



The Enlightenment



**A Mini-Journal of the
Humanist Association of London and Area**

Visit Our Web Site at www.humanists-london.org

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Issue Number '50' of The Enlightenment

The first issue of *The Enlightenment* was published in April 2005, a little over a year after HALA was officially formed in January 2004. The aims as stated at that time were:

1. To inform members of up-coming meetings and events.
2. To present interesting and sometimes provocative articles that invite comments, discussion and criticism.
3. To present articles written by our members, and others, that will be of interest to humanists.

As things have turned out, *The Enlightenment* has evolved to be not so much a Newsletter, but more of a mini-journal containing articles of a philosophical or academic bent on subjects that hopefully will be of interest to humanists. Instead of using *The Enlightenment* to advise members and friends of up-coming meetings and events, we issue separate monthly notices and posters advising of these activities. Meeting notices are also listed on the HALA web site.

Regarding comments and criticisms of articles, we have received many complementary remarks about various articles and some criticisms, but not as many criticisms on controversial subjects as we might have expected or hoped for.

It is noted above that HALA officially began in January of 2004. Prior to that date, an informal gathering of humanists had been meeting for a few years as a study group of the Unitarian Fellowship of London. Over the years HALA has grown and evolved, now holding regular meetings, special events (usually at Wolf Hall) and Solstice celebrations. We have a first-class web site as well as *The Enlightenment* publication. Early in 2010 we were pleased to be informed that HALA had been granted charity status by the Canada Revenue Agency under the education category, enabling us to issue tax receipts for donations. This money is used for staging special events.

HALA continues to be a vibrant and thriving organization and perhaps it is not too soon to start thinking of how we might celebrate our tenth anniversary in January 2014. But in the meantime, this 50th edition of *The Enlightenment* will deal with the past rather than the future. We will touch on HALA activities including past meetings, special events, social gatherings, the HALA web site and *The Enlightenment*. There is also an essay on humanism by editor Don Hatch.

President's Remarks

As we celebrate this 50th issue of *The Enlightenment*, I want to congratulate Don Hatch on this impressive achievement and thank him for his dedication and tireless work in turning out such an outstanding “mini-journal” of which this organization can be very proud. Over the years, these pages have provided HALA members and friends with lucid articles that never fail to inform, inspire, entertain, challenge and, yes, *enlighten* us. In this issue Don offers an interesting look back over the history of HALA as a local humanist organization, and also provides a sweeping panoramic view of the history of humanism as a whole. In a very erudite and thoughtful essay he traces the origins of humanism from the writings of Epicurus and other ancient Greek and Roman philosophers, through the Renaissance and Enlightenment, and up to the present day. He also thoughtfully discusses the challenges we face as we seek to promote a humanist world-view in this 21st-century world in which religious fundamentalism and intolerance continue to thrive. I agree whole-heartedly with Don that a humanism that focuses only on arguing against the existence of God and bashing religion is not going to win over many hearts. We need to focus instead on showing how humanism offers a positive, life-enhancing, and richly satisfying alternative to religion, providing a basis for ethical and compassionate living, social action, spirituality, and meaning. I'm pleased that this is the prevailing emphasis of HALA, and I'm encouraged to see that our membership is continuing to grow and flourish. ~ Rod Martin

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

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Member-at-Large – Vacant

Member-at-Large - Vacant

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

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

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

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

HALA Activities

There are five aspects to HALA activities:

1. Regular meetings.
2. Special events.
3. Social gatherings.
4. Web site.
5. *The Enlightenment.*

Regular Meetings - Back in the early days of HALA, a program committee consisting of Bill Chefurka and Goldie Emerson was formed to engage speakers for our regular meetings. In later years Jon Hore was added to the committee. Without question, HALA's success, to no small extent, is due to the caliber of the speakers obtained by this committee. All three members, now retired, were on the teaching or research staff at UWO. Looking over the roster of speakers, it is evident that many of them, as might be expected, were from UWO. Also noted is that a number of speakers were HALA members. They include Goldie Emerson, Rod Martin, Amelia Wehlau, Jonathon Hore, Don Hatch, André Lachance, Bill Chefurka, Don Santor, and Derek Kaill.

One of the meeting formats that has been well received is asking three of our members to tell us how they became a humanist. To date the following have related their experiences: Pauline Lyon-Evans, Marianne Nyhof, André Lachance, Adriaan Mak, Brian Prachar, and Reinhardt Schmoll. Amelia Wehlau, Arsenio Giron and Don Hatch will speak at the June 12th meeting.

