



The Enlightenment



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

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Tarek Fatah – Political Activist, Writer and Broadcaster

Every spring the Humanist Association of London and Area invites well-known personalities to give a lecture on a topical subject at the Wolf Performance Hall, located at the London Central Library. This year the speaker was Tarek Fatah, a liberal Muslim, a champion for a secular society. His topic was “Blending Values in A Multicultural Society?”

Tarek was a dynamic presenter, speaking without notes on a variety of subjects that interest him. The main thrusts of his talk were Sharia law and separation of church and state. He was adamant that Sharia law must never be allowed in Canada, and he was thankful that the Ontario government turned down former Attorney General Marion Boyd’s recommendation that Sharia law be allowed. He noted that Muslim countries where Islam is the national religion are often backward and need to progress into the twenty-first century.



Tarek Fatah

Tarek Fatah has published two books. His first is *Chasing a Mirage: The Tragic Illusion of an Islamic State*. This book was short listed for the \$35,000 Donner Prize for 2008-09. His second book is *The Jew is not My Enemy: Unveiling the Myths that Fuel Anti-Semitism*. This book won the 2010 Helen and Stan Vine Canadian Book Award in Politics and History. In May 2009, he joined radio station CFRB 1010. Later that fall, he joined John Moore’s morning show as a contributor. Currently he hosts “The Tarek Fatah Show” on CFRB on Sundays. He has also written opinion pieces for various publications including *TIME Magazine*, the *Toronto Star*, the *National Post* and the *Globe and Mail*.

In the 1995 provincial election, Tarek ran as an NDP Candidate, but was not elected. He has left the NDP and is now a Liberal party supporter. He supported Bob Rae in his quest to become leader of the Federal Liberals, but it was Stephane Dion who was elected.

In 2001 Fatah was one of the founders of the Muslim Canadian Congress. He is often criticized by the Muslim Association of Canada who claim he has nothing positive to say about Islam and Muslims no longer listen to him. Regardless of that claim, Tarek’s warnings about Sharia law must be heeded and his passion for the separation of church and state must be admired.

President's Remarks

The past few months have been a very busy time for HALA, and I think we can all feel proud of what has been accomplished. One Saturday in April, the Board met along with several invited HALA members for a four-hour brainstorming retreat to think creatively about future directions for our organization. Breaking into small groups, we discussed our vision of HALA five years from now, ideas for increasing our membership, involvement in social issues in the broader community, and the nature and format of our monthly meetings. It was an energizing and productive day, generating a large number of creative ideas that we will seek to begin implementing over the coming months. Then in May we had our annual Wolf Hall event, with Tarek Fatah as speaker. Tarek turned out to be every bit as dynamic, controversial, challenging, and enlightening as we had hoped. His emphasis on the importance of a secular society and the separation of religion and state fit very well with our Humanist principles and allowed us to increase our visibility in the community. Many thanks to all those who worked hard to make this day a success, particularly Bill Chefurka who spear-headed the event.

Along with the high points, the past few months have also brought sadness, as we have mourned the deaths of four of our long-time members: Ed Ashman, Elvins Spencer, Ivan Sexsmith, and Claire van Daele-Boseret. We remember each of them with great fondness, and we extend our deepest sympathy and affection to their spouses, family, and friends. They will certainly be missed. Their passing reminds us of the brevity of life and the importance of cherishing our relationships with others. ~ *Rod Martin*

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

President– Dr. Rod Martin - (519) 673-6635 – email – ramartin@uwo.ca

Vice President – Dr. Jon Hore – (519) 434-3034 – email – jon.hore@schulich.uwo.ca

Secretary Pro tem – Carolyn Rowland – (519) 457-9982 – email - halacarolyn2012@gmail.com

Treasurer – Olive Porter – (519) 451-5962 – email – porterom@sympatico.com

Member at Large – Walter Heywood – (519) 434-9237 – email – wjheywood@yahoo.ca - Membership

Member at Large - Don Hatch – (519) 472-6167 – email – dahatch@rogers.com - *Enlightenment*

The Humanist Association of London and Area meets at the Cross Cultural Learner Centre, 505 Dundas Street in London, on the second Wednesday of the months September to July inclusive at 7:30 p.m. Please use the rear door off the parking lot. *The Enlightenment*, edited by Don Hatch, is published quarterly in January, April, July and October. Please note: We reserve the right to edit and publish articles at our discretion.

