



# The Enlightenment



**The Newsletter of the  
Humanist Association of London and Area**  
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## Marcus Aurelius – Roman General, Emperor and Stoic Philosopher

The Stoic Marcus Aurelius Antonius, (121-180 CE), reigned as Emperor of the Roman Empire from 161 to 180 CE. During his reign, Marcus had to deal with many vexing problems including a disastrous plague, floods, famine, and wars in various parts of the empire. His last war was fought at the Danube, where he died in 180 CE. It was during this war that he somehow found time to pen the *Meditations*, which were written in Greek, and reflected his noble and self-sacrificing life in which he shunned the pomp and ceremony and the trappings of the imperial court. His last words were, “Weep not for me, think of the pestilence and the death of so many others.”



Bust of Marcus Aurelius

The *Meditations* consists of twelve books, each containing numbered versus. In some respects it is reminiscent of the Bible, but there is one important difference. We know that the words in the *Meditations* were actually written by Marcus, unlike the words of Jesus in the gospels that are second or third hand, with many of his sayings being questionable as to their authenticity. The philosophical verses in the *Meditations* exude much wisdom and the word “reason” appears over and over again. Marcus Aurelius was indeed a humanist. A few quotes are listed below:

*Life, in a word, is short; then snatch your profit from the passing hour, by obedience to reason and just dealing, but be temperate.*

*I seek the truth, which never yet hurt anybody. It is only persistence in self-delusion and ignorance that does harm.*

*To a reasoned being, an act that accords with nature is an act that accords with reason.*

And there are many more pearls of wisdom. The *Meditations* is a highly recommended read.

In first and second century Rome, morality was the domain of philosophers, not the priests. The role of the priest was to perform such appropriate rites as ensuring the protection of the gods for the well being of the state and to prevent their displeasure. It was the philosophers who were concerned with the nature of humans, their duties and their destiny thereafter. They pondered about the composition of the universe and how it came into being. What a pity that morality was later hijacked by the emerging Roman Catholic Church.

## President's Remarks

Once again the HALA annual picnic at the Chefurkas was well attended and enjoyed by all. This event provides an opportunity to socialize and become better acquainted with other members. Our thanks go to Pat and Bill for graciously hosting this occasion.

The speaker at the next HALA meeting on Thursday September 10th will be Irene Deschenes. Irene was the first person to come forward and expose the sexual abuse of young girls by Father Charles Sylvester. She will discuss the delays by police in instigating a prosecution, the attempted cover up by the church and the final financial settlements for the victims. Prior to Irene's talk there will be a short Special General Meeting for the purpose of ratifying amendments to the HALA Constitution and Bylaws.

The speaker at the October 8<sup>th</sup> meeting will be Paul Chefurka. His topic will be "The Humanist Response to the Converging Crisis of Civilization." Paul spoke to us last year on the pending oil crisis and we look forward to his return.

At the HALA meeting on July 9<sup>th</sup> our member Dr. Rod Martin gave a most interesting and informative presentation entitled "What is Humanism?" using overhead slides. Rod has expended considerable effort to put his talk in prose form and the results are printed in this issue of *The Enlightenment*. Also in this issue is an article entitled "Metamorphosis" documenting the life journey of English professor Scott Sanders on his odyssey from believer to doubter to skeptic to non-believer.

### 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. Please note: We reserve the right to edit and publish articles at our discretion.

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

**New members are welcome.** Contact Membership Secretary Dave Mabee at (519) 697-6010, e-mail [davemabee@rogers.com](mailto:davemabee@rogers.com) Membership fees are listed below.

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

# What is Humanism?

By Dr. Rod A. Martin

[The following is a talk that was given at the HALA meeting on July 9, 2009. It was inspired in part by the first chapter of Dr. Jeaneane Fowler's book, Humanism: Beliefs and Practices.]

## The Human Search for Meaning

Humanism is essentially a response to questions about the meaning of life. Humans seem to have an inherent need to understand and to make sense of things, including their own lives. Most of us struggle from time to time with questions like, "What makes my life worth living? What difference does my life make in the grand scheme of things?" There are times in our lives when each of us face the reality of our own mortality, when we struggle with adversities, such as personal failures, financial loss, illness, interpersonal conflicts, the breakup of a relationship, or the death of a loved one. These can often be periods when everything seems pointless, when we feel like giving up. At times like these, we may wonder whether life has any deeper meaning, or is it, as Shakespeare put it, "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing?"

