

In Praise of Dialogue

Our last issue caused a bit of a stir, as the diversity of letters below indicates. It should come as no surprise that not every humanist believes the same things about the state of the world today, and that's a good thing. It reminds us of our reflexive distaste for rigid

dogmatism, and that we value the thoughtful process by which we arrive at our conclusions as much – if not more so – than the conclusions themselves. May this issue provide the reader with more grist for their mill. •

—Richard Young

Letters

Brava for your intrepid and accurate aria about the new totalitarianism [HP202]. What you analyze so sagely is also heartbreaking.

—Lionel Tiger, Rutgers University, New Jersey



Iwanted to commend you for including the article in the Autumn Issue (202) 2017 by Vir Narain, “Rethinking Our Objectives and Strategies.”

I applaud Vir's comments with regard to the relationship needed between the religious individual and humanism. He notes that:

... this might involve a reorientation of the Humanist attitude towards supernaturalism and theism. ... There are indications that, in rejecting religion altogether, we are also denying that there are any ‘religious implications of our ideas’. ... The best that the Humanist Movement can do in this situation is to strengthen its position in the West. For this it has to assume the role of a successor, *not an enemy*, (emphasis mine) of religion.

I would like to quote from the book, “The Ethical Imagination, Journeys of the Human Spirit”, by Margaret Somerville:

“Toward Finding our True, Ethical, Human Selves Through a Shared Ethics: Whether we frame our quest for a shared ethics in a search for truth or as a search for our true ethical human selves might not matter in terms of results, but the latter is likely to appeal to more

people than the former. Still, no matter how we frame our quest, we must decide what we understand by ‘truth’ in the context of a shared ethics. For instance, to say either that God does or does not exist is not ‘true,’ in the sense that such statements can neither be proved nor disproved scientifically. Nor can we all agree on one position or the other as a fact. Therefore, neither view can define for all of us what we mean by our true, ethical human selves nor found the shared base on which we can establish values we hold in common. If we are going to find a shared ethical base, that base must be able to accommodate both those who believe in God and those who do not – in short, it must not be antithetical to either. This requires that we translate our values, whatever their base, into a language we can all share. ... Here I merely want to emphasize that religious people must try to speak their truth in secular language and non-religious people must avoid speaking their truths in anti-religious language, if we are to engage in constructive dialogue.”

Perhaps something worth considering.

Thank you for your choice of meaningful articles. Much appreciated.

(Note: In my own thinking I take the stance of an agnostic ... a cowardly view some might say, however, it accurately reflects my immediate state of mind. My field of study is the Psychology of Religion. I was ordained to ministry in an interdenominational setting where the thrust of my sharing was on the “practical” and not the “dogmatic” role of religion in one's life. Hence, my inclination to like the view taken by Margaret Somerville.)

—The Rev. Paul D. Owen, Ph.D.
Niagara Falls, Ontario

Sophie Dulesh's article "The Regressive Left and Dialectics" [HP202], although containing a few valid points, was misguided in its duplicitous Fox News style attack on Noam Chomsky, falsely claiming that he "defended Pol Pot". This assertion is ludicrous.

The disgraceful smear campaign launched against Chomsky by *Humanist Perspectives*, like so many others over the years by many neo-conservative and neo-liberals lap poodles, is unwarranted.

Since the 1970s Noam Chomsky has courageously challenged American hegemony, imperialism, illegal and immoral wars, horrific atrocities and terrorism which have resulted in countless attacks on him from the sycophantic right wing corporate media and intelligentsia. All have been systematically refuted multiple times. But those who challenge power are expected to be vilified; of this Chomsky is well aware. He has admitted that if he wasn't the target of vitriol from the capitalist state and their corporate media echo chambers, he'd be doing something wrong.

Noam Chomsky's integrity is unparalleled.

I direct you to an article titled "The Boring Truth about Noam Chomsky: He Does Not Support Pol Pot" by Michael Brull. [<https://goo.gl/V3PCBE>]

Also consider a letter to *The New York Times* regarding this issue by the late Ed Herman [<https://goo.gl/q93Lh2>].

I also take exception to Dulesh's inclusion of Chris Hedges, Glen Greenwald, Jeremy Corbyn, Cenk Uygur and others as members of the oxymoronic Regressive Left. The descent of the left into identity politics is regrettable but to refer to those dissenters such as Noam Chomsky and others as "regressive" seems quaint at best.

Isn't regressive a term generally reserved for calcified conservatives and reactionaries like Ronald Reagan, Bush I and II, Stephen Harper, David Cameron and Donald Trump?

Oddly, Dulesh in her hit list of left wing "regressives" has left out another of my respected leftist intellectuals, Michael Parenti.

—John L Rebman, Chilliwack, BC

I believe you have hit the nail on the head in your recent editorial ("Social Justice – the new totalitarianism?"), and as a result you will be getting the usual denials and attacks. I hope you persist and expand on this topic.

In the last four months, I have woken from my slumber.

Based on who is invited to speak at our local Humanist association, I wonder if Humanism is no longer for skeptics and freethinkers but is instead becoming a venue for the ideology of Critical Theory, an ideology sometimes referred to as Cultural Marxism, which opposes free speech under the guise of not hurting anyone's feelings. On the YouTube channel *The Rubin Report*, ex-Muslim Sarah Haider has stated that the political Right is far more accepting of ex-Muslims than the Left, possibly because they do not fit the political Left's narrative. How things have changed!

Based on my personal observations at our meetings, I have serious concerns about the direction that this movement is taking. At one meeting, some "social justice warriors" of Indian and Pakistani background defended the niqab, and one mentioned friends in the Antifa movement. So why are face coverings important? When I mentioned Lindsay Shepherd at another meeting, a couple of attendees looked annoyed. A young volunteer at a crisis center gave a talk concerning sexual violence only to slip into political rhetoric that "we live in rape culture," and "colonization is the problem"! Challenged by the humanists, she appeared unable to extract herself from the political narrative, repeating "we live in a rape culture" and blaming everything on "colonization."

This leaves me concerned about our education system. Are our institutions of learning little more than indoctrination centers designed to silence critical thought?

Rather than being a beacon of freethought and critical thinking, I fear that Humanism is becoming just another avenue to advance the agenda of the cultural-Marxist social justice warriors.

—Mary Porter, Vancouver, BC