



The Enlightenment



The Newsletter of the
Humanist Association of London and Area
(An Affiliate of the Humanist Association of Canada)

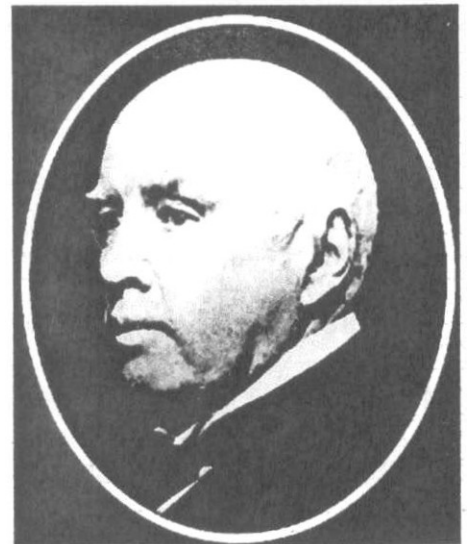
Volume 2

Number 2

May 2006

Robert Green Ingersoll – American Orator and Lawyer

Robert Green Ingersoll, 1833-99, American orator and lawyer, born Dresden, N.Y. The son of a Congregational minister who settled eventually in Illinois, Ingersoll was admitted (1854) to the bar and became a court lawyer. He served in the Union army during the Civil War. Although previously a Democrat, he emerged from the war a Republican, and in 1876 he nominated James G. Blaine for President in his famous "plumed knight" speech. He served (1867-69) as attorney general of Illinois, but his antireligious beliefs prevented any further advance. Known as "the great agnostic," Ingersoll questioned the tenets of Christian belief in such lectures as "The Gods" (1872), "Some Mistakes of Moses" (1879), "Why I Am an Agnostic" (1896), and "Superstition" (1898), drawing large audiences through his eloquence and irreverent wit and provoking denunciations from the orthodox. One of the greatest orators of his day, Ingersoll was acclaimed by Henry Ward Beecher as the "most brilliant speaker of the English tongue of all the men on the globe." His lectures were widely read for a generation, and editions of his works still circulate; the Dresden edition (12 vol., 1900) has been reprinted several times



A Few Quotations of Robert Green Ingersoll

Give to every human being every right that you claim for yourself.

Happiness is not a reward - it is a consequence. Suffering is not a punishment- it is a result.

Happiness is the only good. The time to be happy is now. The place to be happy is here.
The way to be happy is to make others so.

I am the inferior of any man whose rights I trample under foot.

I will not attack your doctrines nor your creeds if they accord liberty to me. If they hold thought to be dangerous- if they aver that doubt is a crime, then I attack them one and all, because they enslave the minds of men.

President's Remarks

In past years the Humanist Association of London and Area has not met during the months of June, July and August. This year our meeting room is available on the second Thursday of these summer months if we wish to use it. The Board has decided to hold meetings in June and July with the topics listed on page 3. An August meeting has not yet been scheduled.

We had a good turnout for our April meeting featuring guest speaker Dr. Chris diCarlo whose talk, "We are all African - Our Great Diversity," was well received. Professor diCarlo brought us up to date on the latest scientific substantiation that Homo sapiens did in fact originate in East Africa and subsequently migrated throughout the world.

Best Regards, Don.

The Board of the Humanist Association of London and Area

President- Don Hatch -472-6167 – e-mail – dahatch@rogers.com

Vice President- Derek Kaill – 434-4096 - e-mail, derekkail@canada.com

Secretary- Harold Koehler -453-5452 – e-mail, hkoehler@execulink.com

Treasurer- Claire Van Daele-Boseret – 451-5962 - e-mail, c.v.d.b@rogers.com

Membership – Ed Ashman – 457-9982 - e-mail, edward017@sympatico.ca

Member at Large – Bill Chefurka – 471-3407 - e-mail, pchefurka@execulink.com

Member at Large - Goldie Emerson- 657-7178- email, gandjemerson@execulink.com

The Humanist Association of London and Area meets at the Cross Cultural Learning Centre, 505 Dundas Street in London, on the second Thursday of the months September to July inclusive. Please use the rear door. The Enlightenment is published quarterly in February, May, August and November.

