



# The Enlightenment



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

An Affiliate of the Humanist Association of Canada (HAC)

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### **Simone de Beauvoir - French Philosopher and Author**

Many books have been written charting the historical progression of philosophers from the pre-Socratics to those of our modern era. With very few exceptions, most of these philosophers are male. Only two females seem to be mentioned consistently, Simone de Beauvoir and Hannah Arendt. This article centers on the extraordinary life of Simone de Beauvoir, leaving Hannah Arendt for another time.

Simone was born in Paris in 1908. She graduated from the Sorbonne in 1929 along with Jean-Paul Sartre, who became her frequent companion for the rest of her life. At age 21 she became the youngest student ever to pass the aggregation examination in philosophy. She then went on to become one of the most preeminent French existential philosophers and writers, working along side other famous existentialists including Sarte, Camus and Merleau-Ponty.



As a child Beauvoir had been deeply religious as a result of her education and her mother's training, but at the age of 14 she had a crisis of faith and decided definitively that there was no God. She remained an atheist until her death at the age of 78.

Her most famous and influential work, *The Second Sex*, heralded a feminist revolution and remains to this day a central text in the investigation of women's oppression and liberation. She argues that women have historically been considered deviant and abnormal. She asserts that women are as capable as men, and thus can choose to elevate themselves, moving beyond the 'immanence' to which they were previously resigned, and reaching 'transcendence,' a position in which one takes responsibility for oneself in the world where one chooses one's freedom. Beauvoir did not think that women's freedom lay simply in attacking men. Women's freedom can ultimately only be found through their capacity for individuality. Groups dedicated to the emancipation of women should concentrate on removing those institutions which restrict women's freedom.

At the end of World War II, Beauvoir and Sartre edited *Les Temps Modernes*, a political journal that she used to promote her work and explore ideas on a small scale before fashioning essays and her numerous books. At the time of her death in 1986, she was recognized as one of the most powerful and influential philosophers and female intellectuals of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## President's Remarks

On Sunday July 13<sup>th</sup>, the Humanist Association of London and Area held a summer picnic at the country home of Pat and Bill Chefurka. This was a first for HALA and was held for the purpose of allowing all our members and friends to get together on a social occasion and get to know each other better. The weather was perfect and the potluck tables were loaded with all kinds of great food. The KFC chicken rounded out the assortment. All in all a great success, and our thanks go out to Pat and Bill for their hospitality and for suggesting that we hold this event.

The Humanist Association of Canada Conference held in Toronto on August 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> in conjunction with the Darwin Exhibit at the ROM, was attended by our members Kate Balogh, Derek Kaill, Jackie and Goldie Emerson, Carol Rankmore and Dave Mabee. A report on the Conference has been prepared by Derek and begins on page 4 of this Enlightenment.

Our Program Committee has been active lining up interesting speakers for future meetings. The meetings for the period from October to January 2009 are listed on page 10. There will be no regular meetings in February and March 2009 because of the planned Darwin celebrations. Darwin was born 200 years ago in 1809 and *On the Origin of Species* was first published 150 years ago in 1859. Thus 2009 is an appropriate time for special celebrations. Bill Chefurka is heading a committee to organize these events. We will keep you informed.

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

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The Humanist Association of London and Area meets at the 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 January, April, July and October.

Visit our web site at [www.humanists-london.org](http://www.humanists-london.org)

**New members are welcome.** Contact Membership Chairperson Ed Ashman at (519) 457-9982 [edward017@sympatico.ca](mailto:edward017@sympatico.ca). Membership fees are listed below.

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

## Camp Quest Ontario

By Kate Balogh

Now that fall is upon us and the kids are back to school, I have a few minutes to reflect on this summer just past.

We are a humanist family, with ties to the Humanist Association of Canada as well as to the Humanist Association of London and Area. With both my partner and I feeling so passionately about humanism, it's only natural for us to raise our kids with the humanist principles in mind. So when I first learned about Camp Quest Ontario, my first thought was: How brilliant! A camp for kids from humanist, atheist and skeptic families! It's about time we have an opportunity for our children to bond and learn about our beliefs, just like Christian families send their offspring to Bible camps! We need such initiatives.

