

“My experience has been what folks really mean by “diversity” are different shades of the same.” Dr. Anthony Pinn

On Saturday, October 15, 2016, First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis hosted a conference titled **“The Future of Humanism: New Voices for the 21st Century.”** This conference was in celebration of humanist pioneer John Dietrich.

The conference was sponsored by First Unitarian Society, the Humanists of Minnesota, Black Freethinkers of Minnesota, Atheists of Minnesota, The American Humanist Association, and the Humanist Institute. Panelists included distinguished humanist scholars and authors from around the country. Humanist theologian **Anthony Pinn** of Rice University was joined by Macalester College's professor of religion **William Hart** and feminist scholar **Sonita Sarker**; theorist of secularism **Phil Zuckerman** of Pitzer College; and Yale Humanist chaplain **Chris Stedman**.

The panel was moderated by **Stephanie Zvan**, of the *Humanist Hour* podcast.

Stephanie Zvan: Hello everybody. David Breeden is our host today, which means he probably shouldn't need an introduction, but it's really nice to see that we have people here today who aren't with First Unitarian. So, David is Senior Minister here, and the organizer of today's conference. In addition to leading this congregation, you can find him writing about Humanism's role within Unitarian Universalism at "Quest for Meaning" on the "Patheos" blog network. This morning, he's going to give us a quick background on modern Humanism's first hundred years and First Unitarian's role.

[Applause]

Rev. David Breeden: Isn't it cool to be in a room full of atheists?

[Laughter/Applause] That's one of the reasons this place is still here after a hundred years and more!

The people who would eventually found this congregation began meeting under the auspices of a group known as the Liberal League back in the 1870s. The Liberal League was a secularist group of agnostics, atheists, and freethinkers (the term "humanist" wasn't being used as of yet).

The Minneapolis chapter studied the writings of Charles Darwin, and invited the Unitarian minister Henry Symmons to do a series of lectures on the theory of natural selection. Symmons was such a popular speaker that the

members of the Liberal League asked him to stay, and he said he would if they formed a Unitarian congregation. So, from its founding in 1881, First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis has been a gathering of agnostics, atheists, infidels, Darwinists, Marxists, and freethinkers in general. But, no one had yet called them Humanists.

The people in the above list were, and still are, a fractious bunch. We tend to agree on certain core commitments—that all human beings must be treated as ends in themselves, not the means of another's end; that reality is best explored naturalistically; that reason is the most efficient method of exploring ethics; and that the church and the state must always remain separate.

When the congregation gathered to vote on calling John Dietrich as their minister at their annual meeting back in August of 1916, Dr. Dietrich had some marks against him. For instance, he was a pacifist, and the American entrance in the First World War was only six months away.

Some feared that he might even be a capital "R" Red, and 1916 was the second year of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. In addition to pacifism and purported Communism, as a minister, Dietrich had been tried for heresy and de-frocked. Dietrich was also rumored to be an agnostic, at best, and at worst, an atheist. Then there was that other thing—he was calling himself this weird and unknown label, Humanist. What exactly did that mean?

Now, despite these red flags (and I do mean "red" flags), the people of First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis voted to call Dietrich as their minister, and when he began speaking here on November 1, 1916, the congregation was the first in the world to call itself Humanist.

John Dietrich was what the French philosopher Michel Foucault called "the founder of a discourse." That discourse is Humanism.

Humanism was then, and still is, what entrepreneur Seth Godin calls an "FPO"—For Position Only. Mr. Godin says,

when creating a layout, designers put low-res, imperfect, non-final images all marked 'FPO' —For Position Only. They exist to help the client understand the gestalt of the piece, and to give feedback.

FPO: For Position Only. The people of First Unitarian Society all these years have practiced the discourse called Humanism, knowing all the while that

that label "Humanism" is always marked "FPO." Maybe we can get it a little more in focus today. Who knows? It's a work in progress.

As one of Dr. Dietrich's successors, my deepest truth is that Humanism is nothing if not extreme: extreme in theology, extreme in politics, extreme in philosophy, extreme in insisting upon a shared life in a shared world, as the First Humanist Manifesto insisted. Humanism's deepest commitment was, and is, that no person should ever be treated as a means rather than an end, that end being a free, independent, self-actualized, and self-determining human being.

