



The Enlightenment



The Newsletter of the Humanist Association of London and Area

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David Hume – Philosopher – (1711-1776)

Generally regarded as the most important philosopher ever to write in English, David Hume (1711-1776) -- the last of the great triumvirate of "British empiricists" -- was also noted as an historian and essayist. A master stylist in any genre, Hume's major philosophical works -- *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740), the *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding* (1748) and *concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), as well as the posthumously published *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (1779) -- remain widely and deeply influential, despite their being denounced by many of his contemporaries as works of scepticism and atheism. While Hume's influence is evident in the moral philosophy and economic writings of his close friend Adam Smith, he also awakened Immanuel Kant from his "dogmatic slumbers" and "caused the scales to fall" from Jeremy Bentham's eyes. Charles Darwin counted Hume



as a central influence, as did "Darwin's bulldog," Thomas Henry Huxley. The diverse directions in which these writers took what they gleaned from reading Hume reflect not only the richness of their sources but also the wide range of Hume's empiricism. Contemporary philosophers recognize Hume as one of the most thoroughgoing exponents of philosophical naturalism.

Against the common belief of the time that God's existence could be proven through a design or causal argument, Hume offered compelling criticisms of standard theistic proofs. Also, against the common view that God plays an important role in creation and reinforcement of moral values, Hume offered one of the first purely secular moral theories, which grounded morality in the pleasing and useful consequences that result from our actions. (Above information obtained from Google searches)

Canadian philosopher, teacher and author, Pat Duffy Hutcheon states in her book, *The Road to Reason*, that "in the firmament of our intellectual forebears, David Hume can be counted as one of the brightest stars."

President's Remarks

Our fall season got off to a good start on September 14th with Dr. Rod Martin's entertaining talk entitled "Jest For The Health Of It." Rod outlined the very important part humour can play in the maintenance of a healthy body. At our October 12th meeting our Dr. Bill Chefurka spoke on the very interesting and ever controversial subject of "Nature Versus Nurture." Bill's presentation was well researched and outlined the latest thinking on this topic. A lively discussion followed.

At the up-coming November 9th meeting, our Dr. Goldie Emerson will engage in debate with Dr. Bruce Tallman, a Spiritual Director based in London. The topic will be: Is There a Loving Creator God? Don't miss this one; it should be a spirited, but friendly exchange of ideas and opinions.

Best Regards, Don.

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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.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) 457-9982 or 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				

What's in a Name?

The terms Humanism and humanists have been around for centuries, but if you ask the average person what they know about Humanism or humanists, the answer will usually be nothing. Why is this the case when Humanism has so much to offer? As a proactive life stance guided by principles of rational thought, scientific inquiry, responsibility, ethics, compassion, fairness, and equality, surely Humanism should offer a realistic alternative to the religious beliefs and actions that are causing so much strife and misery in our world today. Surely if Humanism were more widespread, our world would be a more prosperous and peaceful place. Why is Humanism not more prevalent?

Perhaps part of the problem could be the word humanism itself. Just what does it imply? It's really hard to say. Realistically, all it implies is that it has something to do with humans, but what is the something? Attempts have been made to clarify the situation by attaching an adjective to identify various forms of Humanism, such as secular, celebrant, religious and others, but all these seem to have accomplished is to suggest that there is divisiveness amongst humanists. Maybe it is time to drop the word Humanism and look for something better.

The Kitchener/Waterloo/Cambridge/Guelph Humanists pondered this possibility and conducted a survey to get their members' reactions. The question posed was – “Which is a more inclusive umbrella term for all non-religious persons?” The choices offered were Humanist, Atheist, or Freethinker. The result from 215 respondents was –

Freethinkers	76.3%
Atheists	17.7%
Humanists	7.0%
	100.0%

These skewed results would certainly tend to indicate that there is a need to change, and the KWCG people have done just that. They now call themselves the Society of Ontario Freethinkers (SOFREE). They now welcome all atheists, agnostics, secular humanists, rationalists, materialists, skeptics, and transhumanists under their umbrella. They collaborate with the Institute for Humanist Studies, the Freedom from Religion Foundation, the Free Inquiry Group, the Toronto Secular Alliance, the Humanist Association of Canada and the International Humanist and Ethical Union. There is no membership fee, and members of other groups such as the Humanist Association of London and Area, are welcome to join and/ or attend SOFREE meetings and events. A listing of meetings and events can be obtained from www.kwcg.humanists.net