Visit our web site at www.humanists-london.org

New members are welcome. Contact Membership Secretary, Walter Heywood (519) 434-9237 e-mail wjheywood@yahoo.ca Membership fees are listed below.

	<u>Humanist Canada</u>	<u>Humanist</u>	<u>HALA</u>	<u>HALA Limited</u>
	<u>Basic</u>	<u>Perspectives</u>	<u>Basic</u>	<u>Resources</u>
Single	\$ 40	\$22	\$20	\$10
Family	\$ 50		\$25	\$15
HC Life	\$700			

Remembering

By Marianne Nyhof

May 5th, 1945, the day Germany capitulated unconditionally to the Allies.

In the part of the Netherlands north of the river Rhine, on this day the sun seems to be shining more brightly than ever before. For the first time in five years every house has the Dutch flag flying and, have no fear, it's OK, now we will not be shot for that! Members of the Dutch resistance wearing their special armbands are in charge and patrolling the streets.

I am 13 years old and feel the unbelievable, delicious sensation all through my consciousness of being FREE ! We are allowed - no encouraged - to sing our national anthem again. We can be outside after 8 p.m. No more deep dread of a knock on the door in the middle of the night to get our house searched by big armed men. We have our citizens' rights again.

Suddenly I don't have that tightening of my stomach any more when I see a German uniform, knowing all German soldiers have handed in their weapons and do not have power over us any longer. We hear stories of German soldiers hastily making their way back to Germany any way they can, even by bike. They are well aware that after five years of the systematic plundering of food, coal, shoes, clothing, everything, the emaciated Dutch are not in a forgiving mood.

Ever since the summer of 1944 there has been no electricity, no vehicle fuel and only gas for 45 minutes per day for cooking purposes. Everything was rationed and everything was getting more and more scarce until in the end there was no coffee, tea, sugar, salt, meat, milk, butter, fruit or vegetables (other than cabbage, carrots and rotting potatoes). A family of four had one coupon each week for one loaf of bread, made without yeast - measuring 1 ½ x 4 x 8". Stores were empty of shoes – other than wooden shoes – clothing, linens, toilet paper (my job was to cut newspapers into 3 x 4" pieces and thread those on a string to be hung in the bathroom) shampoo, soap..... the list goes on.

But now, May 5th, 1945, as weak as everyone was, all were looking forward to welcoming our heroes, the Canadian soldiers. The rumour was the Canadians would come from Rotterdam to Delft (where I lived), so, May 6th, early in the morning everyone went to the highway that was completely empty of traffic. People stood eight deep for many kilometers along the road, but no liberators showed up. The same for May 7th; how disappointing!! But then, around noon on the 8th, we saw in the far distance some dark specks that quickly grew bigger. Tanks! Trucks! Trucks packed full of young, beautiful, wonderful, healthy-looking Canadian soldiers. The cheering was absolutely deafening and young and old swarmed around the trucks trying to shake hands or just to touch these, our liberators.

Not too surprising, it was young women who were hauled up on the trucks to get a ride into town. (My sister was then eighteen years old and when my mother, cheering somewhere in the crowd, saw the young girls on soldiers' laps her cheering stopped and instead she frantically looked for my sister among those on the trucks, as she later told me - and no, my sister did not end up riding into town on the lap of a Canadian!.)

A festive period followed; the Dutch learned the song "The Maple Leaf Forever" and were taught how to do the hokey pokey and, more importantly, we started to receive food: spam, powdered milk and powdered eggs, flown in by the military from Sweden every day, freshly baked white bread and this was 6" high and tasted like fine pastry.

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The Dutch will never forget what the Canadians did and sacrificed in order that the Netherlands would again be a free, independent, sovereign nation after having been annexed by force into the Third Reich. In the Netherlands, May 5th is celebrated each year with parades, speeches and visits to the graves of Canadians, a total of 7,600 men who were killed on Dutch soil. Those cemeteries are maintained year-round with love and respect, mostly by groups of school children who hear stories about the war, not so much how the Germans suppressed the people, but how Canadians came from safe and free Canada to right a terrible wrong, despite knowing that the cost would be many young lives.

Ever since 1945, on May 5th at dusk, hundreds of people in the Netherlands take part in a silent, slow walk to one of the many memorial monuments with each person holding a lit candle. A powerful and moving experience.

So, dearly beloved Canada: THANK YOU for, 67 years ago, giving the Dutch back their precious freedom.
~ Marianne Nyhof – A proud Canadian.