I knew my daughter, Lydia aged nine would enjoy such a camp, but I also knew that I would like to be a part of something this worthwhile. So I sent an email to Kathy Meidell, Camp Quest leader for the past 5 years, offering my services as a volunteer counselor and my daughter's participation as a camper. Kathy accepted my offer, and later my partner, Derek also decided to join us. So it was a family "working vacation" for all of us.

To prepare for the camp we had a checklist of things to bring and a schedule of the week provided by the camp leader. It was just like any other camp list: bring comfortable shoes, clothing appropriate to the weather, flashlight, sunscreen, and bathing suit. But Camp Quest is not only a fun place for the kids to spend a week. It is also very education-oriented and of course most of the programs are geared toward free-thinking and topics such as science, logic and evolution.

This year, the camp was at the University of Waterloo. The kids experienced living on campus in a student residence, having their meals in the campus cafeteria, and attending the science day camp organized by the university. We counselors and the leader of the camp had the task of herding 17 kids to breakfast and to the daily programs. They learned about and created their own robots, they designed and built a "civilization", created musical instruments, learned how to make the most delightfully gross and sticky slime, and made edible "science experiments" like fudge, and ice cream made with the help of liquid nitrogen. At 3:30, it was time for us to collect the kids and take them back to the "common room" where it was up to us to provide snacks, entertainment and a sense of order for these youngsters.

At first I thought it's going to be difficult: all these kids, different ages and backgrounds, and horror of horrors, TEENAGERS. But I didn't need to fear. Our kids (I came to think of them as "our" kids, collectively, kids of humanists or like-minded families) are intelligent, well-behaved and fun.

They made up their own entertainment; a few girls designed and performed an impromptu dance routine called "gangsters", they decorated their camp t-shirts, created masterpieces out of playdough. They bonded and gave everyone a nickname. The older kids helped out the younger ones without us even asking. They made a movie using stop-motion video with the help of Freethought TV executive Chris Meidell – you would be amazed what artistic and funny footage came from using a simple paper plate and a coke can, or moving chairs around in a room. They played amazingly creative games like "unusual party guests" or playing a scene out

by only asking questions, never answering. We also had guest speakers; a veterinarian who talked about evolution and made the evolution time line “human sized” by relating it to one of the kids’ years. I think all of them were a bit surprised (I certainly was) to learn that humans only emerged in the “last ten minutes” of the “9-year-old” Earth’s life.

We also had Chris diCarlo speak to them about how to debate properly and what makes good arguments in a debate. Professor diCarlo is a great speaker; he was voted “Lecturer of the Year” by TVO and was also Humanist of the Year in 2008. He proved he was worthy of those honours by keeping these kids of various ages spellbound throughout his hour-long talk.

We also took a trip to the Darwin exhibit at the ROM in Toronto; we had free admission tickets courtesy of the Humanist Association of Canada. The kids enjoyed the exhibit; it was very interactive, informative and interesting. Not to mention the two Galapagos turtles that decided to mate just as our group was arriving – we had to drag the kids away from that particular display after 10 minutes of staring, laughter and teenage jokes.

Of course, not everything was absolutely perfect; we had a morning of sudden torrential rain that decided to descend while we were having breakfast and none of the kids had their rain jackets – we had to improvise by cutting up garbage bags and using them for raincoats. There were the occasional displays of teenage attitude: a reluctance to pick up after themselves; some late-night talks long after the lights were off, even after repeated knocks on the door by their sleepy counselors; a bit of homesickness and crying and a phone call to Mom, but what would summer camp be without some challenges?