Because the number of card carrying Humanists in Canada (and elsewhere) is not large, perhaps the time has come for humanists and other like-minded groups to form a combined organization under a name such as Freethinkers, (or any other descriptive name) thus forming a critical mass large enough to be visible to the public and hopefully able to have a significant positive and beneficial influence. This is not to imply that humanists have not had influence in the past. They have been instrumental in acting on important issues such as abortion, gay rights, euthanasia and others, but with larger numbers, it should be possible to have more visibility and to take on the critical issue of the threat to the separation of church and state by the religious right. What do our members and other readers think? Comments will be welcome. (DAH.)

Opinion Piece

I am pleased that our officially registered Humanist group has gotten well underway, and I hope others have enjoyed our meetings, as have I. Our Humanist website, operated by John Pope, and *The Enlightenment* newsletter, published by our president Don Hatch, are helping people who may be inclined toward a humanistic point of view to know more about us.

Following are some suggestions for possible ways of making our Humanist meetings even better. I hope readers will comment, through *The Enlightenment*, on these ideas by adding to them, modifying them, or disagreeing with them.

One of our main goals should be to make our Humanist meetings occasions where people can comfortably express their opinions. Of course people will not always agree with each other. But if we are accepting of that fact, we can be enriched by the ideas of those holding views different from our own.

We should try our best to provide interesting and challenging speakers. Our Humanist principles encompass a broad spectrum of topics that speakers can address. These principles include respect for the scientific method as a means of separating fact from fiction and the encouragement of critical thinking. They also include respect for every human being, democratic decision-making, freedom of speech, the peaceful resolution of conflicts, and our dependence on each other and the environment. Perhaps most important of all are the moral principles that are based on attitudes of empathy, caring and compassion.

- a. Speakers could be invited from many sources, including our own members.
- b. Other sources of speakers are universities or colleges; teachers and professors are often pleased to talk about their special areas of research and knowledge.
- c. Leaders from politics, social action and other interest groups are often eager to share their interests and enthusiasm.
- d. You may know of others, such as an outstanding teacher, a devoted co-worker, a person who has contributed socially or simply someone who has been a mentor or acted as a good model for you.
- e. Do you have a topic that falls within our broad Humanist interests, that you, yourself, would like to present?

You are invited to respond to this Opinion Piece and/or suggest additions to the above list of possible future speakers.

Goldie Emerson

A Couple of Quotes:

History has shown us that we have good people who do good things, and we have evil people who do good things, but to get good people to do evil things, that takes religion. Anon.

You make a living by what you get.

You make a life by what you give.

Winston Churchill.

The Heathen's Guide to World Religions

Canadian author William Hopper has recently published an updated version of his book, *The Heathen's Guide to World Religions*. This 205 page book is a witty, sarcastic, cynical and humourous discourse on Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. For anyone not already familiar with the history of these religions, this volume provides a sugar-coated insight into how these religions originated and evolved into their present form. While there are a few factual errors, the book is by and large a realistic concise digest of several millennia of world religious history. It's worth reading just for the humour.

An added bonus is the plethora of quotes interspersed here and there to add some spice and wisdom. A number of these quotes are shown below.

To you I'm an atheist; to God I'm the loyal opposition. Woody Allen.

Question with boldness even the existence of God, because if there is one he must more approve of the homage of reason than that of blindfolded fear. Thomas Jefferson.

Man could not make a mite, yet he makes gods by the dozens. Michael de Montaigne.

They've got it all wrong. The people of the world only divide into two kinds. One sort with brains who hold no religion. The other with religion and no brain. Abu-al-Ala al-Marri. 10th century Syrian poet.

Prayer has no place in the public schools, just like facts have no place in religion. Superintendent Chalmers, *The Simpsons*.