If you are a guest here today, as you wander around this building you will notice a couple of things about our commitments. First, there are no religious symbols here. Second, there are no flags—those symbols of civic religion. In our building, we worship *none of these*. "No gods, no masters," as early Feminists phrased it; no idols of the human mind. We respect first and foremost the human spirit, truly and thoroughly free.

On November 1, 1916, Dr. Dietrich and his new congregation set the fire that we call "Humanism" today. They called it "religious humanism back then," and in the 1960s there came along the term "secular humanism," and now we call it "congregational humanism" because we don't know what "religious" means anymore. We go on watching the powerful and liberating idea called Humanism morph and grow, but we still keep those core commitments.

First Unitarian Society *is* the community that a century of congregational humanist practice creates—for good and ill. This congregation is not an abstraction—we are names and addresses on paper; we are people who support causes; people who feed and cloth human beings. We are people—from cradle to grave—whose actions affect the present and the future.

In addition to this congregation, in this room this morning is the community that Humanism in the Twin Cities has built since those beginnings in 1916. Unknown and perhaps untraceable connections and linages. Free thought.

Here's my challenge to you: let's here, today, set another fire, shall we?

[Applause]

Stephanie Zvan: There is an amazing range of perspectives here. What I am hoping to do with our questions today is to get everybody to answer

them a little bit, and then get a chance to bring these fine folks into dialogue with each other. Not because I think their perspectives conflict, but because I think they will illuminate. I will begin at the end: what has Humanism gotten *wrong* for a hundred years? We've heard a little bit from David about what Humanism has accomplished in a hundred years, and of course, there's always more to tell there, but improvement requires asking the hard questions: In those hundred years, where has Humanism fallen short? Tony, I'm going to start with you because I know you always have the ready answer to that question.

Anthony Pinn: One of my favorite sermons by John Dietrich is titled something along these lines: "If the World Turned Humanist." In that, there's a line that I really love. He said that what this would involve is that folks would then act as if there was no heaven and as if they have only one chance at happiness, so they would go after this one chance of happiness, recognizing that it takes place within the context of the heart beating.

Right. I tie that to Frederick Douglass and his notion that he really only understood the value of prayer when he prayed with his legs. In holding those intentions, it seems to me there are ways in which both of those figures—and I would label them both Humanists—understood that Humanist activity and Humanist values, at their best, have *felt* consequences.

It seems to me where Humanism has fallen short is that it has avoided a certain type of risk, and that risk involves moving beyond the easy conversation concerning separation of church and state, and science, to a much more difficult conversation concerning issues of race, gender, and class, for example, and of sexuality: much more charged conversations. We (Humanists) remain fairly safe, self-assured. We pat ourselves on the back, but we don't really wrestle with these fundamental questions that are heart-felt and are in need of real attention.

William Hart: I will just supplement what Anthony said by saying that I think that one of the failures of Humanism is that it remains an elite formation, and I'm a little bit ambivalent about that. And I'll say why later, but I think it remains an elite formation: it's very, very difficult for people who don't have a certain kind of education—often times some kind of *college* education, to even consider Humanism as a commitment and identity. I don't think that the movement has done a good job of moving out of that set of constraints.

I am going to invoke a term. Take the New Atheists, for example. I agree with just about everything they say, but there is a certain debunking,

sneering quality to the way that they go about making their case which I think can be off-putting to people who haven't been sort of enculturated and socialized within the way in which we go about making arguments in academic spaces. So, I would say that sort of elitism is a failure. But again, I don't want to push that too hard because I think that there are arguments to be made for elitism . . . properly understood.

Chris Stedman: I think that part of why Humanism has struggled is that there are folks who will not come to Humanism because they do not see it responding to the challenges in their lives. To the realities of their lives. And that is because the people who speak—who have historically spoken—for Humanism have tended, more often than not, to be heterosexual, cisgender, white men of a certain status who are interested in certain kinds of conversations. I think breaking out of *that* is critical to the future of Humanism.

The second piece, which I think is related to the first, is that Humanists have not done nearly as good of a job at institution-building as they should, or need to; and institutions, for all of their failures—and there are many—are how people organize. They are how people come into spaces with others who can challenge them to think about their lives in other ways, who can expand their world-views, who can remind them of their commitments and give them opportunities to act on their values.