Paul Kurtz (in *The courage to become: The virtues of humanism*) has noted that there are three common responses in our culture to these sorts of questions. The first of these is the **theistic religious** response, which seeks to answer these questions by invoking belief in God, an afterlife, and a supernatural reality. In this view, life has meaning because God loves you, will save you, and will take you to a blissful eternal afterlife. This approach is obviously very appealing to a great many people in our culture. However, as Kurtz points out, this is an inherently anti-humanistic view, because it sees humans as helpless and hopeless, unable to take care of themselves. It is a denial of reality, a wish to escape reality by fleeing into fantasies and myths.

The second common response is **skeptical nihilism**, which says that there is no evidence for the existence of God, an immortal human soul, life after death, or a supernatural realm. Consequently, according to this view, there is no real basis for ethics, social justice, or even knowledge. This is an extreme post-modernist outlook, which says that everything is relative, subjective, and a matter of personal taste. There is no basis for objective knowledge, no way of arriving at truth. This leads to a pessimistic, despairing view of humanity. In this view, life is meaningless and there is no real hope for humanity. This is also quite a widespread perspective in our secularized culture. However, this too is an anti-humanistic view, according to Kurtz, because it also sees humans as weak and powerless, incapable of gaining genuine knowledge, solving problems, making progress, and achieving self-improvement.

The third response is **Humanism**, which combines a realistic outlook with optimism and courage. It is *realistic*, because it agrees with the skeptic that there is no evidence for the existence of God, supernatural powers, an immortal soul, life after death, and so on. We are alone in the universe, and we need to embrace this reality, rather than fleeing from it. At the same time, Humanism is also *optimistic* about the human potential to gain knowledge, solve problems, and thrive. Humans are a product of millions of years of successful evolutionary adaptation and survival. We have intelligence, creativity, an ability to understand, to solve problems, and to overcome adversities. We are fundamentally a social animal, and we can work cooperatively with others to build a harmonious society. Thus, Humanism affirms the possibility of the good life here and now. It is an exuberant, joyful response to questions about the meaning of life. It urges us to face the struggles of life with courage and joy, striving to create a better world based on reason and the ideals of freedom and progress.

## **Small-h versus big-h humanism**

Most people in our society seem to have little awareness that Humanism even exists, let alone what it is all about. The name “humanism” itself is often used in a rather vague way with many different meanings. Jeaneane Fowler (in *Humanism: Beliefs and Practices*) points out that we need to make a distinction between (small-h) humanism and (big-h) Humanism. In a broad, everyday sense, “humanism” refers to a concern for humanity, and is often used as a synonym for *humane* or *humanitarian*. In this general sense, almost everyone is a “small-h” humanist, including such historical figures as Jesus of Nazareth, the Buddha, or Karl Marx.

Another common use of “humanism” occurs in the context of university education, where the “humanities” refer to disciplines outside the natural sciences and engineering, such as literature, modern and classical languages, philosophy, history, etc. This use of the term originated during the Renaissance, when a division was made between “human” and “divine” studies. The Latin word *humanitates* referred to the study of such subjects as literature and rhetoric, as opposed to divinity or theology, and “humanists” were the teachers of such subjects. Even today, some professors of the humanities still call themselves “humanists.”

However, these are not the meanings of the word that we are concerned with here. Our topic here is Humanism (with a capital h) as an organized movement, a “life-stance” which stands in contrast to theistic religious perspectives. Humanists tend to have certain shared beliefs and values, and an orientation to life which is centered on *human beings*, rather than on God.

It is important to recognize at the outset that Humanism has no formal creed, and is not a narrowly defined belief system. Humanists have many different points of view, and disagree among themselves about many issues. As Fowler notes, this multiplicity of views is an asset rather than a hindrance, because it means that Humanism is an ever-growing, dynamic process, rather than a static system of thought. It can respond to the changing world in which we live. Indeed, it is important for Humanists to constantly rethink their views, responding constructively to the ever-changing issues and challenges facing the world.

## **Emphases of Humanism**

As the name suggests, the focus of Humanism is on what it means to be *human*, or what Fowler calls “*human-being-ness*.” Interestingly, the word “human” comes from the Latin *humus*, meaning ground, earth, or soil. This etymology emphasizes our close kinship with nature, and our evolutionary origins in inorganic matter, along with all of life, in contrast to a view of humans as divinely created *ex nihilo*. It underscores the secular rather than the religious, and the Humanist’s concern with *this* life rather than an imagined life after death.

Although Humanists have no official creed, there are several key emphases or assumptions that they generally tend to agree on. I will summarize these in the following paragraphs.

