



The Enlightenment



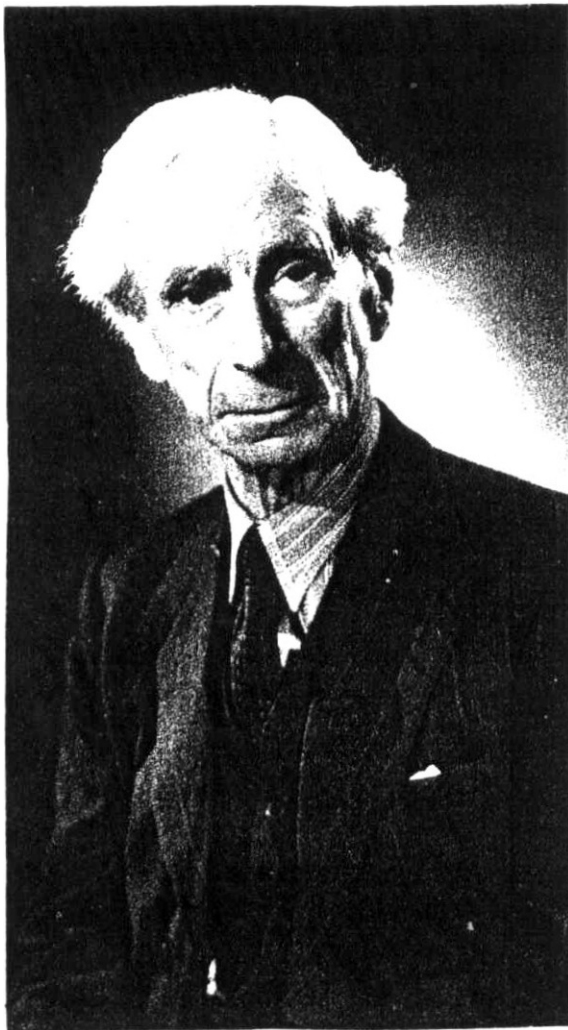
**The Newsletter of the
Humanist Association of London and Area**

(An Affiliate of the Humanist Association of Canada)

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Bertrand Russell

(1872- 1970)

A Mathematician and a Philosopher

The philosophic tradition established by Descartes in the 17th century progressed to its most extreme in the analytical philosophy of Bertrand Russell. His work begins with a rejection of attempts, by previous philosophers, to ground truth in human knowledge upon speculation about the natural or psychological make-up of humanity. The analytical view reduced philosophy to the apparently less speculative realm of objective logical inquiry. In the philosophy of Bertrand Russell, philosophical certainty, as opposed to philosophical idealism or Utopianism, reaches a purity that few have matched. However, Russell's voluminous philosophical output also included social and political philosophy, which was largely responsible for his widespread fame.

During the First World War Russell was imprisoned for his pacifism. In 1920 he traveled to the Soviet Republic expecting to find an alternative to what he saw as destructive capitalism. His expectations were disappointed however by the unspeakably horrible regime led by Lenin. He later became one of Britain's principle advocates of radical reform. The clarity and rigour evident in his philosophical work were put to use in journalism and the writing of political pamphlets which brought complex political ideas to a wider public.

President's Remarks

Hello Happy Humanists!

I was very glad to see the chosen front-page of this, our second edition. Don Hatch has decided on a photo and brief bio of the philosopher whose work introduced me to humanism, Bertrand Russell.

This great British empiricist convinced me to look into the formerly-Unitarian "Religious Education" program that is now the Humanist Association of London & Area. Additionally, his writing on education has contributed to my intended methods of raising my son, James Gordon ' Russell Kaill.

Derek

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 Our Web Master is John Pope, jpope@wwdc.com

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

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

Looking Ahead

There will be no regular meetings of the Humanist Association of London and Area during June July or August, but the following events are of special interest.