There were of course a variety of topics covered at our regular meetings. Many dealt with matters of health. This may seem surprising for a humanist organization, but it is really quite appropriate because part of being a humanist is living well both bodily and otherwise. Since it is difficult to enjoy life to the fullest when we are sick, illness prevention by being knowledgeable about good health, hygiene habits and proper diet, can be very rewarding. Some speakers including Goldie Emerson, Rod Martin, Don Santor and André Lachance, dealt with subjects directly related to humanism, while others touched on scientific or political subjects. On two occasions, Meg Westley spoke about the important and topical subject of "Dying With Dignity." All-in-all, an eclectic representation of interesting topics. We usually get from 35-45 people at our meetings that have been held at the Cross Cultural Learner Center since 2006.

Special Events - Our first special event, held in 2009, was a celebration of Charles Darwin's 200th birthday and the 150th anniversary of the publication of *On the Origin of Species*. The program consisted of four lectures held at the Wolf Performance Hall in the London Central Library. Two of the lecturers, André Lachance and Don Santor, were HALA members. The Hall, which seats 400, was nearly full for all four lectures. The Library, HALA and the UWO Biology Department all were sponsors. The success of this event (and all others held at the Library location) was due largely to the work of Bill Chefurka and Goldie Emerson who worked closely with the Library to ensure everything ran smoothly. André Lachance and Rod Martin arranged for speakers from Montreal and Florida respectively. The theme of the next special event held in the Wolf Performance Hall in 2011 was "The Evolution of Belief." In the first lecture the Reverend Gretta Vosper presented her thoughts from a faith perspective and in the second Dr. Rod Martin presented the humanist perspective. The speaker at the 2012 special event, also held at the Wolf Performance Hall, was Tarek Fatah. His topic was "Blending Values in a Multicultural Society." The 2013 special event was a debate held at the University of Western

Ontario. The topic: “Be it resolved that the funding for Roman Catholic Schools in Ontario be Abolished.” The debater on the pro side was Justin Trottier from the Centre for Inquiry in Toronto and the debater on the con side was Patrick Dunn, formerly of the London Catholic School Board. A winner was not declared, but the consensus, among HALA members at least, was that Justin outperformed Patrick Dunn. The Darwin lectures were financed by a generous donation from UWO Biology Department and by HALA. The last three special events were financed by charitable donations to HALA. We are most grateful to the Canada Revenue Agency for granting us charitable status. We are also indebted to the London Library for providing the Wolf Performance Hall and posters free of charge.

Social Gatherings – Social gatherings entail summer and winter Solstice celebrations consisting of a summer picnic and a winter potluck dinner. For many years picnics were held at the rural home of Pat and Bill Chefurka. HALA provided KFC chicken and members brought salads and desserts. The Chefurkas were always the consummate hosts and they always ordered up fine weather. In 2012 the picnic was graciously hosted by Ellie and Reinhardt Schmoll in their Woodstock home, and again was a great success. The 2013 picnic will be held at the home of Lorrie and Walter Heywood. Winter Solstice celebrations have been held at various locations including the Unitarian Fellowship, Tolpuddle meeting room, 427 Wing of the Air Force Association of Canada (twice) and the home of Alison and Jon Hore. These gatherings provide an excellent opportunity to socialize and get to know each other better.

Web Site – Not long after HALA was formed a web site was set up by former member John Pope. The site was used to inform members and others about upcoming meetings, contained past *Enlightenments*, articles by members, humanist quotes, and links to other humanist sites among other things. By 2012 we were receiving suggestions that our site was badly in need of upgrading and fortunately our President Rod Martin was able to do just that. We now have an impressive first class web site that Rod keeps maintained and updated. Take a look at www.humanists-london.org

The Enlightenment - As mentioned on the cover page, *The Enlightenment* has evolved to be more of a mini-journal than a newsletter, and we have been fortunate that a significant number of our members have contributed articles. They include Goldie Emerson, Jackie Emerson, Derek Kaill, Tony Hewitt, Don Santor, Rod Martin, Catherine Campbell, Jim Cranwell, Bob Harrington, Kate Balogh, You-Sheng Li, Joyce Orchard, Maria Stuhlemmer, Marianne Nyhof, Garth Santor, and editor and publisher Don Hatch. Non-members who have contributed are Reverend Felicia Urbanski, Dagmar Gontard-Zelinkova, and John K. Nixon.

