



# The Enlightenment



A Mini-Journal of the Humanist Association of London and Area  
Visit Our Web Site at [www.humanists-london.org](http://www.humanists-london.org)

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## All About HALA

Largely due to the efforts of two of HALA's newer and younger Board members, Brad Banks and Sherry Keddie, we are seeing more and more younger people attending our regular meetings. At the HALA picnic on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017, held in Springbank Park, some of the younger attendees were asking about the history of HALA: questions such as when was it formed, what are its aims, what are its plans for the future, etc. This 94<sup>th</sup> issue of *The Enlightenment* will attempt to answer these questions.

At the December 2013 Solstice Celebration, we celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of HALA and an outline of our history up to that time was presented. This history has been up-dated to the present and is printed below.

### HALA History

The entity that evolved into HALA began as a small study group at the Unitarian Fellowship of London (UFL) on January 6<sup>th</sup> 2000, with about a dozen people participating. The prime mover was Harold Koehler who served as secretary until he passed away in November of 2007. Most meetings consisted of a speaker on a topic related to humanism, followed by a discussion. The discussions were considered to be of particular importance because it was during those early years that the tradition of discussions following the Sunday sermons was discontinued at the UFL. These discussion periods were missed by a considerable number of UFL members and subsequently some of them began to attend the humanist meetings. By 2003, as many as twenty people were attending. A few of the attendees were also members of the Canadian Humanist Association (CHA) and some of these people suggested that it would be worth investigating the possibility of becoming an affiliate of CHA. A set of Bylaws was drawn up and the group became affiliated with CHA in January of 2004. The London group became known as the Humanist Association of London and Area (HALA). The first president was Derek Kaill, who was really the inspiration for becoming an affiliate of CHA.

With the formation of HALA, the executive at UFL informed us that we were no longer considered to be a UFL study group, and therefore we would have to pay a nominal rental fee for use of the meeting room. This was completely understandable and we went along with this arrangement for a short while until we moved to the Cross Cultural Learner Centre, a more central location, on September 8<sup>th</sup> 2005. In 2015, the Cross Cultural Learner Centre meeting room became unavailable

and we now meet at the Stevenson & Hunt room at the London Public Library. This is a much-improved meeting room, albeit at an increased cost. The format of our meetings has remained the same. Attendance gradually grew to forty or more at each monthly session. Our membership grew as well and has remained at about 80 for a number of years. We hope to grow our membership further in order to cover increased costs.

In the autumn of 2009, Goldie Emerson and Don Hatch went through the fairly complicated process of applying to the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) requesting charitable status for HALA. We were elated to learn early in 2010 that charitable status had been granted under the education category. In order to qualify, we had to draw up a Constitution outlining the purpose of HALA among other things. That document states that:

*“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.”*

We consider our regular meetings to be seminars, and our special Wolf Hall events to be conferences, and we claim the *Enlightenment* to be our newsletter. We strive to keep our education remit in mind as we plan our activities. All Wolf Hall events have been financed by tax-deductible donations.

Throughout the years, we have had a wide variety of speakers talking on a variety of topics at our regular meetings. Many speakers have been from the faculty at UWO and some have been our own members. Others have come from out of town. Many topics in addition to those related directly to humanism and secularism have been presented and discussed. These topics include cosmology, the existence or non-existence of god, multiculturalism, justice, dying with dignity, the economy, politics, history, ethics, philosophy, global warming, and health. A few years ago we asked three members to tell us how they became a humanist at one of our meetings. This proved to be a successful and enjoyable evening and since then we have had quite a number of these popular meetings. Every January we hold a required Annual General Meeting (AGM) where we approve the previous AGM minutes, receive a financial report, and hear a summary of the past year's events from the President. The AGM ends with the election or acclamation of the HALA Board of Directors for the ensuing year.