1. June 16th- Dr. Henry Morgentaler receives Honorary Degree at UWO.
2. June 23rd-25th – HAC Annual Conference in Ottawa. There is a very impressive line-up of speakers including Dr. Henry Morgentaler, Evelyn Martens, (Humanist of the year), Dr. Robert Buckman, and many others. If you wish to attend please contact Don Hatch at 472-6176, e-mail dahatch@rogers.com for registration form and program. Registration fee, including some meals, is slightly over \$200.00. For attending Friday & Saturday sessions only (no meals), \$100.00
3. July 7th. The Great Conspiracy, the 9/11 news special you never saw. Film produced by Barry Swicker, with comments by History Professor Craig Simpson and discussion after the film. 7:00 PM at the Wolf Performance Hall at the London Public Library. Admission \$5.00, (\$2.00 for unemployed and fixed income). Contact John Pope at 672-6657. E-mail jjpope@wwdc.com
4. August 21st – 27th. Camp Quest – Summer Camp for free thinking kids ages 6-16, held at Bingemans Camping Resort, Kitchener. Contact Kathy Meidell at (519) 580-6594. Forms available on web site, www.kwcghumanists.net

Past Meetings

March 3rd An excellent meeting of Questions and Answers led by Goldie Emerson. A variety of answers were given by the audience. Goldie's questions and his own answers are printed below.

April 7th A joint meeting hosted by Beth Guthrie of the UFL titled, Palestine is Still the Issue, led by Professor Michael Lynk. Using slides Dr. Lynk portrayed the horrible conditions existing in Palestine and suggested the only logical solution is for the formation of a single state with representatives from both the Palestinians and Israelis in a single parliament.

May 5th A review of Pat Duffy Hutcheon's book, *The Road to Reason*. Plenty of good discussion and comments from the audience.

Note Our President Derek Kaill is a regular contributor to the New Humanist magazine in the U.K. To view these excellent articles go to www.newhumanist.org.uk and click on Columns and then on Beyond God and Evil. Or go to our web site (see page 1) and click Related Links and New Humanist (UK).

Some Questions Answered and Some Answers Questioned

By Goldwin Emerson

1. *What are the main goals that we as a small group of Humanists in London and Area can achieve?*

Because we are a small group scattered throughout Canada we will not be able to effect *large* plans for charitable work or protection of the environment etc. There are however, upwards of 20% of Canadians and of Londoners who may be attracted to humanist ideas. We can provide a safe environment where like-minded people who are conscientious but not oriented to traditional religious dogma may come together to share their thinking. If we can achieve this one goal this may be the most important thing that we can accomplish.

2. *What do you say when non-humanists ask if you believe in God?*

I am reminded of an NBC interview with Stephen Hawking. To this same question Hawking replied that he used to answer the question about belief in God but was often misunderstood. If Hawking answered that he believed in God the questioner thought that he meant he believed in the same idea of God as the questioner and that was usually not correct. If Hawking said that he didn't believe in God the questioner assumed that he didn't believe in any moral values and that was also not correct. So he often asked the questioner to explain what he/she meant by God and then said that when you tell me that I'll tell you whether or not I believe in the God that you believe in.

(Continued on page3)

(Questions & Answers Continued)

3. *What does the term spiritual mean to you?*

piritual is a rather nebulous and ethereal term which I could comfortably do without. However, to religious people, the term has taken on powerful moral and emotional connotations and to refuse to use it at all tends to unnecessarily separate humanists from religious people. So I end up trying to show religious people that I too believe in the wonder of the world and the excitement and joy of living and that I cherish a spiritual sense of being at one with the universe.

4. *Do you sometimes envy people who have a simple trusting religious faith? Why or why not?*

I don't envy them but I don't try to destroy their faith either. However, if I can put even one thought in their head that might lead them to re-think some of their religious ideas resulting in a more rational approach I will feel a sense of achievement.

5. *Are the methods of science and of religion compatible?*

Of course religious people tend to pick and choose those bits of science which fit into their religion and to ignore or even to oppose those that don't. Basically the methods of religion which are faith-based and those of science which are evidence-based are incompatible but occasionally the two are compatible more by accident than by design.

6. *When or why were you first attracted to Humanist ideas and what appeals to you most about the philosophy of humanists?*

I think that when I was about 18 years old I had a curiosity about life that led me to question and explore. The thought that humans are mainly responsible for both the problems of the world and the solutions was a thrilling idea. I came to notice as a young Presbyterian that when I prayed about matters which were of importance to me that God tended to maintain his customary silence. I think that for me this brought about the onslaught of humanist ideas.

7. *On balance, organized religions are more beneficial than they are harmful. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?*

I agree that for many people who feel powerless, alone, and without hope, that religion may be more necessary than beneficial. While religion may help to hide our problems in the short haul, it probably does more harm than good in helping us to find rational solutions.

8. *Do you think that the growing tide of right wing political ideas and of fundamentalist religion will subside and western society will return to a time of more liberal ideas?*

Yes, I think that eventually it will become clear to most people that right wing policies are not working well except for the wealthy and the powerful. But in the meantime many will be hurt by such policies before major changes occur.

