

# INTRODUCTION

This is the 10th issue of *Humanism Today*, a project of the faculty and students of The Humanist Institute. Each issue has addressed a theme emerging from the Faculty Colloquium of The Institute or during the annual conference of The North American Committee for Humanism (NACH). At the 1995 Colloquium, the faculty addressed "Living as a Humanist," exploring, often in quite personal and autobiographical ways how this representative groups of humanists came to those values and how those values affected their daily lives. Needless to say, those discussions reminded us of the varied interpretations of humanism among us.

We share, of course, a common nontheistic, naturalistic way of thinking. For some of us, the critique of religion and irrationalism is central, whereas others put primary emphasis upon practical ways of living out such a philosophy in our own times and places, an historic moment tinged with both conservatism and anomie—both deadly to historic humanism.

The papers here reflect thoughtful but informal presentations and subsequent discussions. In a few cases, revisions have made illustrations more contemporary. One thing that emerges is the ways in which we were humanists before we became Humanists—developing personal philosophical styles before organizational involvements in most cases. Our hope is that this collection will help others recognize themselves similarly and then go on to raise questions about the need for organizations to make humanism more visible and viable to persons who have outgrown traditional beliefs.

The path to humanism is often beset by ironies and small humors (*see David Schafer's essay, which we have put first because it so ably delineates the early stages of the path*). For some of us, humanism is simply the most congenial of several ways of understanding our existences (*see Philip Regal's essay*).

Growing up in a humanist family does not alleviate the need to wrestle with and re-ratify such an orientation (*as is clear from Jane Koretz' essay*). A broad self-classification as humanist doesn't obviate the need for continual self-questioning of those basic assumptions (*see Harvey Sarles' essay*). And the intrusion of tragedy into personal life often becomes the venue of a deepening of humanism (*see Khoren Arisian 's essay*).

For most of us, a humanistic orientation has necessitated organizational critiques and led in pioneering directions (*see Roy Fairchild's essay*). Another kind of critique involved a reordering of the canon of hero/heroine predecessors, adding some of the overlooked and dropping some of the unwisely-celebrated (*see Robert Tapp's essay*). This continual writing/rewriting the humanist narrative is a self-educational as well as a pedagogical task. Not only changing times, but our own new insights and our responses to our critics help reshape this narrative (*see Howard Radest's essay*).

For each of us, living as a humanist in the company of other humanists can be trying. Few have analyzed these difficulties as deftly as two of our faculty (*see Vern and Bonnie. Bullough's essay*). Another difficult bridge for some humanists is the stretch between the intellectual and the emotional/aesthetic. Between the seeming academic lines of the chapter addressing this, careful readers will catch biographical references and allusions (*see Paul Kurtz' essay*).

This 1995 Colloquium represented here concluded by sketching out theme and topic-assignments for 1996. It seemed appropriate to return to the continually-timely question of the relationships between humanism and education. Few institutions are more central to the democratic commitment of humanism as our schools. The current rhetoric of reform barely touches some of

\* Bonnie Bullough died before this article could appear. We continue to miss her wisdom and perspectives.

these issues. The next volume of *Humanism Today* will focus on this topic.

*Humanism Today* has in the past dealt with related questions and plans to continue its effort to contribute to the development of Humanist ideas and their application. By way of a glimpse of the record, we note the themes of this past decade:

- Volume I, 1985: Ethics, Religion, Education, Welfare, Peace And The State
- Volume II, 1986: The Aesthetics Of Humanism
- Volume III, 1987: Science And Humanism
- Volume IV, 1988: Rethinking Humanism: History, Philosophy, Science
- Volume V, 1989: The Enlightenment Reconstructed
- Volume VI, 1991: Meaning In Humanism
- Volume VII, 1992: Humanism And New Age Thinking
- Volume VIII, 1993: Humanism And Postmodernism
- Volume IX, 1995: Humanism's Answers: Speaking To The Challenge Of Orthodoxy

The Humanist Institute was founded in 1982 in order to help in the education of professional and volunteer Humanist leadership. Sponsored by the North American Committee For Humanism (NACH) its students and its faculty are drawn from the university, the seminary and the various Humanist associations- The American Ethical Union, The American Humanist Association, The Canadian Humanist Association, The Council For Democratic And Secular Humanism, The Friends of Religious Humanism (formerly Fellowship of Religious Humanists), The Society For Humanistic Judaism, The Unitarian Universalist Association. Many people have supported the work of the Institute with their energies and their resources. More than 50 students have

completed the three-year course of studies and many are at work in various Humanist organizations as ministers, counselors, Ethical Culture Leaders, association executives, elected organizational officers. Other students have applied their Humanist studies in their work-life as lawyers, doctors, business people, journalists, teachers.

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