What made it really worthwhile for me in the end was a comment made by one of the just-arriving university students on the last night we were there. I was sitting by the computer in the main lounge area of our residence, wearing my Camp Quest t-shirt that said, “Our kids are beyond belief.” One of the young men from a group playing pool came up to me and asked, “What does that mean?” I told him that the camp is for children of humanists, atheists and skeptics. He stared at me for a moment and then said: Let me shake your hand and thank you for doing this. I was surprised and actually, a bit choked up. I expected just the opposite; some angry theist who would admonish me for leading kids into a “godless” life. But here was a young adult (and I’m sure there are others) who feels the same way that we do: Yes, you **can** live a fulfilled, rich and meaningful life without belief in supernatural power(s). It’s wonderful to know that we are not alone, and it’s very important that we humanists create our own communities and support each other the same way members of religious groups do.

## **A Report on the 2008 HAC Conference and Annual General Meeting**

*By Derek Kaill*

HAC Financial Administrator Kate Balogh and I arrived late for the HAC’s HUGE 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference. We had both been volunteer counselors at Camp Quest, the humanist camp for ages 7-13, and were rushed to get back to London (to drop off Kate’s daughter – a camper), then to the conference at the Intercontinental Hotel in downtown Toronto.

The Intercontinental is a beautiful and very expensive hotel (for example: bottled water is offered in the room for \$8.00/bottle). It was perhaps an appropriate venue for a special occasion, but many people have suggested it may have been a little too pricey, especially for people traveling.

Shortly after arriving, we were happy to see fellow HALA members Jackie and Goldie Emerson and Dave Mabee. It's unfortunate that we missed several of the speakers, but I heard the ones I missed were excellent and well received. An added bonus was the opportunity to view the Darwin exhibit at the nearby Royal Ontario Museum.

I feel very fortunate to have arrived in time to listen to speeches from Christopher diCarlo and Dan Barker. In their talks, both speakers promoted a generous and tolerant humanism.

Professor diCarlo, who teaches at the University of Ontario (courses on critical thinking, bioethics, and others), had recently received the TVO "Lecturer of the Year" award, and with good reason. As always, his words were intelligent, insightful and interesting. Dan Barker is also a great speaker, and a very charming man. What's more, the two of them – along with Freethought TV's Chris Meidell on guitar – treated us to some excellent music. With Barker on keyboards and diCarlo playing the drums, the three men did a little improvising and also played several great songs written by Dan (his music is available on CD).

There were several other excellent and much-enjoyed speakers at the conference. Although due to travel difficulties she was unable to make it to Toronto, Ellen Johnson delivered her talk over the telephone. A former president of American Atheists, Johnson spoke on "Using our Power as Secular Citizens."

Professor of Psychology Dr. Hank Davis was very entertaining with his hilarious definition of "Caveman Logic," while CBC star and defender of science Brian Alters' expertise was as well appreciated as was his wonderful sense of humour when he talked to us about "Evolution, Religion, and Intelligent Design: Why People Still Don't Get It." I thought it was nice that so many of the speakers were not only brilliant, but good for a laugh too!

The AGM was sometimes productive, sometimes difficult (most notably, communicating with a particularly angry and insistent individual), but we struggled through it.

The HAC awards ceremony was a memorable occasion. First, Chris di Carlo received the HAC Humanist of the Year award from presenter Pat O'Brien. We were then treated to a short speech from founding HAC president Dr. Henry Morgentaler, who was presented the first-ever HAC Lifetime Achievement award by former HAC president Dr. Robert Buckman.

It was good to meet my fellow board members in person. Our newest recruits, Laura-Lee Balkwill and Linda Shaw, add much to the already capable team. I predict a great future for the HAC, which will include an increased visibility through promotion and a more streamlined and dynamic approach to projects that we and the membership would like to initiate, creating a subsequent increase in our numbers – both fiscal and human.

## **A Few Words About My Views on Humanism and Atheism**

*By Derek Kaill*

For those unaware, I'd like to explain what sort of humanist I am. I became interested in the Humanist Association of London & Area through the Unitarian Fellowship of London. This is not an uncommon background for Canadian humanists, but there are many members of HAC who are entirely uncomfortable with religion in any form. These people are, by my perception, hateful towards religion in general – and specifically towards theistic religion.

