



The Enlightenment



A Mini-Journal of the Humanist Association of London and Area
Visit Our Web Site at www.humanists-london.org

Volume 13

Number 10

October 2017

HOW MUSLIMS ARE EMBRACING THE 21ST CENTURY

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE HUMANIST
ASSOCIATION OF LONDON AND AREA,
JOIN RAHEEL RAZA, A LEADING GLOBAL
VOICE AGAINST RADICAL EXTREMISM FOR
AN ENLIGHTENING AND MEANINGFUL
CONVERSATION AS SHE ADDRESSES HOW
MUSLIMS ARE EMBRACING THE 21ST CENTURY.

WOLF PERFORMANCE HALL
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 18TH,
7:00 - 8:30 PM

NO REGISTRATION REQUIRED. FREE DROP IN.



RAHEEL RAZA IS PRESIDENT OF THE
COUNCIL FOR MUSLIMS FACING
TOMORROW, FOUNDING MEMBER
OF THE MUSLIM REFORM MOVEMENT,
AUTHOR OF THE BOOK THEIR JIHAD
—NOT MY JIHAD, AWARD WINNING
JOURNALIST, PUBLIC SPEAKER, AND
ADVOCATE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, GENDER
EQUALITY AND DIGNITY IN DIVERSITY.

THE HUMANIST
ASSOCIATION OF
LONDON AND AREA



2 HOURS FREE VALIDATED PARKING IN THE CTFI PLAZA DURING LIBRARY HOURS

Don't miss this presentation on one of the most pressing concerns facing the world today; bringing Islam into the 21st century, and hopefully ending radical Islamic terrorism. It is now almost certain that ISIS will be defeated militarily and will not be able to form the caliphate they intended, but their ideology is implanted in the minds of thousands of young people who are still setting off bombs in Western countries.

In the same way that Christianity was beneficently reformed beginning in the 1500s, Islam is badly in need of reform today in order to eliminate jihad, give women equal rights, and deal with a number of other issues. It was dissatisfied Christians themselves that brought about reform and it is only moderate Muslims that can reform Islam.

We eagerly anticipate Raheel Raza's presentation at the **Wolf Performance Hall** to learn her thoughts on how "Muslims Are Embracing the 21st Century"

Note the date and time:

Wednesday October 18th at 7:00

pm

A Philosopher Explains Humanism and Other -isms

By A. C. Grayling

This is an edited version of the address A. C. Grayling gave on 8 April 2017 at the Australian Humanist Convention in Melbourne. The text has been edited by Professor Grayling from a transcription compiled by the Editor. The full version was replete with entertaining anecdotes and illustrations. The full video is available on YouTube.

THOSE of us who teach philosophy spend our time trying to clarify and to draw distinctions. Behind me are posters for Humanists, Rationalists and Atheists. It is important to have a clear cognitive map of the relationships and difference between atheism, secularism, humanism and rationalism. The choice of labels directs attention to which door you pass through to get into the same room.

When you see Humanism with a capital *H* or Rationalism with a capital *R*, you are talking about a movement which has a set of aims and principles, and conceives of itself in a certain way. When you see humanism with a small *h* or rationalism with a small *r* you're talking about the way that approach is mediated, rather than the organisations which exist to promote it.

I want to talk about the small-letter atheism, humanism and rationalism to illustrate the connections between them.

Atheism

Atheism is a word chosen by theists to denote people who don't share their views. I'd prefer to be called a naturalist or a freethinker; or better, no label at all.*

The theism versus atheism debate is a metaphysical debate. It's about what exists or doesn't exist in the universe. In particular it is a debate about whether or not there are transcendent or supernatural agencies or entities in the universe.

Think of the contrast between theism and atheism as the same as between collecting stamps and not collecting stamps. When you illustrate it by that analogy you see the false dichotomy at work, because it makes it sound as though not collecting stamps is something you positively do. This is why it is difficult to be a "militant" atheist, any more than you can be a "militant non-stamp collector". You can be a militant secularist or a militant humanist or rationalist, but atheism merely denotes an absence of a way of thinking about the world.

The theism versus atheism debate is a metaphysical debate. It's about what exists or doesn't exist in the universe. In particular, it is a debate about whether or not there are transcendent or supernatural agencies or entities in the universe. To conceive the debate in those terms is important, because arguing about whether there exist gods and goddesses starts far too far in; by using these terms you have already assumed too much.

The word *God* with a capital *G* acts as a name or a denoting expression for people who have a theistic commitment. Therefore, atheists are tricked into saying they don't believe in god. If you say there is a God and I don't believe it exists, you've already gone too far into the discussion.

One needs instead to go back to the beginning and ask, "What is in, or attached to, the universe?" In ancient times people thought that supernatural agencies were actually in the world, nearby in the streams, in the trees. It is understandable why our ancestors thought this way, because they had only one concept to explain how nature works; namely, their own felt experience as agents or actors in the world. In these terms, when you think about the wind, the growth of plants, the rising of the sun, you naturally think some agency is behind these actions; something a bit like us must be causing them.