I work hard, and I love my kids. So why should I spend half my Sundays hearing about how I'm going to hell? Homer Simpson.

Jesus was a Jew, yes, but only on this mother's side. Archie Bunker

Allah is its goal, the prophet is its model, the Koran is its path and death for the sake of Allah is its most coveted desire. Hamas Motto.

Capital punishment is as fundamentally wrong as a cure for crime as charity is wrong as a cure for poverty. Henry Ford.

Men will never be free until the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest. Denis Diderot

I contend that we are all atheists. I just believe in one fewer god than you do. When you understand why you dismiss all the other possible gods you will understand why I dismiss yours. Stephen Roberts.

A man has no better thing under the sun than to eat, drink and be merry, Ecclesiastics 8:15

I do not believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason and intellect, has intended us to forego their use. Galileo.

God is dead: but considering the state Man is in, there will perhaps be caves for ages yet in which his shadow will be shown. Friedrich Nietzsche.

If you talk to God, you are praying; if God talks to you, you have schizophrenia, Thomas Szasz.

All the religions we call false were once true. Ralph Waldo Emerson.

We'd all like to vote for the best man, but he's never a candidate. Kin Hubbard.

Only two things are infinite, the universe and human stupidity, and I am not sure about the universe. Albert Einstein.

God helps those who help themselves. Benjamin Franklin.

Both read the Bible by day and night. But thou read'st black where I read white. William Blake.

Wherever law ends, tyranny begins. John Locke.

I count religion but a childish toy and hold that there is no sin but ignorance. Christopher Marlow.

The attempt to make either the Bible or tradition infallible, is never an attempt to preserve truth. John Shelby Spong.

Fundamentalism isn't about religion. It's about power. Salman Rushdie.

Organized religion's like organized crime; it preys upon people's weakness, generates huge profits for its operators, and is almost impossible to eradicate. Mike Hermann.

In the beginning man created God; and in the image of Man created him. Jethro Tull

The first clergyman was the first rascal who met the first fool. Voltaire

I am prepared to die, but there is no cause for which I am prepared to kill. Mahatma Gandhi.

Lighthouses are more helpful than churches. Benjamin Franklin.

Our thanks go out to our member Jim Cranwell who generously donated a copy of this book to HALA. Anyone wishing to borrow it should call (519) 472-6167 or email dahatch@rogers.com The first page of the book contains a number of endorsements. One of these endorsements submitted by Jim Cranwell reads: *An extensive knowledge of pertinent historical evidence...an entertaining irreverent and very funny re-examination of the major world religions.*

The book, *The Heathen's Guide to World Religions*, can be ordered from William Hopper's web site, www.Heathensguide.com The price is \$19.99 plus \$3.00 shipping for a total of \$22.99.

Up-coming Meetings

November 9th 2006 - Regular Meeting of the Humanist Association of London and Area.

This meeting will feature a debate between Dr. Bruce Tallman and Dr. Goldwin Emerson. The question to be debated: **Is there a loving creator God?** Dr. Tallman is a Spiritual Director who has a private practice and lives in London, Ont. He has formerly worked in Adult Education for the Roman Catholic Diocese of London. Dr Emerson is a retired Philosophy professor from U.W.O. who is a life member of the Humanist Assoc. of Canada. The moderator for this debate will be Don Hatch, President of the Humanist Assoc. of London and Area.

December 14th 2006 – Regular Meeting of the Humanist Association of London and Area

“**Religion and Prejudice: Cause or Cure**” will be the title of a talk by Dr. Lynn Jackson, of Kings College, UWO. The well-known psychologist, Gordon Allport wrote that religion is paradoxical, it both makes and unmakes prejudice. Dr. Jackson will attempt to unravel this paradox by reviewing contemporary research that examines the nature of relations between personal religiosity and prejudice.

January 11th 2007 – Regular meeting of the Humanist Association of London and Area,

A video of a CBC program featuring the well known environmental biologist Richard Dawkins entitled, **Religion, The Root of all Evil – The God Delusion**, will be shown. Comments and discussion will follow the showing of the video.

February 8th 2007 – Regular meeting of the Humanist Association of London and Area.