Bishop John Shelby Spong – who writes about the need for the Christian religion(s) to evolve in a way that is more befitting of modern times – is one of my favorite authors. I'm a humanist who thinks that bridging divisions and garnering mutual respect with those of differing beliefs is a much, much better approach than is name-calling, or creating and promoting immature, offensive concepts such as the "Flying Spaghetti Monster".

When I recently came across and read the book, *An Atheist Primer* by Madalyn Murray O'Hair, I perceived it to be hate literature. What stands out most about it, is that it's hate literature for children. The book is filled with cartoons depicting Christians, Muslims and members of other religions looking moronic, and text explaining how people who believe in God are, and this is a direct quote, "dumb". One page includes a picture of the Chinese depiction of the Buddha, and text explaining that in India the people are very dumb and that one of their Gods got fat by eating too much rice (this illustrates O'Hair's embarrassing lack of knowledge of world religions – I suspect most or all readers of this article will know that the Indian Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, has always been depicted as very thin and he was/is certainly NOT believed – not by Buddhists, at least - to be a God). The book comes across as hateful and insulting, while at the same time ignorant and confused. The lesson received after reading this book (again, intended for children) is that atheism is about being hateful and intolerant towards people whose appearance and beliefs are different.

*An Atheist Primer* was being sold at the registration table during the conference (until someone, who will remain unnamed, but will continue typing, hid the book). This book gave me a chill. I definitely would not be a board member of the "Atheist Association of Canada", if there were one, particularly if its image were one of arrogant and insulting xenophobes. For me personally, the ethical foundation of humanism is by far its most important aspect. HAC's stated principles of pacifism, environmentalism and human equality were the selling points for me. The non-theism is a great bonus – which fits neatly with my philosophy, but is certainly not the driving force.

I recognized, then and now, that many in the HAC membership see it as, almost exclusively, a collection of atheists. For this reason, I had intended to resign from my position on the Board. I figured it would be good to do so in person, but after considerable reflection decided to remain on the Board.

I think the popularity of books by authors like Dawkins, Dennett, Harris and Hitchens is one of the reasons many people within the humanist community seem to be excitedly anti-theistic these days. I consider every one of those authors (and others like them) brilliant, and I enjoy much of their work. However, as I say, their popularity seems to have rallied a surge of intolerance. In at least some cases, I think this reaction was intentional.

My own position is that fundamentalism and fanaticism, in all the forms with which I'm familiar, are dangerous. I think that more people should speak against these things, sometimes in an aggressive and persistent manner. In doing so, I think it's important that we make it clear exactly who it is we're opposing. Are we defining as our enemies the Islamic terrorist, the militaristic Neo-Zionist and the God-fearing abortionist murderer – and **also** the hard-working and charming modern Muslim, the good-humoured and intelligent Reform Jew and the compassionate and friendly United Church Christian?

When speaking to many of the people from the latter three categories, I learn that they feel exactly as do humanists about the dangers of fundamentalism. For this reason, they could in many ways be our allies. In fact, in one recent example, they were. After it had been decided that HAC would be sponsoring the Darwin exhibit at the Royal Ontario Museum (to the tune of \$50,000) we learned that the United Church Observer (their monthly journal) was also helping to fund the exhibit. This fact can serve as a reminder that not all religious/theistic organizations promote what many of us consider a narrow or unscientific world view.

I'm currently working on a much longer piece on this same topic. I expect it will be printed either in the next issue of The Enlightenment, or perhaps in Canadian Humanist News.

## **Book Review**

### **A Secular Age by Charles Taylor**

*Reviewed by Don Hatch*

The premise of this book centers on a straight-forward question: Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in Western society in say 1500, while in 2000, there are many people who do not believe that God exists? In other words, how did a predominately Christian religious society evolve into the secular society we observe today in what Taylor designates as the North Atlantic region, consisting of the countries in Europe and North America?

At the outset he identifies three phenomena that describe the changes that have occurred. First, public spaces (except for churches and shrines) have largely been emptied of God and religion. Second, religious observances have declined. Fewer and fewer people are attending church on a regular basis. Third, belief in God has steadily declined. It is this third happening that preoccupies Taylor throughout much of this long book (776 pages plus 75 pages of discursive notes). He proceeds to thoroughly document the historic changes that led to what he calls "exclusive humanism," the non-belief that is present in our contemporary age, particularly as it applies to Europe. The United States get far less exposure and comment, and even though Taylor is a Canadian academic, Canada is rarely mentioned in the book.