As stated in the HALA constitution: “The purpose of The Association shall be to *educate* and increase the public’s understanding of the principles of secular worldviews, including humanism, through the provision of seminars, conferences, and newsletters.” In keeping with our commitment to *educate*, the front page of most *Enlightenments* has featured a famous philosopher or humanist. There are too many to name, but a complete list of the contents of all fifty *Enlightenments* is available on request. The second page usually contains the President’s Remarks wherein our President provides an update of what is going on in HALA, plus a listing of HALA Board members and further information about the organization. The remaining pages are devoted to articles on humanism and related topics by the people listed in the previous paragraph. Again a complete list of articles that have appeared in the fifty *Enlightenments* issued to date is available on request, and copies of previous issues may be downloaded from our website.

Humanism - From Then to Now

That ancient Greece was the cradle of democracy is well known. What may not be so well known is that it was also the cradle of humanism. Yes, several of the pre-Socratics formulated humanist concepts and then it all came together with the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341-270 BCE) who is generally credited with being the father of humanism. And we are most fortunate that the Roman poet Lucretius (95-55 BCE) recorded the teachings and philosophy of Epicurus in his poem *On the Nature of Things*. This poem depicts Epicurus as the consummate scientist of his time. From observations of the world around him, he reasoned that all the matter in the universe was composed of indestructible atoms and that space was a vacuum devoid of atoms. He believed the universe was not created by divine power because it is full of imperfections. His declared purpose was to free humankind from religious fears by proving that the soul is material (not spiritual) and is born and dies with the body. He also believed that, if gods exist, they cannot intervene on earth to help or harm humans. He points out the absurdity of a spiritual soul entering the body at birth when he states:

It is surely ridiculous to suppose that spirits are standing by at the mating and birth of animals – a numberless number of immortals on the lookout for mortal frames, jostling and squabbling to get in first and establish themselves most firmly. Or is there an established compact that first come shall be first served, without any trial of strength between spirits.

Epicurus placed great importance on the necessity of living a moral and balanced life. Moderation in all things was his motto.

Concurrent with Epicurus was Zeno of Citium, (334-262 BCE) the founder of Stoicism. As history evolved it was Stoicism rather than the humanist philosophy of Epicurus that was adopted by the majority of the Roman elite. Stoics exhibited self-control and concentrated on things they could do something about, not things beyond their control. Roman Stoicism is probably best represented by the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius who reigned as Emperor from 161-180 CE. During his last war he somehow found time to write in Greek, his *Meditations*, which reflect his noble and self-sacrificing life. The *Meditations* consist of twelve books, each containing numbered verses. In some respects it is reminiscent of the Bible, but there is one important difference. Instead of being ambiguous, confusing and contradicting like the Bible, it contains straightforward guidelines for ethical and moral living. He posits that there is no need for pomp and ceremony and vanity. One word that appears over and over again is reason. Here are a few quotes from his *Meditations*.

Contentment comes from doing a few things and doing them well.

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

Observe how transient and trivial is mortal life; yesterday a drop of semen, tomorrow a handful of ashes. Spend therefore these fleeting moments on earth as Nature would have you spend them, and then go to your rest with good grace, as an olive falls in its season, with a blessing for the earth that bore it and a thanksgiving to the tree that gave it life.

In this life one thing only is of precious worth: to live out one's days in truthfulness and fair dealing, and in charity even with the false and unjust.

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

So here we have in the early centuries CE, the nucleus of something great, the humanism of Epicurus combined with the wise guidelines for moral and ethical living of Marcus Aurelius, free from the influence of religion and the priests. An important difference between the two schools of thought was polytheism. Unlike the non-theistic Epicureans, the Stoics still had their pantheon of gods and goddesses, and had Christianity not come on the scene denouncing paganism, the pagan deities would most likely have disappeared anyway as secular societies developed.

But Christianity did intervene. Shortly after the death of Jesus of Nazareth, an educated Jew named Saul claimed he had a vision on the road to Damascus wherein Jesus-the-Christ instructed him to carry his gospel to the gentiles. In this endeavour Saul, now known as Paul, and his cohorts were amazingly successful at establishing a number of Christian churches in the eastern Mediterranean area. These churches were attended mainly by illiterate peasants, not the educated nor the elite. Then in the early fourth century, the Emperor Constantine reportedly also had a vision or dream presaging that if he fought the next day's battle under the banner of the Christian cross, he would have victory. He won the battle at Milvian Bridge and subsequently over time, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic Church came into being. It seemed that citizens were able to transfer from the stoic pantheon of many gods to one god, but could not take the next step to no gods as the Epicureans did. The final blow to Greek philosophy and humanism came around the start of the sixth century when the devout Christian Emperor Justinian (487-565 CE) suppressed the distribution of all writings considered to be pagan in nature. For the next 1000 years, the lives of the citizens throughout much of Europe were influenced to no small extent by the Roman Church that connived to exert political as well as spiritual power.