### **(1) Optimistic view of human potential**

Humanism emphasizes the dignity of the human being, and the human potential for goodness, rational reflection, choice, self-realization, and creativity. Unlike other animals, humans are not just passive products of natural forces and biological determinism. We have the ability to transcend biology, and to redefine our nature through culture and creativity. We have freedom of choice and freedom of will, providing the potential for a whole life for each individual. This sort of self-fulfillment requires courage – the “courage to become,” as Kurtz puts it – courage to overcome inertia, discouragements, and past failures, and to strive to achieve our

fullest potential. Humanistic optimism is realistic, recognizing that things will never be perfect, but it is based on a fundamental *choice* to reject pessimism and to strive for something better.

This optimistic view of humans is reflected in the following lines from Shakespeare (in *Hamlet*):

“What a piece of work is man [and woman]! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals!”

## **(2) Human responsibility**

The flip side of the human potential coin is human responsibility. Humans alone are responsible for shaping their own lives. Because we can't rely on some mythical supernatural power to take care of us, what we make of our life ultimately depends on us alone. This is true both individually and collectively. At an *individual* level, this responsibility means taking hold of one's own life to strive for self-actualization, growth, and fulfillment. Of course, we each have limitations in our abilities, intellect, health, financial resources, etc. Nonetheless, we can each strive to make the best with what we have. *Collectively*, humans have a responsibility to one another and to the planet. We are responsible for creating a society that fosters the freedom, growth, and potential of all humanity. We need to work together cooperatively to combat poverty, ignorance, war, violence, and intolerance. Humans also have a responsibility to use our intellect and ingenuity to address the pressing problems facing the earth today, including global warming, pollution, and the extinction of many species. Our existence is intimately intertwined with that of all living things in this world, and the preservation of nature is essential for human self-preservation, self-realization, and happiness.

## **(3) Ethics and morality**

Far from being an amoral, “anything-goes” philosophy of egotistic hedonism, Humanism is very concerned about ethics and morality. Contrary to the claims of the religious right, Humanists emphasize that it is possible to be good without God. Morality for Humanists is decided through human reason and an overall concern for humanity, rather than divine revelation, tradition, or religious authority. As Paul Kurtz has noted, morality means striving for the fulfillment of individuals and societies in a peaceful, happy co-existence. Views on morality can change over time with new knowledge and information, but this does not mean that morality is entirely subjective and tenuous.

Humans are inherently social animals. Throughout our evolutionary history, we adapted and survived as a result of living in small groups of individuals that banded together to help and protect one another. We still need others in order to survive and flourish. Consequently, a Humanist system of ethics is based on caring for others, empathy, compassion, and altruism. This caring goes beyond our immediate family, community, and nation, extending to all of humanity, recognizing that we are all one species. All humans have the same inherent dignity and worth.

Humanists, therefore, reject the sort of self-centered hedonistic approach to life which often grows out of skeptical nihilism. Humanists are generally opposed to crass materialism, consumerism, and the superficial values of our age. They have concerns about inequality, injustice, and the exploitation of others, and strive for a more fair and equitable sharing of resources. Because humans are social by nature, true meaning in life is found in caring relationships with others. Individual happiness is maximized when we work to benefit society, and we find joy and satisfaction in contributing to human betterment.

#### **(4) Naturalism**

As we have already seen, Humanists reject belief in supernatural powers, entities, or experiences. Nature – the natural universe – is all that is, and there is nothing that is “super-” (i.e., “above” or “beyond”) nature. This natural universe is potentially knowable through scientific investigation. Humans also are a part of the natural world. We are the product of an amazing process of evolution, beginning with the big bang, the gradual formation of stars which produced all the elements, the development of the planet we live on, and the evolution of living cells and an incredible multiplicity of organisms over billions of years. Because we are an evolved animal, Humanism takes a non-dualistic view of human nature, rejecting beliefs in a soul or spirit or other immaterial part of us that exists apart from our physical bodies. Our minds are the function of our brains; all of our thoughts, feelings, emotions, and desires are based on exceedingly complex biochemical processes taking place in the neurons of our brains. When we die, we do not continue to exist, except in the memories of others and whatever influence we may have had on the world.