A significant portion of the narrative is devoted to the evolution of philosophical thinking, beginning with the pre-Socratics and progressing through the whole gamut to contemporary philosophers such as Habermas and Rorty. He expounds on the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Rousseau, Voltaire, Locke, Hume, Kant, Nietzsche and many many others. He describes how Augustine and Aquinas, two of the principle architects of Catholicism, were influence by the works of Plato and Aristotle respectively. He labels Epicurus as a self-sufficing humanist and continues on to elucidate the thinking of philosophers of the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the Romantic period and the modern period. He dwells to some extent on philosophers possessing a humanist bent, including Voltaire, Holbach and Hume. Nietzsche, whom he describes as being anti-religious and an anti-humanist, is mentioned a lot. It would be difficult to get through this book without at least a smattering of knowledge about the ideas of the major philosophers.

In order to understand the thrust of Taylor's hypotheses, it is necessary to outline his definitions of religion and exclusive humanism. He defines religion in terms of transcendence. First, there is some good higher than, and beyond human flourishing, a transcendence that takes individuals beyond mere human perfection. Second is the belief in a higher power, the transcendent God. Third is the belief that human life extends beyond the grave in some form of afterlife. With these definitions he rules out any kind of a non-religious transcendence. In other words, the awe and wonder that humanists may experience from observing nature or from art, music and literature, is something inferior to the religious transcendence mentioned above. Taylor is a practising liberal Catholic, although he does not believe in the doctrine of original sin nor in the atonement. He also regards the religious right fundamentalists as naïve and a threat to the separation of church and state in the United States (U.S.). His liberal Catholic heritage permeates throughout the book. He will not let go of God.

To describe the anti-thesis of Christian denominations, Taylor uses the term "exclusive humanism." I take this to mean the kind of secularity present today in many European countries where church attendance is very very low. It is a much broader category than that of the secular card carrying humanists. Exclusive humanists are simply people who go about their lives without belonging to a religion and believing that they can be good without God. They assume that most humans are inherently motivated to act for the

benefit of fellow humans. Sexual fulfillment, instead of being condemned as path to perdition, is seen as a path to one of life's greatest joys. They are not likely to belong to any kind of secular humanist organization and they tend to respect the religious views of believers, generally without being derogatory towards them. As mentioned above, exclusive humanism is primarily a European phenomenon, although many of the 20 % of Canadians who belong to no religious organizations would fit into this category.

In the pre-Darwin era, the progression toward exclusive humanism occurred mainly amongst academics and other intellectuals. After Darwin, the rapid discoveries of the physical scientists made it easier to question and doubt centuries-old beliefs by discarding belief in the metaphysical and the supernatural, as well as abandoning adherence to a religious organization. Secular- minded people began to look to nature and the arts in order to experience a strictly human non-religious transcendence. Taylor cites the Bloomsbury Group consisting of famous avant garde individuals including Virginia Woolf and John Maynard Keynes, as a far out example of the changes that were occurring. Some of these people were closet homosexuals and pre-marital and extra-marital sex was not discouraged. By the 1960s these mores had moved from the elite into the hippy generation of the sexual revolution, and it was after this that the accelerating fall-off in belief and church attendance occurred.

In Chapter 14, Taylor poses the questions: Why has European society become far more secular than in the United States where church attendance has not declined nearly as much? Why does a significant portion of the population in the U.S. believe humans and dinosaurs walked the earth at the same time because the current unrest in Israel is fulfilling the prophesies in the Book of Revelations, and the end of the world is near at hand? Why this incredible ignorance exists in time? Why do a few members of Congress even believe there is no need to worry about global warming in the U.S. is a bit of a mystery to Taylor. He admits he does not have satisfactory answers. With the exception of native Indians and African-Americans, the population of the U.S. is made up mainly of European immigrants or their descendants, so one might think that the European situation should prevail. Perhaps the difference could partly be due to the sorry state of the American system of education. American 15 year olds rank 24<sup>th</sup> out of countries in math literacy. Under these conditions American students are not likely to engage in critical thinking exercises and achieve the levels of knowledge of European students who appear to minimize the importance of religion. There are numerous other possible explanations, but in any case, Taylor says he would be groping in the dark if he tried to fathom them.