I think about the research of (Robert) Putnam and (David) Campbell in their book *American Grace*, where they talk about how in the U.S. religious Americans are much more civically engaged than the non-religious—giving more money to charity, both religious and secular, volunteering more in their communities. But Putnam and Campbell also say that a non-religious spouse who participates in their partner's religious community is just as civically engaged. They suggest that morally-oriented spaces—communities, institutions—for non-religious people that orient the functions of religious communities—giving people a space to reflect and to act on their values—could help activate and animate the moral lives of non-religious people. I would like to see Humanists put more weight on the importance of institution —building.

I think that these are two related . . . I don't even want to say "failures." Maybe because I am in Minnesota. [Laughter] I will say just "missed opportunities."

Sonita Sarker: Good morning, everybody. First of all I am very delighted and honored to be on this stage, and before I answer the question (I

promise I'll answer it), I want to make a couple of dedications. One is to the people who have worked, who are invisible to many of us, on whose shoulders I stand, so I want to recognize that I am here because of other people. I want to also dedicate my conversation, my contribution, to the differently-abled and to Indigenous Peoples—people who are often invoked or marginalized in conversations. Moving towards answering the question—have you looked at the Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism and the Six Principles of the Humanist Manifesto? It's doing a lot of good work, right? So, my work here is done! [Laughter]

There is nothing that Humanism hasn't done in the last hundred years, but I am often . . . you know, part of my profession is critique and analysis, but with critique and analysis also comes "well what are your contributions to it?" Rather than pin-point many of the things that I agree with that people have said here already, I'll offer a few words and hope to amplify on them later.

Where I think Humanism could go is picking up on what people have already said; one is Humanisms in the plural, rather than Humanism as a monolithic entity. That's what I would like to approach. Within that plurality, I'd like to talk about Material Humanism, and I will try to elaborate on them as appropriate. Material Humanism—picking up on the materiality of our lives, and that we live in differently-positioned relationships with each other—inequality is a very big part of it. We live in a world in which people are living in precarious conditions, living in violent conditions, and living under Neo-Liberal Capitalism. And so, within that, a lot of good work is still being done. That's what I mean by Material Humanisms.

Another way to look at it is Intersectional Humanisms—that we are simultaneously racialized, classed, gendered, sexualized, and claimed by religion, nationality and ability. So, to look at Intersectional Humanism—how many of you have heard of the Slow Food Movement? Great! Slow Humanism? [Laughter] I'll talk about that a little later.

And, the last thing I have to offer is Flexible Humanisms. And what does flexibility mean, what does spiritual, emotional, intellectual agility mean for Humanisms in order to bring about the kinds of closer look at the conditions we all experience together?

Phil Zuckerman: I want to respond to something that Anthony started us off with, and I was going to sing a song, but I thought that would be a little weird, so does anybody know the song—I'm going to sing the first line, "there's a land that I see . . ." [audience members sing response] Thank

you, okay, we got it—it's called "Free to be You and Me" by Marlo Thomas. I didn't know if you were familiar with it—music, TV show, book —we had it in our house all the time; we played the record all the time. I'm going to come back to that.

So, if I hear what Dr. Pinn is saying about one of the ways we've fallen short, and others have echoed this, is not only this kind of elitism—this kind of highly intellectualized, college educated, patting ourselves on the back, reading—deep thinkers and talking philosophically, but also not addressing the harder things we face, the real deeper fissures, the more heated topics of race, class, gender, sexuality. I think that's all correct.

My question, then, is, what is a Humanist? Is a Humanist someone who lives and abides by the principles Rev. David articulated earlier, or can be read—you know, a naturalistic world-view, treating people the way we would like to be treated and not as means but as ends in and of themselves, using reason and empathy . . . All of these things . . . or is a Humanist someone who labels themselves a Humanist? Because I know a shit-load of Humanists! They just don't call themselves Humanists. But, they are living in a Humanistic way.

So, I think of Marlo Thomas, who was the creative force behind "Free to Be You and Me." She tried to engage, particularly, gender inequality, but also, to a lesser degree, race and class, as well. But, she didn't call herself a Humanist, and if you read "Free to Be You and Me," it doesn't say Humanism anywhere. But it *is* Humanism.

