



The Enlightenment



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Raising Children

It is a travesty that in the 21st century many children are often indoctrinated with untruths during their impressionable formative years. More often than not, the untruths involve religions, whether it be teaching the Qur'an in mosques and madrassas or the bible in Christian churches, falsities are being propagated. Wouldn't it be a better world, if instead of religious dogma, all children were taught positive (not negative) secular values as the following lines suggest?

Children Learn What They Live

Dr.. Dorothy Law Nolte

If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.

If children live with hostility, they learn to fight.

If children live with fear, they learn to be apprehensive.

If children live with pity, they learn to feel sorry for themselves.

If children live with ridicule, they learn to feel shy.

If children live with jealousy, they learn to feel envy.

If children live with shame, they learn to feel guilty.

If children live with encouragement, they learn confidence.

If children live with tolerance, they learn patience.

If children live with praise, they learn appreciation.

If children live with acceptance, they learn to love.

If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves.

If children live with recognition, they learn it is good to have a goal.

If children live with sharing, they learn generosity.

If children live with honesty, they learn truthfulness.

If children live with fairness, they learn justice.

If children live with kindness and consideration, they learn respect.

If children live with security, they learn to have faith in themselves and in those about them.

If children live with friendliness, they learn the world is a nice place in which to live.

Reasonable U. S. Gun Control Rules Still Not Accomplished

By Goldwin Emerson

On June 12, 2016, Omar Mateen committed the largest civilian massacre killing in American history at the gay Pulse Nightclub, in Orlando. This hate crime aimed at the GLBT community has been classified as a terrorist act against the 49 people murdered and 53 others who were injured.

So far, the pattern of response by USA citizens is similar to that of recent massacres in American history. Some are shocked and surprised, some are angry, and many are fearful. A few politicians, including U. S. President Barack Obama, think it is necessary to regulate the sale of guns, particularly semi-automatic assault rifles (AR – 15) used in recent massacres. The National Rifle Association strongly defends the right of American citizens to bear arms according to the second amendment of their constitution.

As usual, in many occurrences of gun violence in United States, citizens are at a loss to explain the motives of the murderers or to know how to defend themselves from such terrible massacres in the future. Mateen was shot and killed by police at the scene and thus his motives may remain partly unknown.

If guns were sold to children it would be clear to Americans that this would be an unethical practice. Rational people agree that children would not have the judgement of how dangerous guns can be. Children do not yet have sufficient maturity to use guns safely. Recurring massacres indicate that there are also some adults who, like children, do not have the judgement and understanding to be in possession of guns. It is evident that it would be equally unethical to sell guns to those adults who seem incapable of using guns properly and safely.

Some American statistics claim a daily average of 25 murders caused by guns in the United States. This is a number in excess of 9000 people per year, although in 2012 gun deaths actually tripled that number. Depending on population density, annual gun deaths range from 3.4 to 4.7 per 100,000 citizens. Politicians have an ethical obligation to create legislation that controls the sale of guns to citizens of any age who do not possess the mental or physical capability to use guns with care and safety. In the United States the second amendment is not a sufficient reason to allow every citizen the right to bear arms. For example, totally blind people or violently insane people should not be allowed to purchase guns. Yet in many states there are very few regulations or, in some states, none required to purchase guns. There are, however, Federal laws which limit the misuse of guns and uphold punishments after a crime is committed.

A problem arises in assessing the various degrees of physical or mental disability of those who want to own guns. For this reason a responsible approach would be to have citizens who want to purchase guns carefully assessed prior to purchasing them. This procedure is not as cumbersome as it may first appear. When people are individually assessed for their suitability for most jobs they are often required to have a police check to determine if they have a criminal record. Many jobs also require health records indicating the likelihood of mental or physical stability or lack of it.

Signs of severe depression, aggression, abuse of illegal drugs, theft, extreme anxiety, physical altercations, or sex abuse, may well be available from medical or criminal records. As Dr. Phil McGraw of television fame has said, the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior.