About Paul Dirac – Submitted by Garth Santor

I came across this little story about Paul Dirac talking with a group of notable physicists at a conference in 1927...

Heisenberg recollected a conversation among young participants at the 1927 Solvay Conference about Einstein and Planck's views on religion. Wolfgang Pauli, Heisenberg and Dirac took part in it. Dirac's contribution was a criticism of the political purpose of religion, which was much appreciated for its lucidity by Bohr when Heisenberg reported it to him later. Among other things, Dirac said:

“I cannot understand why we idle discussing religion. If we are honest—and scientists have to be—we must admit that religion is a jumble of false assertions, with no basis in reality. The very idea of God is a product of the human imagination. It is quite understandable why primitive people, who were so much more exposed to the overpowering forces of nature than we are today, should have personified these forces in fear and trembling. But nowadays, when we understand so many natural processes, we have no need for such solutions. I can't for the life of me see how the postulate of an Almighty God helps us in any way. What I do see is that this assumption leads to such unproductive questions as why God allows so much misery and injustice, the exploitation of the poor by the rich and all the other horrors He might have prevented. If religion is still being taught, it is by no means because its ideas still convince us, but simply because some of us want to keep the lower classes quiet. Quiet people are much easier to govern than clamorous and dissatisfied ones. They are also much easier to exploit. Religion is a kind of opium that allows a nation to lull itself into wishful dreams and so forget the injustices that are being perpetrated against the people. Hence the close alliance between those two great political forces, the State and the Church. Both need the illusion that a kindly God rewards—in heaven if not on earth—all those who have not risen up against injustice, who have done their duty quietly and uncomplainingly. That is precisely why the honest assertion that God is a mere product of the human imagination is branded as the worst of all mortal sins.”

Heisenberg's view was tolerant. Pauli, raised as a Catholic, had kept silent after some initial remarks, but when finally he was asked for his opinion, said: "Well, our friend Dirac has got a religion and its guiding principle is 'There is no God and Paul Dirac is His prophet.'" Everybody, including Dirac, burst into laughter.

The Protestant Work Ethic

The day that Tarek Fatah spoke at the Wolf Performance Hall, five HALA members, including myself, took him to lunch at the Delta Armouries Hotel where he was staying. The conversation was lively as he put forward some of the views that we later heard during his formal talk. At one point I asked him, "Why are the countries in northern Europe prosperous, while many in the south are nearly bankrupt?" He answered, "The difference is the Protestant work ethic." I believe he is right. The citizens of the cooler Scandinavian countries, Germany and the Netherlands, have worked hard to maintain their prosperity. And they are willing to pay the taxes necessary to enable governments to manage their economies efficiently, while at the same time providing social safety nets. In contrast, citizens in warmer southern countries have demanded and received extended vacations and social safety nets without realizing that, in the long run, it is necessary to work hard to generate sufficient taxes to pay for these goodies. The net result in the southern countries is ever increasing debt that will be difficult to pay off, thus causing financial institutions to decrease bond ratings and raise interest rates.

The term "Protestant work ethic" was coined by the German economics professor Max Weber (1864-1920) the father of modern sociology. From a young age Weber was interested in the relationship between religion and capitalism. What was it that made Protestant northern Europe more friendly toward capitalism than was the Catholic south? Later he wondered why the United States was more dynamic than even industrial Germany. To find out, he set sail to attend the Conference of Arts and Sciences at the 1904 St. Louis World Fair. He was dazzled by the shining lights of the Palace of Electricity; Thomas Edison himself was on hand. The place was brimming with marvels of modern technology, from telephones to motion pictures. He remarked:

"This kind of place is really an incredible thing: tent camps of the workers, especially section hands for the numerous railroads under construction; streets in a natural state, doused with oil to prevent dust, wooden churches of at least 4-5 denominations...Add to this the usual tangle of telephone wires, and electrical streetcar lines under construction, for the 'town' extends into the unbounded distance."

Weber traveled westward, passing through the town of St. James, 100 miles west of St. Louis. He was amazed by the town's huge number of churches and chapels of every stripe. With the industrial extravaganza of the World Fair still fresh in his memory, he began to discern a kind of holy alliance between America's material success and its vibrant religious life. In other words, the Protestant work ethic, combined with the spirit of capitalism, was in place. It was clear to him that economic dynamism was an unintended consequence of the Protestant Reformation. Whereas Catholics associated holiness with the renunciation of worldly things – monks in cloisters, hermits in caves – the Protestants saw industry and thrift as an expression of a new kind of hard working godliness. Others had to work to live, but the Protestants lived to work.

