “How do you know when you have a right answer?” Without too much reservation, most were willing to admit that you will never know for certain, but all a person can do is keep on searching for better answers. Or as one student told the class, “an answer that better serves your needs.”

Most persons also understand that when young children are inculcated or indoctrinated with a set of answers, there is little chance they will change their minds, or that changing might cause considerable stress, or in some cases even trauma. When an individual is educated and indoctrinated to accept certainty, it is difficult to suddenly accept and live with uncertainty.

As the course unfolded, students realized very soon that most religious traditions offer pre-packaged, prescriptive answers to many of these questions, answers that called for conformity of thought and opinion, something they have a natural tendency to resist. At the same time many of the answers are based on revelations from the divine and lie beyond the realm of verification or examination. But they do offer certainty in an uncertain world, something that is psychologically satisfying to many and necessary to some. But answers that provide certainty sometimes cause cognitive dissonance for many students who are expanding their intellectual horizons. The real problem lies in finding a way to resolve the dissonance.

There is a story about a Buddhist monk that illustrates some of these ideas in a graphic manner and provides an answer. The monk is adrift in a rowboat and has no idea where he is. He can see no land in any direction. As expected, he decides to start rowing, hoping to find the shore. After rowing for many hours and seeing no land he gradually realizes that he must be in the middle of a large body of water. So he continues to row looking for the shore, hoping to find a harbour for safe haven. After rowing for many more hours, he eventually realizes that his situation is futile. There is no hope of reaching shore or of finding a harbour. So he stops rowing and decides to build a harbour where he is.

Rather than live with harbours built by others, or by the hope of harbours provided by a religious tradition, we can construct our own harbours. If all our answers to these eternal questions are integrated, and are subjected to critical assessment and analysis, we can generate a worldview that could help us make sense of our existence and give it some direction that would be meaningful. In short, we can build our own harbour. Not relying on the certainty of divine revelation, we can easily modify our worldview so as to respond to advances in our knowledge and thinking.

Humanism invites us to embark on a lifelong search for answers to the eternal questions of humankind. It also invites us to generate a worldview that fosters an independence of thought that enables us to live with uncertainty. Humanism also encourages an individual to modify and amend the answers when they prove to be inadequate. The appeal to reason and to intellectual and moral autonomy in answering the eternal questions of humankind is essential. To this end, humanism should be part of any curriculum in a worldviews education program.

Don Santor is retired from The University of Western Ontario Faculty of Education, where he taught history, world religions and ethics for many years. He also served as a moral education consultant at the local and provincial level. He is the co-author of the *Many Faces of Religion*, an inquiry into the religious traditions of humanity. He is a member of The Humanist Association of London and Area and of The Humanist Association of Canada.

A Few Quotes

An Atheist is a person who has no invisible means of support. – Lord Tweedsmuir.

By the year 2000, we will I hope, raise our children to believe in human potential, not God. – Gloria Steinem. (Editors comment: Too bad Ms. Steinem's hope was not realized.)

Skepticism, like chastity, should not be relinquished too readily. – George Santayana.

Religion is excellent stuff for keeping the common people quiet. – Napoleon Bonaparte.

I do not believe in an afterlife, although I am bringing a change of underwear. – Woody Allen.

I'm an atheist, but we people of the sixties were very spiritual in our own way. – Camile Paglia.

Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. – Marie Curie.

The environment is a moral issue. – Al Gore.

Some Comic Relief

The following statements about the Bible were written by Catholic schoolchildren during a test about the Old and New Testaments. The wording has not been corrected. Read aloud for maximum chuckles.

1. The first book of the Bible is Guinnessis. God got tired creating the world so he took the Sabbath off.
2. Adam and Eve were created from an apple tree.
3. Noah's wife was Joan of Arc. Noah built an ark and the animals came on as pears.
4. Lots wife was a pillar of salt during the day, but a ball of fire at night.
5. The Jews were a proud people and throughout history they had trouble with unsympathetic Genitals.
6. Sampson was a strong man who let himself be led astray by a Jezebel like Delilah.
7. Sampson slayed the Philistines with the axe of the Apostles.
8. Moses led the Jews to the Red Sea where they made unleavened bread which is bread made without any ingredients.
9. The Egyptians were all drowned in the dessert. Moses then went up to Mount Syanide to get the Ten Commandments.
10. The first Commandment was when Eve told Adam to eat the apple.
11. The seventh Commandment is Thou shalt not admit adultery.
12. Moses died before he ever reached Canada. Then Joshua led the Hebrews in the battle of Geritol.
13. The greatest miracle in the Bible is when Joshua told his son to stand still and he obeyed him
14. David was a Hebrew king who was skilled at playing the liar. He fought the Finkelsteins, a race of people who lived in biblical times.
15. Solomon, one of David's sons, had 300 wives and 700 porcupines.
16. When Mary heard she was the mother of Jesus she sang the Magna Carta.
17. When the three wise guys from the east side arrived they found Jesus in the manager.
18. Jesus was born because Mary had an immaculate contraption. St. John the blacksmith then dumped water on his head.
19. Jesus enunciated the golden rule. Which says to do unto others before they do one to you. He also explained a man doth not live by sweat alone.
20. The people who followed the lord were called the 12 decibels.
21. The Epistles were the wives of the Apostles.
22. One of the oppossums was St. Mathew who was also a taximan.
23. St Paul cavorted to Christianity and he preached holy acrimony which is another name for marriage
24. Christians have only one spouse. This is called monotony.
25. It was a miracle when Jesus rose from the dead and managed to get the tombstone off the entrance.

More Quotes

Faith is believing something you know ain't true. – Mark Twain.

If God does exist, he must be an underachiever. – Woody Allen.