If I think about Du Bois—W.E.B. Du Bois—I have read, I think, everything I could get my hands on. I don't think he ever called himself a Humanist, but he certainly was—in orientation, and in activism. If I think about Nehru in India who fought against colonialism, did he ever call himself a Humanist? I'm not so sure. If I think about Harvey Milk—did he ever call himself a Humanist? So I think we have to ask ourselves, do we mean Humanism that is self-identified as such?—wears a button, wears a shirt, goes to a gathering—well then, yeah, it's been pretty narrow and limited. But if we think about Humanist ideals as enacted by people challenging oppression, injustice, systemic inequality, racism, and sexism, and all these things *without a theistic framework, without believing in supernatural deities or magical things*, then I think Humanism does engage these things.

So, I just kind of wanted to throw that out for conversational purposes you know: what do we mean and who are we talking about, because I would agree that at that kind of institutionalized, self-identified level we are pretty

small, not as diverse as we ought to be in various ways in terms of all of the intersectionalities. We're highly intellectual, and so on and so forth. So that, I think, there's a lot to critique there. But, I just want to make it clear that a lot of people are Humanists in their lives and in their endeavors, just not in their identity—or self-identification.

Moderator: So to follow up, both on what Sonita said and what Phil said: even within self-identified Humanist traditions, are there people whose work we are leaving out when we say we haven't done this as Humanists? Are there people we should be . . . this is something that comes up every time somebody writes another article that says "there are no women in atheism." [smiling and waving] Hi! Are there people that we should be—even as we are being critical—making sure we don't lose their work, and don't let that fall to history the way a lot of marginalized people do? This one is open to anybody who would like to address it.

Phil Zuckerman: There is a great book called *The Village Atheist* that just came out. I'm reading it right now, and I'm learning about all kinds of Freethinkers—male, female . . . so far they're all white, but I'm only about 1/3 of the book in. But, there's a rich history, to be sure. Off the top of my head, for women, I would think of Ernestine Rose, Emma Goldman, Margaret Sanger—trying to think, who else—anybody have any other names?

Sonita Sarker: Sure, I did a search engine inquiry, and it took .04 seconds and there were close to a million results for "Humanists." So, it depends on the range you are looking for—whether you are looking within your own country, or whether you are looking by nationality; whether you are looking across the world—especially people who haven't claimed the labels themselves. In Brazil there is Maria Berenice Dias; in Australia there's Helen Caldicott. There are so many Humanists, that the Humanist Association has awarded a Humanist of the Year from Sakharov to Sagan, Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem So, it's not hard.

Anthony Pinn: Phil raises a good question, and it's a difficult one. It seems to me, in part, the question requires a conversation concerning the intent behind the question. On some level we grab all of these folks because we want to constitute something that resembles community, right?—that we aren't alone. So, we just gobble these folks up.

I tend to be much more comfortable thinking about some of these figures as being Humanism-*aligned* as opposed to being Humanist. W.E.B. Du Bois, for example: there is every reason to believe he was an agnostic, that his religiosity—read theism—was shaky even before he left for Germany. But,

once he hits Germany, it's on! Right? He comes back a very different person. There are ways in which his conversation concerning religion is rather pragmatic, and it kind of speaks to an agnosticism, but does that make him a Humanist? Does it? Humanism-aligned, perhaps, but a Humanist?

In the same way, when I critique black churches, I am critiquing folks who *self-align* with that institution as opposed to the millions of African Americans who say, "maybe there's something out there, and I go to church with my mother on Mother's Day, and I go on Christmas, and I go on Easter." Right? When I hold that institution accountable, I am talking about the people who self-identify. For me, when I talk about Humanism falling short, I want to have privilege in that conversation and put some parameters around that and privilege within that conversation people who self-identify. Because then, I can argue what you claim and what you do, if that stuff doesn't line up.

Chris Stedman: Yes, and I think we have to be careful about claiming, or over-claiming, people for Humanism, or for the Humanist tradition, because it can be an opportunity to give ourselves an out from having to critically reflect on why our institutions have failed in certain ways. If we can say, well these people were also Humanists, and they expand what Humanism has done, it gives us an opportunity to not have to strive to do better, and it also makes it so that we don't have to ask the question: Why are there people that we see who, from our vantage point, look like they are operating in ways that we would consider Humanistic, and yet they're not claiming that label? If we find a way to, sort of, bring them in to what we are doing rather than having to push ourselves to step out to where they are, then we don't have the opportunity to self-reflect critically in that way.