Visit our web site at www.Popamoto.net/Humanist/Humanists.html Our Web Master is John Pope, jpope@wwdc.com

New members are welcome. Contact Membership Secretary Ed Ashman at (519) 433-9418.

Membership fees are listed below.

	HAC Basic	HAC Limited Resources	Humanist Perspectives	HALA Basic	HALA Limited Resources
Single	\$30	\$15	\$22	\$20	\$10
Family	\$35	\$20	\$22	\$25	\$15
Life	\$500				

Upcoming Meetings

May 11th Haiti and Canada's Roll There – Speaker-Harold Koehler.

June 9th A discussion on religious and non-religious spirituality. - Participants- Dr. Bruce Tallman and Donald Hatch. Moderator-Goldie Emerson.

July 13th Humanism and Activism. - Speaker - John Pope.

Humanist Blessings

A couple of years ago I was asked to be Emcee at a banquet for retired people with whom I had worked. At one of our planning meetings a committee member asked if there would be a blessing. I pointed out that in this age of political correctness we should probably dispense with this formality and the committee agreed. The next year I simply asked for a brief period of silence where everyone could give thanks in their own personal silent way for the camaraderie of the evening, and for the food we were about to receive. This went over very well.

Probably like a lot of other humanists, I cringe whenever I hear long winded Christian religious blessings usually ending with the words, "and Father we ask this in the name of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ." I have since wondered if there is such a thing as a humanist blessing and subsequently learned that Unitarian Ivan Sexsmith has composed just that. It is printed below.

We are blessed by the five senses that we may know the world we live in.

We are blessed by reason that we may begin to understand the realities around us.

We are blessed with intuition that we may turn into and be a part of life.

We are blessed with a heart that we may feel what the other senses can only witness.

We are blessed with free will that we may choose how we live.

Let us take a moment to be thankful for the many blessings we share and to renew our pledge to uphold an environment in which the human spirit may grow.

Shalom.

Another shorter blessing, composed by J.S. Woodward, the founder of the CCF party, that later became the NDP, has been submitted by Bill Chefurka.

We are thankful for these and all the good things in life. We recognize that they are part of our common heritage, and come to us through the efforts of our brothers and sisters the world over. What we desire for ourselves, we wish for all. To this end we take our share in the world's work and the world's struggles.

Here's an even shorter one, submitted by Jackie Emerson.

For what we are about to receive, let us be truly thankful. And let us be ever mindful of those in need.

So if you do not want to be caught off guard whenever you may be called upon to give thanks before a meal, and wish to offer a blessing that will be compatible with humanist principles, be like our secretary Harold Koehler and keep a copy of one of these blessings in your wallet.

(DAH)

**CHANGES IN THE CONCEPT OF GOD THROUGH TEN DECADES IN THE LIFE
OF JACQUELEEN EMERSON, HUMANIST**

Ages 1- 10

God - - maker of babies
protector and comforter
answerer of prayers
helper in times of trouble
score keeper of good and bad deeds
rewarder and punisher

Ages 10-20

God speaks in and through nature
Religious experience of God as Totality, Ground of Being, Ultimate Reality, All that Is
(This powerful vision has been the guide and measure of all my subsequent religious searches and experiences.)
Reinforcement and support for this view of God through poetry.

Ages 20-30

Disillusionment with organized religion and its leaders
Confirmation of a larger view of God through study of other religions, especially Taoism
Embracing of Unitarianism as a medium for continuation of the search for religious truth

Ages 30-40

Questioning the beneficial role of religion in history in view of events such as the crusades, the inquisition, and the Reformation and its aftermath of cruelty and intolerance.
Viewing the Bible as mostly mythology and poetry, but containing some enlightening and comforting messages for humans.
A search for alternative answers through the study of philosophy.