In addition to regular meetings, there are other HALA activities. These include special events, social gatherings, our web site, and *The Enlightenment*. The special events are usually held at the Wolf Performance Hall in the Central London Public Library. The first, held in 2009, was a four-part series of presentations celebrating Charles Darwin's 200<sup>th</sup> birthday and the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of *On the Origin of Species*. Two of the four presenters were our members, André Lachance and Don Santor. The topic at the two 2011 events was the “Evolution of Belief,” and presenters were Gretta Vosper and our own Rod Martin. In 2012 Tarek Fatah spoke on multiculturalism. The 2013 special event was a debate held at UWO, with the topic: “Be it resolved that public funding for Roman Catholic Schools in Ontario be abolished.” On the pro side was Justin

Trottier of CFI in Toronto, and on the con side was Patrick Dunn, formerly of the London Catholic School Board. Of course, we concurred that Justin won the debate. In 2014, the speaker at our first event was Dan Barker, a co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. The topic was "Losing Faith in Faith." Later in 2014, the Reverend Bob Ripley, who became an atheist and left the clergy, gave a talk entitled "Life Beyond Belief: A Preacher's Deconversion." There was no Wolf Hall event in 2015. In 2016 Hemant Mehta, the friendly atheist, was the speaker. His topic was "Why Are Young People Leaving Religion?" For 2017 the speaker on October 18<sup>th</sup> will be Raheel Raza. Her topic will be, "How Muslims are Embracing the 21<sup>st</sup> Century."

Our social gatherings have entailed potluck summer picnics in July and Solstice Celebrations in December. Delightful summer picnics were held at the Chefurkas' rural location for a number of years, then at the Schmolls' in Woodstock in 2012 and at Walter and Laurie's residence in London in 2013. The 2014 picnic was held at Will Sanderson's home in Sparta. In 2015 and 2016, Pauline and Peter Evans hosted the picnics. We very much appreciate the hospitality of these members. For 2017, our vice president Carl Goldberg organized a pleasurable picnic in Springbank Park. Solstice Celebrations have been held at the UFL, Tollpuddle meeting room, at the home of Alison and Jon Hore, and several times at 427 Wing near the London Airport. For 2017, our winter Solstice celebration will be held in a quite suitable facility at Carl Goldberg's condo complex in north-west London.

Another outside activity has been marching in the London Pride Parade for the last four years. HALA is very concerned about human rights issues and supporting the LGBT community contributes in this regard. Brad Banks, Esther Goldberg, and Brian Prachar have been the prime movers in this activity. Twenty-one HALA members and friends participated in the July, 2017, Pride Parade.

The HALA web site was first developed and maintained by John Pope, who has since moved to Victoria. For a few years, the site was maintained by Alison Cunningham, but was later revised and upgraded by Rod Martin who continues to maintain it. We now have a world-class site and we very much appreciate Rod's efforts in this regard. Rod also manages the HALA lending library.

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

- To inform members of up-coming meetings and events.
- To present interesting and sometimes provocative articles that invite comments, discussion, and criticism.
- 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 email notices and posters advising of these activities. Meeting notices are also listed on the HALA web site. We have

been fortunate that a significant number of our members have contributed articles in various issues of the *Enlightenment*. They include Goldie Emerson, Jackie Emerson, Derek Kaill, Don Santor, Rod Martin, Kate Balogh, You-Sheng Li, Joyce Orchard, Maria Stuhlhemmer, Marianne Nyhof, and Don Hatch. Non-members who have contributed include Reverend Felicia Urbanski, Dagmar Gontard-Zelinkova, John K. Nixon, Dr. Alastair Summerlee, Garth Santor, Duncan Watterworth, and Rosslyn Ives. We encourage all members who like to write articles for the purpose of expressing their views and opinions, to send them in. The President and the editor reserve the right to accept or reject submissions.

Like all non-profit organizations, HALA could not exist without dedicated volunteers to serve on the Board of Directors and work at other positions as well. The Presidents have been Derek Kaill, Don Hatch, and Rod Martin. Vice Presidents have been Don Hatch, Rod Martin, Jon Hore, and Carl Goldberg. Secretaries have been Harold Koehler, Kate Balogh, Don Hatch, Carolyn Rowland, and Elizabeth Bright-See. Treasurers have been Richard Gibbens, Claire Van Daele-Boseret, Olive Porter, and Brian Prachar. Other Board Members have been Goldie Emerson, Bill Chefurka, Walter Heywood, Charlotte Kurn, Terri DeCaire, André Lachance, Peter Evans, Ed Ashman, Dave Mabee, Will Sanderson, Gerry Schram, Wendy Kennedy, Brad Banks, and Sherry Keddie. In other roles, Bill Chefurka, Goldie Emerson, and Jon Hore have served on the program committee, and Bill and Goldie along with Marianne Nyhof have served on nominating committees. For a time, the late Camille Van Daele provided classical music before our meetings, and for many years Jackie Emerson dutifully provided coffee, tea, and cookies. This important task was later managed by Marianne Nyhof, and refreshments are now generously provided by Imran Atta.