Of course, there are some degrees of mental illnesses or criminal activity or physical disabilities which may not in themselves be sufficient reasons to decide they are too dangerous to possess guns. It is for this reason that those in charge of assessing suitability for gun ownership should rely on professional health records and criminal records and exercise care in doing so.

The National Rifle Association is a large, politically powerful group. There must surely be enough wisdom and intelligence within their group that they can be persuaded that an ethical approach would be to establish reasonable gun control regulations in advance of ownership in order to protect American citizens while still upholding the second amendment.

There are a number of reasons why humanist readers will be drawn towards the idea of more effective gun control. Many of the most recent massacres have been driven by religious extremism and the lack of reasoning. They express hatred towards one's fellow human beings. On the other hand, the principles of humanism uphold peacefulness and a rational approach in making our world better for all humanity. Our humanist principles contain references to compassion, respect for the dignity of every human being, human freedoms, and the democratic method. The ideas of those who have committed recent massacres are antithetical and abhorrent to humanism.

CHOOSING BETWEEN TWO WORLDS, OR MORE - With enough mystery for a lifetime

By Duncan Watterworth

"I'm a Secular Buddhist", or so I told the Jehovah's Witness at my door a couple of weeks ago.

I had only read about Secular Buddhism on the internet the day before, but it sounded okay. Take Buddhism, I told him, and strip away the unlikely stuff like reincarnation and all the Buddhist gods that sprang up after Buddha died. What's left may not be a religion, and certainly isn't a faith, but might be a workable guide for living a life here on earth.

Reincarnation or not, it seems like lifetimes ago that I sometimes rang the bell in the Baptist church in Aylmer. It was actually my grandfather's job, but we pulled the heavy rope down together, and when he let go I flew up toward heaven, if only for a while. Then off to Sunday school, and singing in the junior choir.

So I grew up with that worldview, the picture Christians must believe: God's creation, my original sin, the virgin birth, Jesus dying to save me, his rising from the dead. Jesus as the only way to the Truth.

But I also grew up with another worldview. I have an analytical mind, and I liked math and science. I love the perspective of astronomy and geology. And this clashed with the Christian picture.

In my high school days the world seemed to blithely straddle these incompatible worldviews. But I couldn't. I kept thinking: they can't both be right.

As I got older, the Christian version of reality seemed more and more nonsensical. The Christian god became as unlikely and peculiar as Thor or Zeus. When it came time to be baptized and formally join the church, I went AWOL.

I had become a teenaged atheist. Or, as I sometimes said, a born-again heathen.

The Jehovah's Witness at my door couldn't wait to start quoting Bible verses. But I have learned to be quick to say, "Why should we think there is any divine authority in that book?" This one's reply was that the Bible contains many scientific facts that the writers wouldn't have known thousands of years ago, and that proves that God had his hand in it.

"Are you really going to start with that?" I said, truly surprised. "Science isn't the Bible's strong suit."

As religions go, Christianity has bound itself very tightly to a narrative of earthly events, and the literal truth of a collection of ancient writings. This is why it has been getting tripped up by scientific and archeological advances since 1633, when Pope Urban VIII punished Galileo for proclaiming, contrary to scripture, that the earth was not the centre of the universe.

One wonders if Christians wouldn't be wise to strip away the unlikely stuff, and focus on the Bible's allegorical and spiritual message.

Although it was troubling to grow up with two conflicting worldviews, perhaps it was a blessing. A person raised and immersed in a single worldview, no matter how crazy, may find it impossible to imagine any other.

Becoming an atheist is not the end of the story. It's more like the beginning. It's like a police investigator eliminating one suspect among many. The realization that there is no Christian-type god does not automatically answer the big questions. Neither does science.

So there remained the search for the true nature of the universe, what our lives mean in it, how we should live our lives.

And how in the meantime to live by, maybe even flourish in the mystery.

Humanist Ethics

By Rosslyn Ives

HUMANISM is free from dogma and has no creed people commit to; but there are two principles that many consider helpful when discussing Humanist ethics. These are the principle of equal power or egalitarianism, and the principle of maximum well-being.