9. *In the recent tsunami disasters there were many religious people who stated, with sincerity, that their faith in God helped them get through such a tragedy. What do you think of such statements?*

In a time when many people literally did not have anything to hang onto they had fears and feelings of complete loss and devastation. Likely their faith in an all powerful God did give them comfort. Undoubtedly they wanted to be on God's side and to have faith that God was on their side too.

10. *The journal, The Humanist in Canada. has a new look and a new approach to presenting humanist ideas. Do you regard these new approaches as an improvement over the previous format and style of The Humanist in Canada?*

No, the new format is not an improvement but it may attract a slightly different readership. I tend to agree with the criticisms of Dr. Ernest Poser as found on page 4 of the Winter 2004/2005 edition.

Sin and Ethical Behavior

While growing up in the 1930's and 40's, I was coerced into attending a Baptist Sunday School. Here we were constantly told that the world was full of sin. We were warned that in addition to violating any of the Ten Commandments, activities such as drinking alcoholic beverages, smoking, gambling, premarital sex, attending Hollywood movies, and even dancing, were all sinful. While it is true that activities such as consuming alcohol and smoking can lead to addictions and health problems, I just could not see how going to movies and dances could be considered sins, and soon concluded that they were not. It seemed to me that Baptists were just not supposed to have any fun.

And then of course there was original sin, supposedly committed by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and subsequently passed on to humans for eternity. However, there was a convenient and easy way to be relieved of this curse. All a person had to do was repent and be born again by accepting Jesus as one's personal savior, guaranteeing salvation and entrance into heaven. This was all made possible by Jesus' death on the cross as described in John 3:16, probably the most quoted verse from the New Testament.

As near as I can recall, we were not specifically informed about the classical seven deadly sins, although they apparently originated in antiquity and are mentioned at various places in the Bible. The seven deadly sins, along with their much more desirable counterparts, are listed below.

	Counterpart
Pride (Arrogance?)	Humility
Envy	Love
Anger	Kindness
Sloth	Zeal
Greed (the worst one?)	Generosity
Gluttony	Temperance
Lust	Self Control

Obviously all sins do not command equal weight. The Ten Commandment sin of murder is far more serious, more harmful and more despicable, than say pride, the first of the seven deadly sins. In fact, the seven deadly sins are simply human characteristics that should be avoided rather than sins that involve evil actions such as murder and stealing. This begs the question. Just what are the serious sins that should be considered in setting up a code of ethics and morality?

As is well known, religious leaders and adherents claim that one of the main purposes of a religion is to impart sound moral and ethical principles to its members, and they often go so far as to say that morals and ethics cannot exist without religion. Humanists of course claim otherwise and emphatically insist that it is possible to be "Good Without God." In no way are ethics and morality the sole prerogatives of religions, so what are the sins that humanists (and others), should avoid and what principles should they adhere to?

(Continued on page 5)

(Sin Continued)

Right off the bat, I believe original sin can be eliminated. The concept of original sin and the atonement or redemption through the death of Jesus lacks any semblance of credibility, and can be discarded.

Turning to the Ten Commandments, people of all three monotheistic religions, Jews, Christians and Muslims, consider them as God-given guidelines for proper moral and ethical behavior. However, the reality is that many people pay only lip service to the Decalogue and pick and choose those they wish to follow or disobey. Worst of all, over the centuries and even today, leaders of nations practising monotheism have deliberately waged wars, often in the name of their religion, ignoring the sixth commandment, "You should not murder." In this regard it can be said that religious leaders have been colossal failures when it comes to influencing and convincing national leaders to settle differences through negotiations rather than with senseless destructive wars. Nevertheless there is merit and wisdom in at least some of The Ten Commandments and these are commented on below.

The first three concern God's relationship with his chosen people, demanding respect, obedience, worship and adoration. These are of little or no concern to humanists, but the remaining seven do merit examination.

Number four advocates resting on the seventh day which I believe is sound advice. The human body needs periods of rest and periods of relief from the workplace in order to maintain good health and to minimize stress. While working on Sunday is no longer considered a sin, some relaxation, meditation and diversion on this day surely is desirable and beneficial.

Number five, "honour your father and your mother etc.", by and large makes sense. Where would we be without them? However, people who were abused by their parents in their youth may not wish to abide by this commandment.