Humanists tend to be quite skeptical about things like astrology, horoscopes, extra-sensory perception, clairvoyance, spiritualism, near-death experiences, miraculous medical cures, and so on. These sorts of claims must be tested empirically and scientifically validated before they can be accepted as true. At the same time, rather than being a cold and detached outlook, naturalism is a very positive perspective. In the words of William R. Murry (in *Reason and Reverence*), Humanists “exult in being alive in this unimaginably vast and breathtakingly beautiful universe.” Although the natural universe is all that is, it is *enough* to fill us with awe, wonder, and a sense of mystery.

#### **(5) The scientific method as the means to knowledge and truth**

The scientific method is not a fixed set of procedures, but a general approach to seeking truth by testing hypotheses through rigorous, systematic observation and experimentation. Science is based on *empiricism*, which seeks answers to questions through objective, replicable evidence, rather than divine revelation, philosophical speculation, mysticism, ancient scriptures, or other sources. Science is also based on *rationality*, requiring clear, logical, and critical thinking. Science is the most reliable method we have of arriving at truth. We will never have absolute or perfect truth – our knowledge is always tentative and open to correction with new evidence – but science does provide a gradual accumulation of knowledge.

#### **(6) Rejection of theistic religion**

Humanists tend to be either agnostics or atheists. Agnostics assert that it is impossible to know whether or not God exists. Atheists go one step further and assert that God does not exist. In practice, though, there is little difference between the two, as they both go about their daily lives without faith in God. This means that we need to find the answers to life’s problems within ourselves, rather than through divine intervention. Each person has only one life to live, there is no life after death, and therefore we need to enjoy this one life as fully as we can and make the most of it.

Incidentally, a recent poll in the US found that atheists were rated number one among “minorities whom Americans are least willing to allow their children to marry” (Muslims and African-Americans were second and third, respectively). Clearly, as Rodney Dangerfield would say, we get no respect!

The major emphases of Humanism that I have listed above are summarized quite well in the “Minimum Statement” published in 1996 by the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), the parent body of all the major Humanist organizations throughout the world:

Humanism is a democratic and ethical life stance which affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives. It stands for the building of a more humane society through an ethics based on human and other natural values in a spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities. It is not theistic, and it does not accept supernatural views of reality.

Of course, any definition of Humanism is tentative and flexible, recognizing its dynamic nature, and the freedom of individuals to think for themselves.

## **Challenges for Humanism Today**

As with any movement, there is a danger for Humanism over time to become ossified, out of touch, and irrelevant. This is a challenge for us today, as we think about how we can reach out to the younger generation. Having examined the major emphases of Humanism, I would like to briefly discuss several issues that I think Humanists need to grapple with if we wish to remain relevant in today's society.

### **(1) The human potential for evil as well as good**

Humanists have been criticized for having an overly idealized view of humanity, seeing humans as the most highly evolved animal, with a position of dominance over the rest of nature. Although we can be optimistic about the human potential for goodness, we also need to acknowledge the human potential for evil and atrocity. This has been amply demonstrated by the events of the past century, with its world wars, the Holocaust, genocide, pollution, global warming, and gradual destruction of the environment. Some people today view humanity as a cancer on the earth, and argue that the world would be better off without us. Humanists need to avoid such a pessimistic view, but we also need to be realistic about the human potential for evil, and avoid the kind of overly idealized view of humanity that leads to arrogance. It is the arrogance of Western humanity that is destroying the planet. Thus, Humanists need to retain an optimistic view of human potential, tempered by realism.

Historically, Humanists have tended to be rather uninvolved in social and political activism. Their optimistic view of human nature almost seems to have led to a sense of the inevitability of progress, with little need for active efforts on our part to make it happen. However, a more realistic view of human nature would suggest that there is a need for us to become more actively engaged in efforts to improve the world in which we live. Things are not going to get better on their own, and the outcome is not certain. We need to put our Humanist values to work by becoming involved in social initiatives both in our local community and in the broader world.

### **(2) Potential misuses of science**

Humanism has also been criticized for having an overly simplistic faith in the benefits of science. We need to recognize that science can be used for destructive as well as constructive purposes. Over the past century, science has brought us weapons of mass destruction, and the indiscriminate misuse of science has contributed to the degradation of the environment, pollution, and global warming. Although the scientific method is the most reliable means we have of arriving at truth, it clearly needs to be coupled with human ethics and moral values. This ethical approach to science also entails a greater recognition of our oneness with all of nature. Rather than viewing ourselves as the pinnacle of evolution with a right to dominate over nature, Humanists need to acknowledge that, as stated in the Unitarian-Universalist principles, we are part of the "interconnected web of all existence."