Look at the mythologies of the world, such as Greek mythology, which personifies these forces. In its very early roots, religion — or better: superstition — was a kind of proto-science in its attempts to find explanations.

Then one day someone thought, “If I can persuade my fellow tribesmen that I can get in contact with these agencies and modify their behaviour, e.g. make it rain when there is a drought; then I’m going to have power and influence.” This is a good motivation for annexing such beliefs to the temporal powers that run the society.

It would have seemed plausible too because sometimes people have nightmares or visions, or are affected by eating “magic” mushrooms without realising it, and thinking that in these altered states of consciousness they are making contact with these agencies.

So, we can understand how these ideas might have arisen; but as our ancestors became more familiar with the workings of nature, so these agencies moved away, from nearby localities to mountain tops. We find in most early traditions that mountains were regarded as sacred places: Moses, for example, met his god on a mountain top in the form of a burning bush; Zeus and his fellow deities lived atop Mount Olympus.

When finally people got to the summits of mountains they didn’t find any gods. As time has gone by and as human knowledge has increased so the deities have receded yet further away, not just from the woods and streams to the mountains, but from the mountains into the sky, and at last outside the boundaries of space and time altogether. And they have become less numerous as they did so.

So, the theism/atheism debate, as a metaphysical debate about what exists, is the nub of the issue. The argument about whether there are gods is exactly the same argument about whether there are fairies at the bottom of the garden.

When it comes to human affairs, the conversation is not really about the existence of deities, but about religion, and religion is a human-made thing. And the debate about religion in society is the secularism debate.

Secularism

Secularism is about the place of religious influence in the public square; and, as it happens, the origin of secularism lies in the church itself.

In the mediaeval period, the church did not wish the temporal powers interfering in its affairs. So it argued for separation of church and state, at least in one direction, state → church; but of course it always wanted to have influence the other way. For historical reasons, it has been given a place at the top table in order to exert that influence, to have religion taught in schools, and to have religious leaders interfere in social debates.

Secularists acknowledge that religious people are entitled to their beliefs, but they’re not entitled to have special privileges, such as having 26 bishops sitting in the House of Lords. This unelected, self-appointed group get to vote on laws that affect everybody.

There is a question about how much influence any self-interest lobby group can have relative to other such groups. Like any other lobby group, the churches should take their turn in the queue. The degree of influence should be proportional to the support they have in society. With only three per cent of UK citizens regularly going to church, they are massively over-represented in the halls of power.

Humanism, whether with a small *h* or a large *H* is about ethics.

Humanism

Humanism, whether with a small *h* or a large *H*, is about ethics. If you look at the International Humanist and Ethical Union’s principles and the principles of the Rationalist Society of Australia, you will see that they are very similar. There is little difference between small *h* humanism and small *r* rationalism, but as I said

earlier these different organisations enter through different doors into the same room. They all share the same fundamental outlook: basically atheist, secular, rational and humane, but the tiny change of emphasis is that humanism, in its well-springs, is about the ethical life. (We need to be clear about what we mean by the ethical life; because we don't mean quite the same thing as the moral life: see below.)

Small *r* rationalism is about how we think, about basing our views and our actions on the evidence that we have for them. This is a key matter. Think of the word *rational*; the first part, *ratio*, means "proportion". The rationalist is someone who says your beliefs and actions should be proportional to the evidence you have and the strength of the arguments you can adduce in their favour. As Bertrand Russell said, "It is not what you believe, but why you believe it, that matters."

Scepticism

Another *-ism* closely allied to rationalism is scepticism and in many places there are Skeptical societies. Scepticism differs from the other *-isms* in that the door through which it enters is that of setting itself the task of evaluating and assessing, of being critically minded, of challenging the claims not just of religion but even of atheists, secularists and humanists.

However, it would be rather surprising if someone of a sceptical turn of mind said, "You know what, critical thought leads me to believe there really are twelve gods on Mount Olympus," which is why scepticism is a natural member of the family of *-isms* under discussion.

Only in one of the *-isms*, namely secularism, might you find people who are religious but who recognise they should not seek to impose their way of life or views on others. It's a natural thing for religious people to want to do this, because after all they know "the truth" and they want to save you from yourself. After all, it was the reason the Catholic Church burnt heretics: to stop them accumulating more sins. They claimed that they were doing them a kindness!

So among secularists you will find some religious people. But atheists, humanists and rationalists fundamentally take the metaphysical stance that there are no gods or goddesses, inside or outside the universe. That therefore is a very consequential view, because if there are no deities telling us what to do, we have to think about that for ourselves. We have to think about how to live and how to relate to others.

Trying to persuade people to think about where values come from is hard work. It was a responsibility urged on our western civilisation most notably by Socrates, one of the three great figures of the "axial age", the others being Confucius and Gautama the Buddha. All three were philosophers, not preachers or prophets claiming inspiration from a deity.