Ages 40-50

Letting go of all hope of finding ultimate truths through religion or philosophy.
Finding answers to questions about religion through the study of evolution and sociology.
Realizing that religion is a human construction for the satisfaction of human needs and for providing answers to ultimate questions.

Ages 50-60

Further erosion of my faith in religion as a solution to anything other than perhaps social needs, a despair reinforced by ongoing and increasing religious wars and by seeing how little comfort religious faith provided family members approaching death;
and at their funerals, the frequently insensitive, intolerant, unloving and sometimes fanatical statements made by officiants.

Some hope still remained that belief in a rewarding and punishing God might help to keep people moral. This hope was quashed by the scandalous behaviour of several popular T.V. evangelists and the revelations of sexual abuse of children entrusted to the care of religious organizations.

Ages 60-70

Acceptance of Humanism as the most honest response to the human predicament. There is no help for us from outer space – It's all up to us, the fortunate dwellers on this beautiful blue planet. We can choose to make of it a paradise or a hell, and by our choices we do so every day.

Ages 70-80

Achieving a grateful and calm acceptance of the world and life as it truly is, without the crutches of fanciful or superstitious constructs.

An acceptance of the universe as an impersonal complex organization of matter and energy, without beginning or end, and quite oblivious to the needs, hopes, dreams and experiences of earthlings, but still with the slight possibility that it possesses some sort of intellectual or spiritual quality. (The presence of such qualities on earth suggests that they may be a feature of the ultimate scheme of things – the ground of being, or ultimate reality, or God, if you will) – but above all else, the search for truth continues.

Ages 80-90

I hope I will be spared the kind of agonies, physical or mental, that force sufferers to call on the God of their childhood for help and deliverance.

I hope that I will be able to accept the finality of death and the fact that the only immortality we have a right to hope for is through our children and grandchildren, the lives we have touched, and the changes we have helped to make, confident in the knowledge that the world is forever changed, for better or worse, as a result of our being in it.

I hope I will be able to accept aging and death as a fair and reasonable price to pay for a full and joyful adventure of 80-plus years on this beautiful planet.

Ages 90-100

The last half of William Ernest Henley's poem, "Margaritae Sorori":

The sun,	So be my passing!
Closing his benediction,	My task accomplished and the long day done,
Sinks, and the darkening air	My wages taken, and in my heart
Thrills with a sense of the triumphing night,	Some late lark singing,
Night with her train of stars	Let me be gathered to the quiet west,
And her great gift of sleep.	The sundown splendid and serene,
	Death.

A Quote From Gloria Steinem

By the year 2000 we will, I hope, raise our children to believe in human potential, not God.

This quote was obviously made some time ago. Regrettably we are "not there yet." We humanists still have a lot of work to do. Let's work together to try and speed things up.

Crude Words

By Derek Kaill

Did you know that, while CEO of the giant oil company Halliburton, Dick Cheney was made head of the vice-presidential search committee...then chose himself? I didn't, but found out by reading the latest eye-opener by one of Canada's greatest authors of political books, Linda McQuaig's "It's the Crude, Dude."

It was just a few weeks before the US presidential election in 2004 that I heard the news that Linda McQuaig was coming to London, Ontario to promote her latest book, "It's the Crude, Dude". She would be in the main branch of my hometown's public library, discussing the oil industry, the Bush administration and the damage that, together, they're doing to our planet. My first thought was, "This is a woman, and a book, that humanists need to know about". Two excited phone calls later, I am granted an interview with Ms. McQuaig, to take place on the day of her talk; November first, the day before the election.

A little nervous, I wait for the best-selling author in the lobby of her hotel. One reason for my shakes, is McQuaig's intellect. Those familiar with her writing, both in book-form and in the weekly column she writes for the Toronto Star, know what an intelligent and insightful woman she is. She arrives at precisely the time we had agreed upon (I was here fifteen minutes early, thinking somehow this might make me less jittery – it hasn't) I stumble up out of the lobby chair and approach her. "Derek?" she asks, with a friendly smile. By the time we're finished introducing ourselves, which includes an admission of my nervousness, Linda McQuaig's humble charm has me much more relaxed. We take a table at the hotel cafe, and both order tea. I begin our conversation with a question I've asked so many, many times before, "Are you familiar with humanism?" It turns out she is only vaguely aware of us (which makes her much more familiar than the majority I have asked), so I offer her a short introductory definition.