### **(3) Beyond rationalism**

Another criticism of Humanism is that it puts too much emphasis on reason and intellect and not enough on emotion and relationships. While continuing to emphasize the importance of reason and rationality over superstition and ignorance, Humanists need also to affirm the positive aspects of human experience that go beyond reason, logic, and rationality. These include the esthetic pleasures of art, poetry, music, literature, and the beauty of nature. They also include the joys of personal relationships: love, intimacy, devotion, commitment, joy, and laughter. In addition, they include experiences that are traditionally referred to as “spirituality” (although this word is somewhat problematic due to its implication of dualism): feelings of awe, wonder, and even ecstasy that can arise from meditation and contemplation. Of course, all these types of emotions and experiences are based on natural, scientifically knowable brain processes, and are products of evolution. However, this doesn’t invalidate them as valuable aspects of human experience. Humanists need to be careful not to disparage these “non-rational” experiences, and indeed we should encourage their cultivation. If we focus exclusively on rationality, we run the risk of becoming just a dry, intellectual debating club. In celebrating all that it means to be human, we need to find ways of nurturing the social and emotional as well as the intellectual aspects of our nature, becoming a warm community of joy, compassion, fellowship, mutual support, and caring.

### **(4) Positive aspects of religion**

Humanists, many of whom have been liberated from a background of oppressive and narrow-minded religious orthodoxy, tend to emphasize the negative aspects of religion, focusing on the many examples of religious bigotry, warfare, intolerance, and oppression throughout history. However, there is a danger for Humanists of becoming too negative and intolerant of all aspects of religion. The religious impulse is deeply ingrained in the human psyche, and is also a product of our evolutionary history. While criticizing the dehumanizing effects of extreme religious ideologies, we need to recognize that religion at its best also has many positive benefits. We need to acknowledge that the world would not necessarily be a better place if we could simply eliminate all religion. An exclusively negative attack on religion only leads to greater defensiveness and hostility from believers, many of whom may share many of our values and goals. In seeking to promote Humanist values in a positive way, rather than bashing all religions, we would do well to learn what we can from the age-old wisdom of religious traditions and find common cause with liberal religious people on particular social issues, while respectfully disagreeing with their supernaturalistic beliefs.

In addition, we need to explore ways in which Humanism can more adequately fulfill the basic religious needs and desires of humans, within a non-theistic, non-supernatural framework. For many people, religious belief serves important functions, providing them with a sense of meaning and fulfillment that keeps them going in times of adversity, a basis for morality, deeply satisfying experiences of transcendence and “spirituality,” and a caring and supportive community. Rather than bashing religion, we need to strive for a Humanism that acknowledges and fulfills these human needs, thereby reaching out to a broader segment of society.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, Humanism is not just a club, not just a meeting we attend once a month. At its best, it is a way of life which can make a difference in people’s lives, and can bring out the best in people. Humanism is an exciting, vibrant, dynamic life-stance that gives deeply satisfying answers to questions about the meaning of life. It can be the basis of a life of fulfillment, joy, and value that is dedicated to reaching toward the full potential of what it means to be human.



## Metamorphosis

Some people are raised in a religious family and remain loyal to their inherited denomination throughout their entire lives. Others are raised in a strictly secular environment and never become interested in, or associated with, any kind of religion. Then there are those who are raised in a church-going home, but as they grow older begin to doubt and question the articles of faith of their religion and the validity of the Bible. These feelings of uncertainty often cause these people to embark on a journey searching for a life stance or world view that will bring them peace of mind and a non-religious form of spirituality while living as a non-believer. One such person is author and English literature professor Scott Russell Sanders. He has documented his journey, or metamorphosis, in a beautifully written book entitled *A Personal History of Awe*, as he progresses from believer to doubter to skeptic to non-believer.

Scott spent his early years living on a farm near Memphis, Tennessee. When he was five years of age the family moved to Ravenna in northeastern Ohio, where his father was employed at a military arsenal. Scott's mother was a devout Presbyterian. His father was a Baptist so they compromised and attended a small Methodist church in the hamlet of Wayland, Ohio. His mother saw to it that he got a good dose of religion while growing up. Long before he could read, he "took the Bible in through his ears in sermons and hymns, in the way he took in air, water and food." But at an early age during the Korean War, he began to have doubts. He could not understand how a benevolent all-powerful God could allow the rampant killing of fellow humans in barbaric warfare. The more he read the Bible, the more confused he became. Instead of answering his questions, the Bible deepened them.