Number six; "You shall not murder," is in my view, the most important commandment and speaks for itself. If everyone obeyed this commandment, wars would not occur and our streets would be safer.

Number seven; "You should not commit adultery," is a difficult one to handle in today's more permissive environment, but when it occurs, it can bring about great strain on families.

Number eight; "You should not steal," is an important one that should be obeyed by everyone, although a starving person stealing food might think that stealing is the only way out.

Number nine; "You should not bear false witness against your neighbour," is sound advice that should be followed.

Number ten, "You should not covet, etc.", is really equivalent to the sin of envy and again is something to be avoided.

(Continued on page 6)

(Sin Continued)

The seven deadly sins are human temptations that we should try to avoid. However, for me, one stands out as being by far the most serious, causing untold problems in our society. That one is greed. In our present age, where the rich are getting richer while the middle class is having difficulty making ends meet, and the poor are certainly not making much progress toward a better life, greed seems to be on the increase. When many wealthy people are asked why they continue to go after more and more riches, when they have far more than they will ever need, they say it is the challenge of the chase that motivates them and keeps them ever wanting more. True, some wealthy people share their wealth through philanthropic endeavours, but others are so greedy they commit fraudulent acts to bolster their assets. Recently a few business leaders have gone to jail for their crimes of greed, and hopefully this will be a deterrent to others and make them think twice about trying to hide illegal activities. Greed also, of course, is a stimulating factor in organized crime and even petty theft.

Next, what about the sins I was warned about in the Baptist Sunday School that are sometimes referred to as "taxable sins" because governments rake in huge tax dollars from their usage. These include drinking alcoholic beverages, smoking tobacco, and gambling. We now are well aware of the deleterious health effects of smoking and fortunately smoking tobacco appears to be on the decline, but what is wrong with enjoying a glass of fine wine with a memorable meal, or drinking a cold beer on a hot day? What is wrong with having a little fun gambling now and then? The problem is that both alcohol and gambling can be addictive for some people, and excessive alcohol intake can cause serious health problems and even death. The key word here I believe is moderation. Moderate drinking or gambling is hardly a sin, but in the case of addictions, help must be available for its victims, to help them kick their habit and practice abstinence. (A question. Should smoking marijuana be legal and taxable? Our society must soon decide on this issue.)

Finally, what about premarital sex and adultery? In the 30's, 40's and 50's we were advised that these were unpardonable sins and should be avoided. Then came the liberal 60's when anything seemed to go, with the long-term result that today teenage sex is common, many couples live together "in sin" before getting married, and adultery is prevalent. These will be moral issues for some, and there are also serious concerns about the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including aids that has no cure, and teenage pregnancies that result in single teenage mothers who often have great difficulty coping with child rearing. These are complicated subjects and problems whose solutions go far beyond the scope of this discourse.

So where do we go from here? It seems to me that not only a set of principles is required, but a few stiff commandments as well. Instead of ten I will advance three.

1. Do not murder.
2. Do not inflict physical, or mental, or economic pain and suffering on fellow humans.
(or animals)
3. Do not steal.

(Continued on page7)

(Sin Continued)

In Summary, I believe a non-religious moral and ethical basis for a peaceful society should be based on these three "Commandments," plus a set of principles (not a religious creed) such as those outlined below.

Principles

Practitioners would affirm: *

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person
- Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process in organizations and in society
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all
- A respect for, and the preservation of our natural environment
- The existence of a non-religious spirituality based on a love of nature and gratitude for the privilege of living on our wondrous planet.

Practitioners would promote and practice: *

- Hope rather than despair
- Critical thinking in place of dogma
- Education in place of ignorance
- Logic in place of irrationality
- Compassion rather than indifference
- Tolerance in place of bigotry
- Love instead of hate or envy
- Kindness in place of anger
- Generosity in place of greed
- Temperance in place of gluttony
- Self control in place of lust
- Humility in place of arrogance or pride
- Honesty in place of mendacity

With human nature being what it is, it may be difficult for people to always adhere to the principles listed above, and lapses will occur, but these lapses should not be considered serious sins requiring punishment, except in the case of greed where fraudulent managers can cause the loss of pensions and other benefits to employees. However violating the previously stated three commandments should be considered not only serious sins, but also criminal offenses, requiring appropriate punishment. (DAH)

*The above "affirmations" are stated Unitarian principles. The "promote and practice" items are stated humanist principles.

A Quotation - If you are ever to enjoy life, now is the time – not tomorrow, nor next year, nor in some future life. -Thomas Dreier.