In 2014 a survey was conducted in order to obtain an understanding of what members expected from HALA. Complete results are contained in the March 2014 *Enlightenment*, available on the HALA web site. A summary of results for three of the categories considered is shown below. Answers are in descending order of popularity.

**Purpose of monthly meetings** – To learn about science. To learn about humanism. To discuss ideas. To make friends. To engage in social action.

**Formats of monthly meetings**. – Focus on humanism but not exclusively. Show videos. Continue with “How I Became a Humanist” presentations. Have presentations by HALA members as well as by outside guests. Discussions after presentations are very important. Small group discussions might be worthwhile.

**Topics for monthly meetings** – Human rights. Humanist ideas. Science. Global problems. Applying humanism to daily life. Psychology. Politics. Philosophy. History. Local social issues. Art and last on the list, medicine.

Hopefully the above discourse provides a fair description of HALA activities to date, but now we must think about the future. Should we continue as in the past, or should we contemplate making changes or additions? Perhaps a good place to start is to restate our aims and purpose.

## The Aims and Purpose of HALA

It is now generally agreed that humanism is about much more than shouting from the roof tops that there is no God. While practically all humanists reject belief in the supernatural, most would agree that there is much more to humanism than just being an unbeliever. In fact, of the twelve humanist principles, only one (number ten) deals with disbelief in a deity. Other principles cover subjects such as democracy, science, human dignity, mutual respect for all humanity, improving society, human rights, peaceful resolution of conflicts, responsibility to oneself and others, empathy for all living things, and respect for and preservation of the environment. The subjects of the twelve principles provide a wide scope of topics for monthly meetings.

Putting it another way – Humanism is a proactive life stance guided by the principles of rational thought, scientific inquiry, responsibility, ethics, compassion, fairness and equality, without belief in the supernatural. Or more simply, being good without God.

In the end, the desire is to work toward a prosperous free democratic secular society, with optimum equality and with a well-defined separation of church and state. And there is enough factual evidence from experience in a number of Western democratic countries that prosperity and equality encourages secularity and causes religiosity and supernatural beliefs to decline. Thus, we end up realizing the importance of economic conditions. A prosperous economy and secularity are co-related.

Conclusion: A principal aim of HALA should be to help contribute, in whatever ways it can, towards achieving and maintaining a prosperous democratic society with adequate social safety nets and firm separation of church and state. This could involve political action from time to time within the limits allowed by CRA. By achieving these goals, Canada will remain one of the greatest countries on earth.

## The Future

In a way, HALA is at a fork in the road. Should we continue as we have in the past, holding monthly meetings, having a Wolf Hall event once a year, limiting social events to winter and summer solstices, and continue publishing the *Enlightenment*? Yes, we should continue these activities, but should we also venture down a new fork in the road and include more activities, particularly those that would appeal to our younger members? If so, what should these activities be? Sherry Keddie has already instituted discussions at the Fox and Fiddle pub after each monthly meeting, and this has been quite successful. She has also started holding regular games nights, and the younger people at the picnic emphasized how much they enjoy these games and the discussions that occur. But what else should be considered?

It has often been remarked that meeting once a month does not provide members with the sort of sense of community that many weekly churchgoers experience. The Vancouver humanists attempt to fill this need by meeting once a week, and they appear to be quite successful as they have a good turnout at most meetings. It would be difficult for HALA to hold regular weekly meetings, but at

one time the Vancouver humanists met every Sunday, not for a regular meeting, but for brunch and lively discussions at each table. This is something HALA might consider, keeping in mind that one of the reasons a London humanist group was formed in the first place, was to allow discussions after speaker presentations to make up for UFL ceasing discussions following the sermon. Intelligent discussions can be invigorating and enjoyable and their history goes back a long way.

Plato's *Symposium* describes how he and Socrates got together regularly with a few friends, consumed a bit (maybe more than a bit) of wine and engaged in discussing a variety of topics. In the 1700s, a group of secular minded friends, known as the philosophes, met regularly at the opulent home of Baron d'Holbach in Paris to again enjoy some wine and carry out intelligent discussions. Attendees at these occasions included Denis Diderot, Jean le Rond d'Alembert, (founders of the Encyclopedia), Voltaire, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and occasionally Benjamin Franklin and David Hume. Yes, getting together on Sunday mornings with like-minded friends to enjoy a beverage of choice, perhaps consume a little food and engage in interesting discussion is worth HALA's consideration. If there is enough interest, this could result in achieving a sense of community.