Throughout the book Taylor talks about "our contemporary predicament" and the dilemmas facing society. Both believers and unbelievers face the same challenges. One concerns transcendence and human fulfillment. He appears to think that nothing other than belief in a supreme being and an afterlife makes it possible to achieve the ultimate in transcendence. He reasons that unbelievers who look to nature and the aesthetic creations of humankind are unable to become completely fulfilled. Refuting this assertion, humanist Austin Dacey in a review of *A Secular Age* in the August/September 2008 issue of *Free Inquiry* magazine, states, "There is another kind of natural transcendence that can approach the infinite when through reason we touch the truth. We find that our cups are running over with it: the overcoming of self for a loved one, the ecstatic transport of music or dance, delight in beauty, wonderment at nature, laughter, orgasm. It is no trouble for most of us to get in at least three transcendent experiences a day, especially on the weekend."

It seems impossible for Taylor to acknowledge that the kind of humanist transcendence described by Dacey can equal that available to religious people. Why? Could it be because he was raised as a Catholic. As the Jesuits proclaim, give us a youth until the age of seven and we have got him for life. When William F. Buckley Jr. was asked by Ayn Rand, "How can an intelligent man like you believe in God?" he replied, "It is due to my Catholic upbringing. It is because of my reverence for the unexplainable mystery of God and religion." Perhaps it is the same with Taylor.

The second dilemma he deals with is the one of violence and the aggressive dimensions of human behavior. A whole chapter is devoted to this problem wherein Taylor concludes that neither believers nor unbelievers have a solution to this problem. He certainly believes that any final constructive answers will

rely on religion more so than on humanism. He admits that there is good religion and bad religion, and in the end he believes the good religion will prevail over the bad and also over exclusive humanism. As stated above, he will just not let go of God.

Any card carrying modern humanist reading this book would likely notice that nowhere is there mention of any humanist organizations such as the International Humanist Association, The American Humanist Association, the Center for Free Inquiry or the Humanist Association of Canada. Surely Taylor is aware of some of these organizations, so why are they not mentioned in a book dealing with secularity, especially when many members of these groups openly call themselves secular humanists? Are they so insignificant in his mind that they do not rate any recognition? In any case this omission should tell us something. It tells me that these organizations are flying below the radar as far as the general public is concerned. This is not surprising because secular humanists are very good at preaching to the converted, but do not seem able to attract individuals with the knowledge and marketing skills to promote what humanism stands for. Huge challenges lie ahead. Perhaps Taylor has unwittingly done humanism a great favour in inadvertently alerting us that we need to do better.

Now back to the book. It is not without its shortcomings. It is far too long, contains many complex and obscure words, is often repetitive, and some of the arguments and explanations are convoluted and difficult to follow. Nevertheless, there are many occasions when clarity and common sense leap off the pages, and I am glad I read it.

Some time ago it was announced that Taylor had been awarded a grant of \$1.8 million by the Templeton Foundation to study spirituality. No doubt in due time he will publish his findings. Since the Templeton Foundation is a religious organization, you can bet that Taylor will be searching for that "good religion" that will provide a fulfilling spiritual transcendence that will pass all understanding. I will wager that he will never find it. With the decline in attendance at religious institutions throughout Christendom, I think he is naïvely searching in vain for the day when the trend reverses. He is however, a learned scholar and he could be right, and I could be wrong. We will wait and see

## **Rites of Passage**

At the present time our Humanist Association of London and Area does not have an Officiant to perform rites of passage. For those who may be interested, the Unitarian Fellowship of London has an active program of qualified Lay Chaplains who offer services such as weddings, memorial services, child dedications, and other milestone ceremonies. These certified Lay Chaplains are sensitive to both the religious and secular points of view of the clients they serve. For further information please contact the Unitarian Fellowship of London at 519-451-0424 or email [ufl@execulink.com](mailto:ufl@execulink.com)

### **Letter to the Editor**

I thought I would like to respond to Dr. Lachance's presentation at the September meeting of the Humanist Association of London and Area.