The principle of equal power

If I have superior power over other people, I can, if I am bloody minded, force them to do what I want. I can ignore their wishes and their rights. Admittedly they will resent what I do, feeling that my behaviour is unjustified; but if my strength is greater, there is little they can do about it.

On the other hand, if I have equal power with others, I cannot just ride rough-shod over their interests. When our interests conflict, I can either fight them or else find some compromise acceptable to us both. The principle of equal power supplies us with a method for deciding whether some arrangement is just or not. If it's the one that people in a position of equal power would accept, then it is just. As an IHEU

manifesto says: Human justice is the progressive realisation of equality. Justice does not exclude force, but the sole desirable use of force is to suppress the resort to force.

In many ways, it is similar to what is often called the Golden Rule. “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” Both Confucius and Lao-Tse, the sages of ancient China, gave the same advice. Bernard Shaw, however, pointed out that this version needed to be handled carefully when he said: Do not do unto others as you would that they should do unto you, for their tastes may not be the same.

The principle of equal power overcomes this problem, for if our power is equal we cannot force our tastes on each other, we can only compromise to allow each to indulge in his or her own tastes, provided they do not harm the interests of others. The ancient philosopher Epictetus, a member of the Stoic school, which Humanists regard as one of the forerunners of Humanism, put it this way: What you would avoid suffering yourself, seek not to impose on others.

The principle of maximum well-being

The principle of equal power is the principle that tells us the rights that both we and other people have. It provides the framework within which we can live together harmoniously as members of the same community. It does not, however, actually tell us how to live our lives.

The principle of maximum well-being offers us a possible pathway. It advises us to choose ways that give us maximum satisfaction, i.e., maximum well-being for ourselves and others. At the same time, we should aim to minimise dissatisfaction, by avoiding frustration, unhappiness and pain for both ourselves and others.

A minimum requirement for well-being is that our primary needs, such as food, shelter, clean water, useful work and involvement in our community, are met. In addition, we will seek opportunities to engage in more diverse activities that further enhance our well-being, such as education, physical activity, music, dance, and the creative arts.

Hopefully, many of us will also find satisfaction in helping others, in giving other people pleasure, in seeing other people fulfil their talents and achieve their goals. And, in the position of equal power, we would agree to raise children who find their personal fulfilment in such altruistic goals.

Many will find satisfaction in their work, or in sport, creative activities, rearing children, caring for the needs of others, or in politics, business or management, or in challenges to their strength and courage such as exploration and mountain climbing. The principle of equal power would require us to respect these goals, provided they did not harm others nor cause people to neglect their obligations to others.

What then is a good ethical life for a Humanist? I think it is about personal autonomy used responsibly, seeking knowledge, engaging in pleasures that do no harm to others, and deriving satisfaction from the arts, physical activity, music, personal relationships and belonging to a community. These are best achieved by recognising the equality principle and actions that maximise well-being.

From the Victoria Humanist (Melbourne Australia).

The 2016 HALA Wolf Hall Event

Why Are Young People Leaving Religion?

Speaker – Hemant Mehta – The Friendly Atheist

Monday September 19th

London Central Library, 251 Dundas Street at 7:00 p.m.

The talk will explore the reasons for the rise of non-belief among the millennial generation, the challenges facing young atheists in North America, and why things are actually getting better for them.

Hemant Mehta, raised in the Jain faith, is now a prominent atheist writer, blogger and public speaker. He is editor of a blog called the Friendly Atheist, appears on the Atheist Voice channel on YouTube, and co-hosts the (uniquely-named) Friendly Atheist Podcast. He also writes for the “On Faith” column in the Washington Post. He helped establish and serves on the board of the Foundation Beyond Belief. He has degrees in mathematics, biology, and math education. Hemant spent seven years as a high school math teacher. His books include: *I Sold My Soul on eBay*, *The young Atheists Survival Guide*, and *The Friendly Atheist: Thoughts on the Role of Religion in Politics and Media*



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