McQuaig seems to be in full agreement with the aspects of humanist philosophy we discuss. However, she offers no personal beliefs regarding theism. I reach down into my briefcase to extract a notepad full of questions, but McQuaig says that she finds the Q and A approach less effective than a conversational-style interviewing technique. I follow her suggestion, considering it free advice from a journalist I look up to. I approach an issue that I'd earlier removed from my notebook on a second thought: Michael Moore. I'm curious to know McQuaig's take on his work. Also I tell her that I think the information in her book would reach a much wider and more politically-diverse audience if it were produced on television or as a film. She agrees that the medium is a useful one for informing people, "I'm certainly open to anything like that, but I'm not a filmmaker"

What about working with Michael Moore? She tells me she'd love to work with him, but also that he'd be very hard to contact. In any event, we both agree that "It's the Crude, Dude" would be a useful resource book for anyone making a film about the Bush administration, the big oil companies, and the global warming crisis.

McQuaig tells me her book's title is an intentional tip of the hat to Moore's "Dude, Where's My Country?" We talk a little about the possibility of her new book appearing on screen. She reminds me that there are two separate themes in the book, one of global warming, and one of the oil industry's often disturbing history, from its discovery to modern times.

We discuss Hugo Chavez, the president of Venezuela. The fourth chapter of "It's the Crude, Dude" serves as an introduction to this charismatic, radically liberal leader whom McQuaig interviewed in Caracas, Venezuela.

In September 2000, Chavez held a summit of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in Caracas where representatives of oil producing nations negotiated ways of reducing the financial exploitation of their countries. Before Chavez's intervention, OPEC was practically defunct due to the efforts of Washington to weaken its unity over the past three decades. The Venezuelan president's actions have done much to breathe new life into the organization.

McQuaig talks of the referendum held in Venezuela in which support for Hugo Chavez was remarkable. "It's really important that he won such a significant mandate." she says, "It's going to be very hard for (the U.S. government) to make the case that a leader they are anxious to depose is not a popular leader."

I tell McQuaig how concerned I was to learn about the People for a New American Century (PNAC), the republican think tank that work towards "American Global Leadership." In her book she tells of a letter PNAC sent to President Clinton in 1998, suggesting that he make the removal of Saddam Hussein a priority. McQuaig continues, "That's the group (PNAC) that of course became the backbone of the Bush Administration." She is referring to Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz and Dick Cheney.

We talk a little more about Washington, Big Oil and their ethically distressing relationship, and politics in general. Then I thank Linda McQuaig for her time, and walk out the front door of the hotel, looking forward to her imminent address.

Seven-thirty p.m. and the hall is filled to capacity, the audience waiting to hear the author of (among other bestsellers) "The Wealthy Banker's Wife," and "All You Can Eat: Greed, Lust and the New Capitalism". McQuaig begins by speaking of the important geopolitical issues pertaining to the oil industry, then moves on to the subject of global warming. She tells us that science now assures us the phenomenon is real, it just isn't being taken as seriously as it obviously should. "...there's a small group of enormously powerful companies in the fossil fuel industry...that have fought vigorously to confuse the public into believing that the science isn't very clear."

She goes on to tell us that although after conducting its own studies, the Pentagon itself reported the reality and potential dangers of global warming (including the possibility that Britain, within the next twenty years, could end up submerged under water), the United States withdrew from Kyoto, "The world's attempt to deal with this global warming problem."