Other activities that have been considered are movie nights, book reviews, a book club, and of course games nights which are already occurring.

As has been mentioned, education is a primary goal of HALA. The question then arises, should HALA branch out and become involved in local community activities? One thing that immediately comes to mind is opposing the public funding of Ontario Catholic schools in some appropriate and effective manner. And there are other activities that could be considered by the HALA Board of Directors particularly now that we are attracting more younger members who should have more energy than some of our long-time older members. President Rod is concerned that HALA continue to thrive for many years to come, rather than having it fade away as many veteran organizations and some service clubs are doing. This makes it imperative that the thoughts and ideas of our younger members are given due consideration by the Board.

Hopefully the above discourse answers some of the questions posed at the outset. (DAH).

## **Post Modernism, Populism, Fake News, and Alternative Realities**

*By Goldwin Emerson*

There are a number of truths the Western World relies on to bring success and beneficial cohesiveness to our way of living. Among these are respect for democracy, freedom of the press, belief in the value of the capitalist system, and also the value of honesty in dealing with our fellow humans. For many of us, these values have served us well years ago. Yet, within the past 50 years there have been writers and politicians emerging to challenge these values.

Among these writers are Kathy Aker, John Barth, Samuel Beckett, and Paul Auster. Their philosophy can broadly be called postmodernism, but it is a difficult philosophy to describe because the concept of traditional truth is not part of their beliefs. What is true is considered to be whatever seems right and appropriate to each individual on each occasion. Thus, reality and truth are whatever is workable and seems reasonable for each person in their private lives. For postmodernists, there are no absolute truths or collective truths. Hence most postmodernists keep their distance from typical religious beliefs and also from legal concepts of right and wrong. Where there are no solid concepts of truth, telling lies takes on an easy acceptance.

Post modernists have rejected traditional views which were current and modern when truth and freedom of the press were more in vogue years ago. Hence the postmodernists adhere to a new philosophy wherein the traditional views popular and modern fifty or more years ago are presently replaced by post-modern ideas.

Postmodernism holds a great many different ideas including some that contain internal disagreements within this philosophy. For example, some believe a post-modern New Age of thought occurred after the 17 century period of the Enlightenment rather than in present day modern times.

I understand that in this short description of postmodernism one sets oneself up for failure because of the great variety of views within this philosophy. Nonetheless, here are some basic tenets of postmodernism.

There are no absolutes truths; at least no absolute concepts of behavior that are regarded as consistent with moral good or moral evil.

Capitalism works well for some individuals but it does not serve the interests of the vast majority of citizens. It does not fulfill the socioeconomic needs of the populace.

Religious and capitalist ideas ought to be consistently challenged, keeping the current needs of the general population in mind.

What is real and true is whatever seems to be working well, for individuals and individuals have their own views of truth and reality.

Consumerism, production of weapons of mass destruction, over-abundance of goods, and environmental pollution are wasteful in our modern throw-away societies. Yet, military strength helps to determine outcomes within social conflicts.

Traditional views and values of the Western world popular 50 or more years ago do not serve society well in more recent modern times.

While there are parts of postmodernism with which many of us can agree or not, when we look at modern political leaders, one can see some aspects of this philosophy presently in practice within modern democracies.

There are today some prominent leaders who hold their own views of what is accurate or true. To these individual politicians, whatever runs counter to their personal interests will be seen as fake news or alternative facts. Moreover, strong leaders do whatever is necessary to deter views to which they are individually opposed. When a postmodernist leader is strong enough, they may create laws and media controls sufficient to shut down views not in their own best interests. If they can, they may destroy freedom of the press. For postmodernists, a free press is not crucial for good government. Postmodernist politicians, who see no absolute enduring truths, feel free to change their particular views from day to day. Views on climate change, government health care, open or closed immigration policies, honesty in business dealings, and respect for different ethnicities will readily switch to whatever is convenient for each situation.

Do you know of politicians who are subject to such easy and frequent changes in their opinions? Can such leaders who tell lies on numerous occasions be trusted in important government positions within a healthy democracy? These are important questions for present day democracies.

## **Next HALA Wolf Hall Event – October 18<sup>th</sup>**

**Speaker – Raheel Raza. Time – 7:00 p.m. Admission - Free**

**Topic – How Muslims are Embracing the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Raheel Raza is a Pakistani-Canadian journalist, author, public speaker, media consultant, anti-racism activist, and interfaith discussion leader. She lives in Toronto, Canada.



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