Later on as a teenager, he became passionately interested in science and believed that science could explain away the mysteries of the Bible and religions. His faith in science crowded out any faith he had in religions. He contemplated that the only role left for God, if there was one, was to spark the Big Bang and frame the laws that governed how everything from quarks to quasars would eternally behave. Nevertheless, he kept reading the ancient book seeking comfort and illumination, but became more and more troubled by the undercurrent of cruelty. From beginning to end, while preaching love and forgiveness, the Bible envisions a God given to spite.

Scott's fascination with science prompted him to enroll at Brown University in Rhode Island, majoring in physics. By this time he was estranged from the church because he could not understand why the clergy was not speaking out against so much of the nation's wealth being spent on more and more destructive weapons while children were going hungry and the poor were living in the streets. He no longer believed in the Apostles' Creed, noting that it said nothing about justice, healing, peacemaking or compassion. Nor did it say anything about awe, the kind of satisfaction he experienced communing with the natural world. And there was also the awe of the miraculous universe revealed by science: a cosmic entity cohered magnificently from the tiniest atom to the largest of galaxies, "all bound together by the rules of an ancient elegant dance." Here was a vision of grandeur far greater than anything imagined by the authors of the Old and New Testaments. His awesome reverence for science outdated everything he had read in the Bible or heard from the pulpit. Toward the end of his sophomore year, however, Scott began to realize that science might not provide all the answers to life's perplexing questions. The more he studied the more he realized that uncertainty is woven into the very fabric of the universe.

Scott's ambition after graduation from university was to enter into scientific research in the field of physics, but when told that the money to finance his research would most likely be supplied by the industrial-military complex, he became troubled. He abhorred wars and wanted no part in helping to invent and produce weapons that kept becoming more and more destructive. Now he was forced to face the question: if he did not wish to become a researcher in a physics lab, what were the alternatives? Just what was he called to do?

In the fall of 1965 he took a class called, "Literature of the American Renaissance," reading the works of Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville and Whitman. He considered Emerson to be the intellectual grandfather of the group, but it was Thoreau that thrilled him the most because he was a man who sought to live a purposeful life with a keen sense of awe. It was through studying these five great writers that Scott was able to see how literature could address his deepest questions and most powerful yearnings. His mind was made up, he decided he wanted to become a professor of English literature and also take a stab at being an author.

In his final year at Brown, 1967, Scott learned he had won a Marshal scholarship to study at Cambridge University in England. While still in high school, Scott had attended a science camp in Bloomington, Indiana, where he met Ruth McClure, a fellow science student. They soon fell in love and corresponded constantly, while meeting whenever conditions allowed. After graduating from university they both intended to do graduate work at Harvard, she in biochemistry and he in English Literature, but the scholarship to Cambridge changed their plans. They decided to get married and then together they embarked for England. Four years later Scott received his PhD. His thesis was based on the novels of D.H. Lawrence.

On returning to the U.S. Scott assumed the position of Assistant Professor in English Literature at Indiana University in Bloomington. He remained at this institution throughout his career. In addition to teaching he authored nine books, the most recent being *A Personal History of Awe*.

The central theme of *A Personal History of Awe* is, of course, Scott's metamorphosis from believer to doubter to skeptic to non-believer. But there is another metamorphic theme interwoven throughout the book. Scott has a daughter Eva who has a daughter Elizabeth. After Elizabeth was born, Scott regularly enjoyed babysitting his granddaughter and observing her progress as she learned to talk and walk and go through all the fascinating phases of childhood. All this instilled in him a profound sense of awe that he describes almost poetically with deep emotional feeling. At the same time as Elizabeth was growing up, Scott was tending to the needs of his aging mother who was slowly losing her faculties in a nursing residence. The chronicles of these two individuals, one at each end of life's cycle, exemplify experiences that many of us will undergo during our lifetime. On one occasion Scott's mother asked him if he believed in heaven. He said yes, even though he had long ago stopped believing in the supernatural and the hereafter. It was, of course, the compassionate and right thing to do.

Scott never uses the word humanist in the book, but through his metamorphosis he became, without question, a consummate humanist. As a lover of nature, a pacifist who abhorred war, a proponent of scientific inquiry, a non-believer and a man who substituted a sense of awe for religious spirituality, he was indeed a humanist. He experienced his profound sense of awe through a loving marriage, the birth of his children and grandchildren, a keen love of the natural world, a reverence for all forms of life, and a fascination with literature, science and the grandeur of the universe. Our communities can benefit greatly from people like Scott Sanders, as we continue to progress towards a more secular, less religious society. (DAH)