On a positive note, says McQuaig, the problem of global warming is one that can be solved. What we have to do is implement alternative energy sources, such as wind and solar power. To this she adds, "Probably the biggest part of the answer is in greater efficiency in the energy we use." Yes. Today I met and spoke with Linda McQuaig, then later attended an informative lecture she presented at the public library. I can't imagine a more suitable way to spend the day before the U.S. presidential election. Of course the result of that election was a disappointment - putting even more power in the hands of big oil - but perhaps if more people get to hear Linda McQuaig's argument, perhaps there is a chance to turn it around.

"Lessons I Learned From My Grandfather"

Arun Gandhi's Lecture Reported by Hilary Cunningham

On January 30th, between 7:30 and 9:30, Arun Gandhi spoke at First St. Andrew's Church in London about nonviolence. It was the 58th anniversary of the assassination of his grandfather-Mahatma Gandhi.

Arun says that nonviolence is not just a conflict resolution strategy – it goes much beyond that. And he uses the term 'nonviolence' as opposed to 'non-violence' because this makes it stand alone, and not just be the absence of some thing else. So nonviolence is not the lack of action – violence is what is the negative philosophy. And we need a positiveness to control our actions. So, contrary to popular belief, nonviolence is not merely turning one's cheek. It is an active philosophy that stands up and faces injustice – just not in a violent way.

It was the 12-year old Arun Gandhi's desire for 'eye for an eye' justice for the humiliation he suffered in South Africa that caused his parents to send him to live with his grandfather for 2 years. There he says his first lesson was that humanity needs to understand anger and use this energy in a positive way, for the good of humanity, rather than for destruction. Although he added later that he believes some violence is inevitable, we can still reduce the level we experience today.

Arun's most interesting point for me was the idea that our little acts can be violent even if we don't realize or intend them to be that way. For instance, when we throw away natural resources this is violence against the Earth. And when this over-consumption deprives poor countries of resources this is also an act of violence. Hence violence is rooted in attachments. This is just a form of what he said the Mahatma called 'passive violence,' whereby we hurt other people with our action/inactions and how we behave and live with other people. This is not 'physical violence,' but passive violence generates anger and feelings of vengeance that are the fuel for physical violence. So, we need introspection to see how we contribute to violence, because change comes from the bottom up, not from the top down.

But the multiplication of violence is perpetuated in our culture of violence, which must be changed. Because how is the next generation expected to be any different than this one if we do not set proper examples? Because, for Arun, nonviolence is about how we bring up our children and the relationships we have with them and all other human beings. But relationships today are built on self-interest. This teaches children to be selfish and to think that they must be successful no matter what the costs – thereby laying the seeds of violence. And selfish people are violent people, because both sides are looking to further their own self-interests. And when parents punish children they are not doing any good, because it takes love and respectful relationships to change people. Blaming children for simply living the only way they know how is not letting parents take responsibility for their actions. So, "we must be the change we wish to see in the world," as his grandfather said.

We are all interdependent with other individuals and all creatures of creation. Arun says we are here for a purpose, which we have to find out. Then we will be able to accept each other as human beings, without gender, racial, economic, etc. labels. Because every time we put a label on someone we are creating a division between us and them, which breeds conflict. So Arun says nationalism is a bad thing. He believes it makes us believe we can isolate our countries and let the rest of the world 'go to pot.' So he says ego is the greatest form of violence. But, again, we are all interconnected, so we need to make some sacrifices to let the rest of the world catch up. Because as Gandhi put it, "the world can provide for everybody's need, but not for everybody's greed."

Arun also talks about the inverse relationship between materialism and morality: when one goes up, the other goes down. Therefore, we need to find a balance. And once we find this peace, if we keep it tucked in our hearts, it will eventually perish and die with us. But if we let it interact with other elements it can spread and be passed on to the rest of the world. Therefore, nonviolence is about changing people through love.

In conclusion, Arun Gandhi's talk was very inspiring. I learned that violence is rooted in attachment with materials and ego. And that nonviolence seeks to change people in this culture of violence through love and relationships that recognize the value of all humanity and our interconnectedness together. (*Hilary Cunningham is a first year student in Social Justice and Peace Studies at Kings College, UWO. She is The Enlightenment editor's granddaughter.*)