I think that the question of, "who are people that are doing this work who we should be sure to lift up"—I mean, I've had the incredible opportunity over the last five, six, seven years of my life to get to travel to many different parts of the United States and have conversations with people around the book (*Faithiest*) that I wrote and the work that I've been doing, and the richest part of that experience for me has been to meet people who are on the ground, in their communities, doing the work of building and lifting up communities. They are people whose names no one, 20/25 miles away, has ever heard of, and they're the folks whose perspectives are, I think, vital to this conversation. Unfortunately, none of those people are on stage with us right now. And part of it is because they are doing the work on the ground that so often keeps them so busy and that occupies so much of their time that they aren't able to put themselves out there in a way that would get them to be asked to be on this stage.

That's something that I have tried to reflect on a lot, and try to continue to reflect on a lot, even now when I'm invited to do something like this, and I accept that invitation—and I'm very grateful to be here today—please don't take these comments as lack of gratitude—but I often stop and ask myself. Whose space am I taking? Who could contribute to this conversation who's not, because I'm here? Do I necessarily *really* have something to offer to this conversation? Or am I reiterating perspectives that are already being heard? I think that those are hard questions to ask. Certainly they are hard questions for me, and I don't know that I necessarily always do as good of a job of living out the responses to those questions that I would want to. But I think it's worth reflecting on as we think about this question.

William Hart: I would add a footnote to what's been said. For me there is an intellectual, conceptual, reflective, recursive aspect to being a Humanist. It's not simply a matter of a set of practical commitments. Humanists don't have a monopoly on those beautiful, practical commitments that we just described. There are all kinds of people—many who are theists—who are just as committed to those ethical components of Humanism as we are. So, we can't misuse the term "humanism" in a way that many people misuse the word "religion" and sort of recruit people to their cause. I think the practical commitments are important, but the conceptual, intellectual, and reflective components of Humanism are just as important.

Sonita Sarker: A couple of things: One is the urgency and the other is respect. So, urgency is about our moment in time today, and the urgency or need to claim labels. Also, our urgency, as in Feminism, as in Humanism, to recruit for ourselves a body of people whom we can say, "stand behind us or stand with us," right? So, think about this question: What is the need to claim socialism, atheism, feminism, humanism, at this point in time? That would put some parameters on what we are trying to do.

The second aspect is self-identification, and I think it's very important that we respect people who identify themselves as such. But the other side of it is that urgency that we want to bring within our communities people who haven't identified themselves. Virginia Woolf never said she was a feminist, but she's the basis of feminist syllabi and discussions. So, how do we go about clarifying and respecting our self-identifications?

I feel your point deeply, Chris. I think about taking up the space of people who might be here to do the work as well. I think part of that is advocacy and representation. That's how I rationalize my place here: that I am doing

the work or bringing the word from other people, and serving as a *conduit* rather than as an entity in and of itself.

Phil Zuckerman: Thanks, everybody. I guess I want to just keep throwing things out that are maybe a little bit . . . pushing things. I guess when I really was thinking about this question, leading up to this event, I was really struggling with something, so maybe you don't, and maybe you have different . . . I am curious if it's different for you. To me, one of the things I really never liked about religion was I didn't like people telling me I ought to . . . whatever! You *ought* to read this, you *ought* to believe this, you *ought* to come here on Sunday, *ought* to get involved in this. Maybe that's not the case for you-all, but I really didn't like that aspect of religion—like they *had* something and I really ought to have it too.

I love soccer, I love it—like it does a lot for my life. It makes me a happier person. It makes me a better father, all this stuff. But I don't tell other people, "hey, man, you *really ought* to play soccer too." Figure it out for yourself—I don't like to preach that. I mean, I might mention it, yeah, I'm playing soccer on Sunday, but I am really not into missionizing at all.