The speaker for this event will be Dr. Peter Ossenkopp, Chair of the Psychology Department, Faculty of Social Science, UWO. The topic will be **Evolutionary Psychology**.

When God Goes to War

By Karen Armstrong

Religions usually espouse peace and goodwill, so why have they sparked so many conflicts? Whatever the cause we can be certain of one thing in 2004. Unless there is some unimaginable breakthrough, we will see more religiously inspired terrorism. It often seems that we might be better off without religion. A cursory consideration of the crusades and persecutions of Christian history shows that religious violence is not confined to the Islamic world. If the different faiths really are committed to peace and goodwill, why do they inspire such hatred, and why are their scriptures so aggressive?

Religion is the creation of human beings, who are biologically programmed for aggression. We dream of peace but slaughter our own kind, and from the very start our faith systems have reflected this tragic dualism. In the earliest religions, most gods were militant, including Yahweh, worshipped by Jews, Christians and Muslims. Humans were able to enjoy security only by fighting other groups, so they assumed there was also perpetual warfare in the divine world, in which the gods opposed the forces of disorder.

The world religions that developed during the first millennium BCE rejected this bellicose theology and preached empathy, compassion, even non-violence. But they all emerged in societies devastated by war, and this pervasive aggression seeped into their new scriptures. Judaism, for example, was born out of the wrenching experience of political annihilation,

deportation and exile – a trauma that left its mark on the Hebrew Bible.

Some of the biblical writers responded to the violence in kind. Their God commands Moses and Joshua to massacre all the natives of the Promised Land. But others spoke of reconciliation and of respect for the stranger. They reminded the people of Israel that God was not reflexively on their side, and their own unjust and irresponsible behavior contributed to the disaster.

Jesus told his followers to love their enemies, but the New Testament was also affected by the turbulence of Palestine during the first century: the resentment of Roman occupation and escalating tension between Jews and Christians. Later, the emperor Domitian's persecution inspired the vengeful fantasies of the Book of Revelation.

The Koran also reflects the brutal tribal warfare that afflicted Arabia during the early 7th century. For five years, the Muslims were threatened with extermination and had to fight for their lives. The Koran tells Muslims how they should behave on the battlefield, but these militant passages always end with exhortations to reconciliation. Eventually, Muhammad brought peace to the peninsula by adopting an audacious policy of non-violence.

The scriptures all bear scars of their violent begetting, so it is easy for extremists to find texts that seem to give a seal of divine approval to hatred. War affects all aspects of human behavior, so when conflict becomes chronic, it should be no surprise that religion is also infected. This is certainly what happened at the time of the Crusades.

In a similar way, the Christian right today has absorbed the endemic violence in American society: they oppose reform of the gun laws, for example, and support the death penalty. They never quote the Sermon on the Mount but base their xenophobic and aggressive theology on Revelation. Osama bin Laden is just as selective in his use of scripture. Most of the Muslim extremism that troubles us today is the product of the societies that have suffered prolonged, hopeless conflict: the Middle East, Palestine, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Kashmir.

Religion, like any human activity, can be abused. You can have bad religion, as you can have bad cooking, bad art and bad sex. From the very beginning, religion got sucked into conflicts that were originally secular. In the past, however, prophets and sages recalled their co-religionists to the prime duty of compassion.

Today, we need religious people to be proactive in reforming their own traditions away from extremism. It is not enough simply to condemn other people's violence. We need bishops, rabbis and imams to search for the seeds of aggression in their own scriptures, admit that their own faith has a history of hatred, and revise bigoted, self-serving textbooks. We should also question the efficacy of the current war against religious terror. By increasing violence in troubled regions, we have contributed to the conditions that have always mobilized the faithful in their pernicious holy wars.

·Karen Armstrong is the author of *A History of God*, *The Spiral Staircase*, *The Battle for God* and several other books. Since her writing career took off, Armstrong's communion with God occurs in the library, where she spends up to three years researching her books, which are as densely packed with detail as her conversations. "I get my spirituality in study," she said. "The Jews say it happens, sometimes, studying the Torah."