In Europe, after the Reformation, Protestant countries grew faster than Catholic ones, so by 1700 the former had clearly overtaken the latter in terms of per capita income. By 1940, people in Catholic countries were, on average, forty per cent worse off than in Protestant countries. Because of the central importance of Luther's belief in individual reading of the Bible, Protestantism encouraged literacy, not to mention printing, and these two things unquestionably encouraged economic development (the accumulation of capital) as well as scientific study. Undisputedly, it was the offshoots of the Protestant Reformation that allowed parts of western society to progress and prosper from the Enlightenment period onward.

When I was growing up in the 1930s and 1940s in south-central Ontario, the Protestant work ethic was alive and well. These were the periods of the Great Depression and World War II. Hard work was necessary to survive in the 1930s, and it was also an indispensable requirement in the effort to win the war in the first half of the 1940s. A lot of this effort was manual work, because there were fewer labour-saving devices than exist today. Anyone who shunned hard work was considered to be a lazy no-good. Another prevalent attribute was thrift. Cash, not credit, was king. Credit cards did not exist. People tended not to buy things unless they could pay for them immediately. One positive aspect of the war, if there is such a thing, was increased amounts of cash as unemployment was drastically lower than in the depression.

With the military personnel returning home after the war, a strong economy materialized as new homes were built and families were raised. Many new churches were built as suburbs developed. Church attendance was at or near an all-time high. Prosperity continued through the '50s and '60s, and in 1967 Canada joyously celebrated its 100th birthday, culminating in the amazing Expo 67 or Terre des Hommes. Canada was the place to be as multitudes of immigrants arrived from Europe. But little did we realize that a major factor in our success was low cost energy. In 1974 the Arab nations saw an opportunity and jacked up the price of oil. From that point on, real income for the middle class has not increased.

Coincident with this, something else was happening: By the 1960s the veterans and the immigrants had furnished their homes, and the purchasing of material items began to slow down. This would never do because successful capitalism relied on growth. At this point Madison Avenue took over and developed advertising techniques that turned materialism into a religion. People just had to have the latest gadgets whether or not they were needed. Keeping up with the Joneses became a challenge, and for many this could only be accomplished by relying on credit. Today, in the U.S., ninety-five percent of families owe \$1.40 for every \$1.00 of annual income, not to mention government debt. This is a crisis, and recovery seems elusive as the middle class shrinks and the rich get richer.

It is now plainly obvious that the thriftiness and fear of debt, a vital part of the work ethic of the 1930s and 1940s, has faded away. At the same time, attendance at mainline churches has declined as materialism becomes the Holy Grail. But paradoxically, as mainline churches closed, the fundamentalist/evangelical churches grew by attracting people looking for comfort and assistance in tough times. Their message is deceptively simple; believe in God and he will come to your aid.

While all the above was in progress, belief in the supernatural was being questioned by a few liberal theologians. The existence of God, of course, has been questioned by various philosophers and academics ever since the Enlightenment, but it was now being discussed in popular journals such as TIME Magazine and others. These developments present an opportunity for humanist organizations to promote the advantages of secular societies. Humanism is defined as a life stance guided by principles of rational thought, scientific inquiry, responsibility, ethics, compassion, fairness and equality. Perhaps it would be a worthwhile endeavour to also emphasize the necessity of thrift and hard work in creating prosperity for all, not just the rich. Under prosperous economic conditions, supernatural beliefs tend to fade into the background as young people realize their falseness. Rather than a Protestant work ethic, it could be called a Humanist Ethic of Thrift and Industriousness. The challenges are huge, and will not be solved without thrift, hard work and economic reform similar to the New Deal that helped end the Great Depression. (DAH)

Ontario Humanist Society Survey

The Ontario Humanist Society has asked all Ontario Humanist organizations to participate in a survey inquiring as to how each group functions and also asking for details of their activities. The reply we submitted is printed below. We thought HALA members and friends would be interested in reading this account of where we have been and what we are now doing.

What became HALA started out as a study group of about 15-20 people at the Unitarian Fellowship of London (UFL) about 10 years ago. In 2004, the group decided to become affiliated with the Humanist Association of Canada. A set of Bylaws was drawn up and the moniker Humanist Association of London and Area was coined. A Board of Directors consisting of a President, a Vice President, a Secretary, a Treasurer and 3 Members at Large was set up. The organization was not (and still is not) incorporated. The connection with UFL was severed when HALA was formed.