So, one of the contradictions, or paradoxes, for me, is that I definitely love being a Humanist. I was looking at the pamphlets out in the hallway, you know, about Humanism, and I started gathering a few and I was like, "oh, man, I can bring a few of these back to my class at Pitzer, and I could talk about this event, and I could show these pamphlets to the students, and be like, 'yeah, you really should check this out,'" and then I stopped, and I was like, "man, that's too freaky—what am I, a missionary, here?" [Laughter]

You know, I kind of stopped myself. So, what is hard for me is, with Humanism, it's like . . . what I am trying to say is . . . if we want to engage others, and we want to do that as self-identified, declared Humanists and not just Humanists by default, or this aspect or that aspect . . . I struggle. I don't *want* to do missionary work as a Humanist. I want people to accept the ideals and values and principles of Humanism, but I am very uncomfortable saying, "I am a Humanist, you should be too—you should wear this pin, and you should have this tee-shirt, and you should go to this congregation."

I am happy if they do, but I struggle with that, so I think that's what limits Humanism's reach. Whereas religious people don't seem to have any problem with that. They love that, and they thrive on it, so they can point to "look what we're doing, and look at what our group is doing, and look at what our leaders are doing, and look at what our prophets say," but I struggle as a Humanist with wanting to replicate that, and since I don't want

to replicate that, it does limit Humanism's reach, Humanism's community, Humanism's ability to have good P.R. I am just curious as to how others struggle with that.

Anthony Pinn: Just a couple of things. I'll respond to that, and then I'd like to back-track a bit. I personally have no problem with folks proselytizing, whether they be theist, or what-have-you. What happens within the context of personal and private engagements really isn't my business. But, I think one of the difficulties for Humanists is that we tend to . . . my experience has been, anyway . . . we tend to rip something away without replacing it. So we don't give people a soft place to land.

It's as if telling them, "religion is crap" is all they need to hear. [Laughter] Right? They need a soft place to land! It seems to me that's particularly the case for some of the more battered populations. So, for example, as an African American, to hear that the black church offers you nothing is a piss-poor response to my need! Right? Because at the very least, you can hide out there in the church, and if the sermon is the price you pay for social connection and cultural inclusion, then you pay that price! [Laughter]

There are a lot of folks doing this, yeah? So, to simply tell them, "what you're going on Sunday at Mount Zion Bedside Baptist Church is irrelevant"—whatever!—right? A soft place to land, right? It seems to me that's a major issue.

I'd like to back-track a bit, and it seems to me that part of the difficulty with what it means to be a Humanist is the counterpoint. That the counterpoint for us tends to be religion. But, what is that? And it seems to me that, for me, the more compelling point of opposition is theism as opposed to religion. I mean, religion is just a bonding. You just wrestled with this, Phil, in the wonderful book we just finished reading (*Living the Secular Life*), and I know Bill (Hart) wrestles with this.

Religion. I think about religion as a kind of strategy, a technology. A device we use to try to come up with some sort of meaning in a context that doesn't seem very meaningful. It's a strategy. It's a tool. So, to be in opposition to that doesn't make much sense to me, because I am just as comfortable arguing that Humanism or atheism can constitute a religious orientation based upon its effort to wrestle with meaning, whether it's achieved or not. But, again, for me the stronger point of opposition revolves around Humanism and theism.

Moderator: I am going to take this opportunity, because this is a great segue. We're talking about whether we are comfortable putting our values forward, and talking about having something positive, and one of the advantages of Humanism over simple non-belief is that it allows us to come together and have those conversations about what we want those values to be—how we want to articulate them, as well, but—what should a Humanist value system look like?

Chris Stedman: Well, I am going to do what we so often see in our Presidential debates, which is I am going to hear the question and I am going to say something else. [Laughter]

No, I'm just kidding. Actually, I promise I will circle back to that. The thing I wanted to add, which I think is actually related, is, when I got to Yale, to start the Yale Humanist Community there, almost right away I sat down for coffee with a really fabulous religion professor at Yale named Kathryn Lofton, and her first question—like before I even fully sat down—was, "tell me why Humanism is not a religion." Right from the start we had this really challenging conversation.