During the time of the Italian Renaissance (1300-1500) a semblance of humanism consisting of the discovery of the Greek and Roman classics began to appear. Fortunately, these works had been preserved by Arab scholars and by Irish monks. They were brought to light by dedicated Italian scholars who set about searching for these classic writings that the Church had previously condemned. For example, the poems of Lucretius were discovered by the Italian scribe Poggio Bracciolini in a German monastery. These revelations were known mainly by the scholars of the day and had little effect on the masses. Nevertheless, the rediscovery of the humanist philosophy of Epicurus was to be of great benefit to later humanists.

The next phase of humanism appeared after the Protestant Reformation during the Enlightenment period. The Protestant Churches were more liberal than the Catholic Churches and provided an environment in northern Europe and in North America whereby both science and democracy were able to develop. The French philosopher Luc Ferry in his recent book *A Brief History of Thought*, avers that in fact it is difficult for democracies to develop except in an environment of liberal Protestant values. He describes the humanism of the Enlightenment period as Christian ethics, morals and values without belief in the supernatural. But as in the Renaissance, humanism was the pursuit of philosophical scholars such as the *Philosophes* in France, and had little effect on the average citizen, most of whom were affiliated in some way with a Christian church.

There were those during the Enlightenment period and later who dared hope for a better future for all citizens. The argument went like this. Developments in science and technology through mechanization would eliminate much human drudgery and allow more time for leisure. At the same time, the growth of representative democracies would allow citizens to have some influence in their governments whose remit besides maintaining sovereignty, would be to provide an environment for a prosperous economy to exist and thrive. This would hopefully improve living standards for all, not just those at the top. Under conditions of prosperity, secularism should increase and religiosity should decrease. In 1819, Baron d'Holbach's 1761 short treatise entitled *Christianity Unveiled*, which highlighted some of the absurdities of the Christian religion, was translated into English. In the Preface the editor commented as follows:

"In this philosophical age, when nature, reason, and rights of man have resumed their empire; when the genius of a great, generous and brave people is giving the last blow to superstition and despotism, the publication of this work which has greatly contributed to these glorious events, must be highly acceptable, not only to the literary world, but even to the community at large, who eagerly seek after instruction, the moment they believe it is necessary for their happiness. This publication bears a conspicuous rank among those whose free and independent sentiments have introduced a happy change in the public mind and will bring forth a revolution that will probably prove to be a harbinger of the complete triumph of reason. Persecution and wars will cease forever throughout the civilized world."

Well, wars and persecutions did cease in Europe and North America for about one hundred years, and during the Victorian age there was reason to hope that humanistic Enlightenment values would prevail. But sadly, the first half of the twentieth century turned out to be one of the bloodiest eras in the history of human kind. And then amazingly, the second half of the twentieth century turned out to be the most flourishing ever for the western world as the middle class grew and prospered. Towards the end of this era, democracy triumphed over communism as the Berlin Wall fell, and as we entered the new Millennium with fireworks erupting in cities around the world, a spirit of optimism prevailed. But the optimism did not last and up till now, the twenty-first century has been anything but glorious.

The first shock of course came on September 11th, 2001 when Islamist terrorists hit the United States in New York and Washington DC. This was followed by a prolonged war in Afghanistan and a totally unnecessary war in Iraq wasting billions of taxpayer dollars. Then in 2008 a financial meltdown occurred triggered by the collapse of the U.S. housing market due to the issuance of low rate prime time mortgages that came due without the ability to sustain them. On top of all this, jobs were moving overseas and the middle class was shrinking while the top five percent were making a killing. Capitalism had gone amok. In the United States big money was influencing and running the Congress to their advantage, not for the good of the middle class, while in Europe many socialist countries had overextended social safety nets and some were in danger of financial collapse. Only Germany and the Scandinavian countries plus Canada and Australia seemed to be relatively unscathed.