Their respective philosophies promoted the turn from the concept of virtue as "warrior virtues", the specifically masculine virtues of courage, endurance and fortitude in defence of the tribe or city, to the idea of civic virtues, about living together in communities based on mutuality and cooperation. That is what Socrates challenged his fellow Athenians to think about, i.e. the ideas of kindness, cooperation, mutuality; the idea of the good and of self-restraint, all necessary in a cooperative society.

Like the other two great thinkers, Socrates didn't leave any writings. His views come to us through the work of his disciples. But we know that he said, "The life truly worth living is the considered life." To dramatize the point, he put it in the negative: "The unconsidered life is not worth living." If you don't think about the values you choose, then you are living someone else's idea of a good life.

The importance of the Socratic challenge is that there really are as many ways to lead a good life as there are people. It turns on the answer we each individually give ourselves about how to live and what to be. You don't have to arrive at answers or a conclusion; it is the journey towards such answers that matters.

Aristotle had anticipated this view: he said, the minute you ask the question "How should I live?" you have begun to live the worthwhile life.

You immediately realise that this is a key for the humanist outlook. As essentially social beings we need our relationships, we need to be connected with others. We need to love and be loved. We need friends. We need to be part of a community. We need to contribute to the good of others in whatever way we are best suited to thus contributing. Humans are empathetic beings. To feel that empathy for people on the other side of the planet, strangers we don't know, people yet unborn, is to be fully connected as a humanist to the human project. And if we see ourselves as humane we see our responsibility to animals — our fellow creatures — and the environment and nature at large.

So, it's a very rich but also a responsible commitment to be a humanist, committed to thinking about our place in the great network of human lives, of history and of the world we live in. This is why I think it is so important to draw that distinction between the "ethics" and the word *morality*.

Ethics as distinct from morality

Ethics comes from the word *ethos*, meaning character. The word *morality* comes from *mores*, meaning customs or etiquette. Morality is about responsibility person to person, so it's a very important part of ethics, but it is not the whole of ethics.

Ethics is about what characters we form and therefore what sort of people we are going to be; it shapes how we live our lives.

The realm of the ethical is much broader than the realm of the moral. And it is the ethical that Socrates is trying to alert people to, which is therefore the key to the humanist outlook.

Concluding remarks

To be a humanist is to be a certain sort of person, with a certain set of attitudes and responses of generosity and sympathy to our fellows.

But this is where the rational part comes in too: we must have standards, we must be robust in living according to our standards; it is not a case of "anything goes." So as a humanist and a rationalist one must feel that it is right to live on the basis of generosity and sympathy towards others, alongside the standards we expect of ourselves and others. And we must be prepared to stand up and fight for these standards.

I wholeheartedly recommend the humanist outlook to you. If everyone in the world adopted it, the world would have a very good chance of being a much better place.

My late lamented friend, Christopher Hitchens, who was an atheist, also used to say he was an anti-theist, i.e. against those who had some religious set of doctrines and were prepared to act on it to the detriment of other people. Which is why his book, *God is Not Great*, is a polemic against those who do believe and do a great deal of harm to others who don't agree.

Professor Anthony Clifford Grayling, CBE, renowned British philosopher, is Master of the New College of the Humanities, London.

Comments on Professor Grayling's Presentation

Although the preceding presentation is somewhat lengthy, it is well worth a careful read because it explicitly outlines the distinctions of the various "isms" under discussion. I particularly like the distinction between small h and large H humanism. Small h humanism is about individuals, about how each of us should live Socrates' "good life," according to established humanist principles. Large H humanism is about organizations such as HALA. How can HALA best direct its efforts to further the case for secularism, which boils down to maintaining a firm separation of Church and State. This is our challenge.

A Statue Enlivens Evolution's Argument

Almost everyone has heard of the Scopes "Monkey Trial" held in Dayton Tennessee in 1925. John T. Scopes, a science teacher, was put on trial (the trial of the century) for teaching the theory of evolution in a public-school science class, right in the heart of the southern bible-belt. Scopes' lawyer was agnostic Clarence Darrow and the State's lawyer was William Jennings Bryan. Scopes was found guilty in this widely publicized trial, but the Judge wisely fined him the sum of one dollar. After the trial, journalist H.L. Mencken, who covered the trial, is reputed to have said, "a smart dog has more brains than a Tennessee holy-roller."

Now, although it is nearly a century after the Scopes trial, there still exists an aversion to science and evolution in the bible-belt, and in 2005, a statue of William Jennings Bryan was erected in front of the Dayton courthouse.



W. J. Bryan

Recently, recognizing that there are two sides to every court case, a group of Dayton residents suggested that a statue of Clarence Darrow on the court house lawn next to Bryan, might attract tourists and bring some additional revenue to the community.

Despite an anti-Darrow rally, the local historical society approved the erection of the statue and thanks to a \$150,000 donation by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, a statue of Darrow was unveiled on July 14, 2017. Yes, some progress is slowly being made, even in bible-belt territory.



C. Darrow

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