Let me say first that I am not familiar with the traditional position of the Intelligent Design movement. People seem to infer that it is a question of a god that is enforcing its will. But what if it is just intelligence that is inherent in nature? I felt that Dr. Lachance never dealt with this question adequately. ID seems to be questioning to my mind not the fact of evolution, but the reasons for evolution. The law of entropy in physics suggests that organized systems trend towards disorganization. Another direction is indicated in biology where organized systems or life forms trend towards higher degrees of organization. The distinction between the two is that in the latter you may have the operation of intelligence of some form no matter how primitive.

What is intelligence? Is a tree exercising its intelligence when it extends its branches up to the sun? Is a bird exercising intelligence when it flies south for the winter, like a Canadian on the way to Florida? I don't think that humans can say that we are the only beings with intelligence. Even the world taken as a

whole shows signs of living intelligence. It responds to pollution the same as a human would. It gets a fever!

Two things we need a better understanding of, viz.: intelligence, and life. Are these qualities inherent in matter? Elisabet Sahtouris, in her book, *Earthdance*, which is available at <http://www.ratical.org/LifeWeb/Erthdnce/>, argues that biological systems create holons, or whole and independent units that within themselves exhibit these qualities of intelligence and life. Is the earth itself such a holon, ie, is it alive and intelligent? Her analysis suggests yes it is. For example, as one test, is it creative? Who can deny that it is creative of endless life-forms? Can it heal itself? There are many balances in the earth system, the same as in the human body, that work to maintain equilibrium and health. How can we think that the earth does not act intelligently as any living creature would?

One definition I offer is that intelligence is the ability to perceive a problem and a variety of solutions and to choose the best. A tree sensing sunlight in one direction reaches towards it to provide itself with energy. Another plant might choose a way to adapt to lower light levels. More complicated life forms of course are more complex. These systems may lack self-consciousness as in humans but self-consciousness is a product of intelligence and not the cause. What about even larger systems such as the universe as a whole?

Here we have the problem of entropy as a law of physics, where everything trends towards annihilation or chaos. If there was no counteracting force there would have been no organizing creative centre in the first place, no big bang. In human experience, intelligence, whether self-conscious or conscious is the only counteracting force able to stand against entropy. Intelligence seems to operate through biological life forms. Even the principle of the 'survival of the fittest' is creative of greater intelligence. These two principles of entropy and decay versus intelligence seem to be endlessly struggling against each other. It may be that there is another principle underlying these two which enables them to function such as consciousness, which is still undefined and not understood. On the individual level it seems to be a self-referral point; perhaps there is on the largest scale some sort of universal centre that unites the whole into one, which people call cosmic consciousness.

Thanks for printing my comments. It was an interesting evening.

Bob Harrington, London.

**Editor's Comments** Dr. Lachance's presentation was about the way the term Intelligent Design is used by those promoting the teaching of creationism in science classes in schools. He concentrated on the trial in Dover Pennsylvania where the judge ruled that Intelligent Design was merely a disguise for creationism, had religious implications, and did not belong in science classes. Dr. Lachance also pointed out how the well-financed Discovery Institute is promoting the creationists' agendas. This talk was not intended as a scientific exploration of intelligence per se.

## Up-coming HALA Meetings

**October 9<sup>th</sup>** Salim Mansur. Tentative Topic - speaking about the Canadian Human Rights and Free Speech.

**November 13<sup>th</sup>** Jason Marsh speaking on Divine Hiddenness.

**December 11th** Ed Corrigan speaking on the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict.

**January 8<sup>th</sup> 2009** HALA AGM and discussion period.

**February and March 2009** Special Darwin lectures. Much more information to follow.