So where is organized humanism in this chaotic twenty-first century? I submit it is practically nowhere, except perhaps in Norway where there are 80-90,000 card carrying humanists in a population of four million, probably mostly due to the fact they receive a portion of the church tax. In other countries humanist organizations have relatively few members and if you ask the average person what they know about humanism, you will most likely receive a blank stare. This despite the efforts of prominent individuals including Carl Sagan, Isaac Asimov, Richard

Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and others. Humanists are very good at organizing conferences and publishing academic journals, but they are abysmal marketers, compared to the fundamentalist Christians who have convinced over forty-four percent of Americans that dinosaurs and humans walked the earth at the same time as recently as ten thousand years ago. The principal aim of many humanists seems to be trying to convince believers that there is no God as evidenced by book titles such as *The God Delusion* (Dawkins) and *God is not Great* (Hitchens). One positive aspect however, is that most humanist organization do provide officiants to perform secular rites of passage.

Now this is not to suggest that you have to be a member of a humanist organization in order to adopt a moral and ethical life stance free from belief in the supernatural. Significant numbers of people now have no affiliation with a church (especially in Western Europe) and go about living a secular ethical and moral life with a benign indifference to religion. This is particularly true in Scandinavian countries. In an article in the *New Scientist* entitled the God Issue, UBC professor Ara Norenzayan states:

“Religion, with its belief in watchful gods and extravagant rituals and practices, has been a social glue for most of human history. But recently some societies have succeeded in sustaining cooperation with secular institutions such as courts, police and mechanisms for enforcing contracts. In some parts of the world, especially Scandinavia, these institutions have precipitated religions decline by usurping its community building functions. These societies with atheist majorities – some of the most cooperative, peaceful and prosperous in the world – have climbed the religions ladder and then kicked it away.”

The trend toward lower levels of religiosity will continue in countries that are able to maintain a strong prosperous middle class, but in countries that have high income disparity, religiosity will not likely decrease. This unfortunately is the case in the United States, one of the most religious countries in the western world with a high and increasing level of income disparity. Humanist organizations in that country (and some others) have a daunting challenge that cannot be met unless they get political.

Aside from the need to maintain prosperous economic conditions, there is the disturbing problem of religious fundamentalism, both Christian and Islamic. Christian fundamentalists are attempting to influence governments, with some success in the United States, and Islamist fundamentalists are attempting to establish Caliphates through terrorist activities. In an effort to dispel fundamentalism, perhaps it is time to really get serious and point out the spuriousness of the avatars of Christianity and Islam, namely Jesus-the-Christ and the prophet Muhammad, because just proclaiming there is no divinity, whether he or she is called God or Allah, has been almost ineffective in convincing fundamentalists of any stripe, to abandon their zeal to proselytize and in some cases wreak havoc.

Dealing first with Christianity. This religion is based on the supernatural Jesus-the-Christ of the creeds. This person could not possibly have existed. The reasoning for this claim has been covered in some detail in the previous *Enlightenment* (Volume 9, No. 4). In brief, if there is no supernatural supreme being (God), Jesus the supernatural Christ could not possibly have been the son of a non-existent God. He had to be a human invention just as a supernatural God was a human invention of ancient peoples. It is proffered that the inventor was the human Jesus of Nazareth himself. It is further suggested that this Jesus of Nazareth was a clever conniving imposter who convinced a number of uneducated followers that he was the Messiah forecast in the Old Testament, and that he had redemptive powers. What he founded was a small cult. The

Jewish authorities soon realized he was an imposter who did not measure up to the criterion of a Messiah and called for his execution. He was not the founder of the Christian religion of the gentiles. This distinction goes to the apostle Paul.

The deceptive nature of Islam is detailed in the January 2013 *Enlightenment* (Volume 9, No. 1). The argument is similar to Christianity in that Muhammad could not have received messages from a non-existent Allah, via an angel that also could not possibly have existed. Somehow it appears that Muhammad believed he heard a voice or voices and over a number of years dictated the words to scribes to be incorporated into the Qur'an. But the Qur'an is obviously not the work of one person as it took a couple of hundred years to reach its present form. It is confusing at best and vindictive in places, but has influenced Muslims for centuries and has fostered the Jihad terrorists we have today. In the end, Islam like Christianity is based on an imposter. Almost all the evidence we have about the existence of Jesus and Muhammad comes from the New Testament and the Qur'an. There is some mention of each of them in non-scriptural historical records, but it is very minimal. Had they been as prominent in the societies of their day as their scriptures maintain, there would be more recorded about them in secular historical records.