Originally we met on the second Thursday of the month during every month except August. Board meetings were held on the third Thursday of every month except August and December. Now we meet on the second Wednesday of January, February, March, April, June, September, October and November. In May we hold a public event or events in the 400 seat Wolf Performance Hall at the London Central Library. In 2009 we celebrated the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth with four lectures: two by outside speakers and two by our own members. In 2011 we had two events on the Evolution of Beliefs. One was from a faith prospective by the Rev. Gretta Vosper and the other was from a humanist prospective by our president Dr. Rod Martin. In 2012 we held one lecture by Tarek Fatah on the subject of multiculturalism (as noted on the cover of this *Enlightenment*). All these events have been fairly well attended. In June we hold our annual picnic and in December we hold our Solstice celebration.

In January 2010 we received charity status from the Canada Revenue Agency under the education category. To obtain this we had to prepare a Constitution. Our Purpose or Mission as stated in our Constitution is:

To educate and increase the public's understanding of the principles of secular worldviews, including humanism, through the provision of seminars, conferences and newsletters.

We issue tax receipts for all charitable donations of \$10.00 or over, and all money received is used to finance the events we hold at the Wolf Performance Hall.

The publishing of our newsletter, *The Enlightenment*, began in 2005. Regular issues are published four times a year and special issues are published from time to time. To date we have published forty-one issues. The way things have turned out, *The Enlightenment* is not so much a newsletter, but is more of a philosophical or academic house organ with articles on humanist-like and other relevant topics.

A very important part of our organization is the Program Committee, consisting of three of our members, one of which is also on the Board of Directors. We have been most fortunate that this committee is continually able to obtain interesting speakers, often from the faculty of the University of Western Ontario. Our meetings begin at 7:30 with a short introduction by our President followed by the speaker who will talk for about forty-five minutes. We then hold a coffee break followed by a question period. The question period is a vital part of our meetings.

About forty percent of our members are or were Unitarians, and the Unitarians used to hold a discussion period after the sermon. About the time we formed HALA, the discussions ceased at UFL and for those UFLers joining HALA, it helped them make up for this lack of what was considered to be a desirable activity.

One of our Board Members at Large maintains a membership roster and at the end of 2011 we had over seventy members. To date we have never had an organized membership drive; new members are obtained mainly by word of mouth.

We try as much as possible to enlist speakers who can talk on matters related to humanism, but also include speakers on other topics such as medicine, education, and science. We like to think we are builders rather than bashers. While we all shun supernatural beliefs, and realize religions have caused much harm in the past, we feel that if you engage in bashing religions, you need to suggest a better alternative to take its place. We know that religions are good at providing a strong sense of community for their members, and we know that recently many humanists are increasingly aware that this sense of community is lacking in many humanist organizations. We feel that determining how to provide a strong satisfying sense of community is one of the biggest challenges we face.

We often like to emphasize that the twelve principles of Humanist Canada deal with a wide range of subjects that are prerequisites for living a satisfying and meaningful secular life, and only one principle (No. 10) deals with supernatural belief. We feel that there is so much more to humanism than atheistic beliefs and regret that many in the general public believe that humanists are little more than a bunch of atheists. We wish to allay that conception. It is our contention that if we work toward establishing a prosperous secular society, supernatural beliefs will gradually fade away. This is what has happened in Scandinavia.

Last March one of our members passed away suddenly at age 50. To show our respects we held a memorial service with OHS Officiant André Lachance conducting the proceedings. The service went exceedingly well, carried out in a reverent and respectful manner. This was a first for us and everyone remarked about how professionally it was done.

Humanist organizations are often accused of preaching to the converted, holding interesting conventions and writing good articles in journals, but seldom getting actively involved in important social issues. Recently we have realized we are guilty of doing just this. We have done little more than hold monthly meetings, picnics and Solstice celebrations. The only exception has been the Wolf Hall events, but still most people in London don't even know we exist. In an attempt to rectify this situation, we recently held a retreat of Board members, plus a few others, to try to determine what we might do to become more active in the community, what causes we might support and how we might attract more members, particularly younger people. A wealth of ideas came forward and we now face the challenge of determining which activities might be practical and effective.

We feel fortunate that we have a keen and capable Board of Directors who get along well together, and we feel certain they will endeavour to plot an interesting and productive course for the future. We also feel fortunate that we have a loyal group of members who regularly attend meetings and participate in lively discussions. And we look forward to seeing our membership grow as we try to be better known in the community.