So here is a challenge for national humanist organizations. Conduct research to determine whether or not the claims about Jesus and Muhammad made above and in previous *Enlightenments* have any semblance of validity, and if so, aggressively make the findings widely known. This will put the cat among the pigeons, and cause far more stir than proclaiming there is no God. Whether any humanist group is willing to accept this challenge is speculative at best, particularly in the case of Islam where death threats would no doubt result. But the reality must be determined and made known for the benefit of all humanity. The problems now being caused by religious fundamentalism need to be solved. Surely all humanists can agree on this point.

Now it would of course be hypocritical to criticize religions without suggesting something better in their place. In his recent book *The God Argument: The Case Against Religion and for Humanism*, the well-known English philosopher and humanist A.C. Grayling does just that. He notes that Christians often remark that religion is necessary to impart morality to their adherents, especially children, and that secularists cannot obtain the sense of spirituality that religions provide. He refutes both these claims.

Grayling emphasizes several times in his book that many problems are caused by religious teachings that fill the minds of impressionable children with untruths about the supernatural before they are able to think critically. In particular he cites the use of fear to instill morality by insisting that humans must behave in this world if you are to get into a blissful heaven. Instead of this approach, children should be instructed to live a balanced ethical and moral life in the here and now, and if they ask questions about the existence of a heaven, it should be explained that it is a fantasy akin to Santa Claus and the tooth fairy. This places a heavy responsibility on parents as well as secular educational institutions, but it should be a most effective method of progressively reducing religiosity.

One of the chapters in Grayling's book is entitled "Humanism and the Good Life," wherein he lists seven characteristics that a good life is likely to incorporate. Quoting directly:

"The first is that good lives seem meaningful or purposeful to the people living them. Another is that they are lives lived in relationships, having at their core real intimacy – love, or friendship – with one or more others. A third is that they are lives of activity –

of doing or learning. A fourth is that they are consistently marked by honesty and authenticity. A fifth is the acceptance of responsibility for the choices of life. A sixth is that the felt quality of the life from an aesthetic point of view is positive; that is, the experience of living it feels rich or satisfying to the person living it. The seventh and last is integrity, in the sense of the integration of all the others into a whole which constitutes the individual's own choice for the good."

At the end of the chapter he asks, "What would it add to any of the above, to say that in addition to these considerations, there is a need for a deity or deities?" The obvious answer: nothing! In fact adding a deity just complicates straightforward common sense.

Now onto spirituality! Some humanists shy away from the word spirituality because of its strong association with religion, but surely there must be some sort of secular spirituality that is equivalent to, or better than religious spirituality. And indeed there is. There is a spirituality that some secularists like to describe as awe and wonder. They marvel at the awe and wonders of nature, the vastness and complexity of the universe; the miracle and preciousness of life itself; the accomplishments of human kind in the areas of art, music, poetry and architecture; at the emotion of falling in love and the joy experienced at the birth of a child. Rather than worshipping a supernatural deity, secularists celebrate the joy of living a moral, ethical and compassionate life. They look on all these things as being sacred, not in a religious sense, but as a new kind of sacredness, the sacredness of life itself and the sacredness of the natural world that we are privileged to inhabit. Yes, discarding religious baggage and belief in the supernatural can, to borrow a biblical phrase, lead to a secular spirituality that provides a "peace that passes all understanding."

Before concluding I want to say something about Luc Ferry's explanation of the difference between animals and humans. Anyone who has owned a pet dog knows animals can exhibit emotions, be sociable and show signs of considerable intelligence. But there are two important aspects in which humans differ from animals. First, although higher animals show signs of an ability to communicate, they are not able to express themselves using a complicated verbal language. Secondly, and this is the point I wish to emphasize, humans have the capacity to improve themselves over the course of a lifetime, whereas animals are guided from the outset by instinct. This marvelous uniquely human capacity for continuing improvement should not be wasted. Education should not just be a youthful endeavour, but should be a lifelong activity as we strive to live "the good life." Life should not just get longer, all things being equal it should also get better.

Finally, I want to end with a quote by John H. Dietrich, a nineteenth century American Unitarian minister who is credited with being the father of religious humanism. I think it beautifully sums up what I have been trying to convey in this essay.

"If we live in a great impersonal universe with no friend to guide us, it matters tremendously how we conduct ourselves, for we are actually the makers of human destiny. Therefore, our responsibility is to put beauty in place of ugliness, good in place of evil, laughter in place of tears; to dispel error with knowledge, hatred with love; displace strife and contention with peace and co-operation."

Could anyone have summed up what humanism is all about any better?