As someone who studied religion at Augsburg College here in Minneapolis and continued to study it in my graduate work at Meadville Lombard Theological School in Chicago, this is something I've really wrestled with. I think that part of the allergy that some of us feel when we think about Humanism as a religion has to do with a certain kind of religious expression that we found challenging. And yet, even now, as someone who has been doing Humanist community organizing for the better part of a decade, I find myself at this point realizing that there are some real limitations to avoiding some of the things that I find myself sort of averse or allergic to.

For example, that being told what to think or not to think. I am very averse to that. And, yet, I think about when I was in high school, when I started high school, my mom—who is my favorite person in the world—told me that I needed—not that she really *wanted* me to or that she *thought* I should really, strongly consider—she said I *had* to try out for a team, a team sport.

Now, just seeing me you can probably tell that that was not something I was super thrilled about. I was also coming out of the closet at the same time, and I was the only person who was openly queer at my high school, so it felt risky and unsafe in certain ways. I was really against this idea, and part of why I was against this idea is that I had three siblings who were all very athletic and I was the bookish one, and that was my identity, and so she was pushing me to really go far outside of my comfort zone. I fought against her,

and was really, really against it, but I lost that battle because it was my mom, and if you know my mom, there's no winning there. Well, ultimately, I won because what happened was I ended up trying out for cross country because I thought, first of all, it was not a team sport, really, and second of all I was like, I'll just do it and I won't make the team, but I didn't realize that in cross country, everyone makes the team. [Laughter]

So, I ended up on the cross country team. But here's the thing—I started out the absolute worst, and by the end I actually got "Most Improved," and I found myself enjoying this, and I did it again the next year, and I got "Most Improved" again the second year, in part because I didn't practice between the two years. [Laughter] But, to this day, I run three to four days a week. I love it. It's a hugely important practice in my life, and it's something I would never have discovered if my mom had not challenged me and pushed me to look at something that I wouldn't otherwise consider, and try something that I wouldn't otherwise consider.

I am rambling at this point, but there is a wonderful Humanist at Harvard named Vanessa Zolton. She's the Assistant Humanist chaplain at Harvard. She co-hosts a podcast called "Harry Potter as a Sacred Text." I definitely recommend checking it out, if you'd like. She talks about her interest as a Humanist in thinking of texts as sacred. For her, it started with *Jane Eyre* and what that means to her is that she decided to read *Jane Eyre* in a different way. Not in a critical way, sort of looking for all the things to pick apart, but rather with something that she calls "experimental certainty." She wanted to read it with the idea that it had something for her, something to offer her, something to teach her, and she was going to sort of put her faith in that, and read it and see what came out of the text for her. That for her felt like a very different approach. It felt like an opportunity for the text to impose something on her, even though she's very resistant to people imposing things on her.

I feel the same way. So I think that there are opportunities. When you asked this question about what Humanism should look like, or what should Humanism actually mean in terms of our convictions . . . I think it's a conversation a lot of us are very uncomfortable having. We don't want to say, "this is what Humanism should mean or stand for" because we don't want to speak for other people. But, I think we need to become a little bit more comfortable with the idea that Humanism means certain things, and doesn't mean other things, and that that is a conversation that is critical to have for the future of Humanism.

William Hart: Yes. I would venture to say that there is not a person in this room who doesn't have certain value commitments, and who doesn't make certain normative judgments. We all think that some things are good and some things are bad; some things are right and some things are wrong. We need to own that. I happen to think that an atheistic way of living is preferable to a theistic way of living. I am not ashamed of that, and I am not averse to making that case.

Now, there are good ways of making that case, and there are bad ways of making that case. Again, I doubt that there is a single person in this room who likes to be imposed upon—but that's not the only way of making a case for your set of values and your set of moral commitments. So, I mean, I think we are all averse to the kinds of experiences you've had. I've had them as well. But that's not the only way to go about making the case for why certain value commitments are better than others, and certain normative commitments are better than others. I think that's our obligation, as atheists, as Humanists, as naturalists.

Sonita Sarker: I'm feeling like I'm Alice in Wonderland going down the rabbit hole. Suddenly I had this idea, from what you said, Tony—the overlapping circles are Humanism, theism, and atheism. So I wouldn't put the "ism" as the only other to my position.

I don't know how many of you have heard of Paulo Freire? A Brazilian educator who has worked with landless farmers in Brazil? His basis is very Humanist. He claims that title, too. But it's based in Liberation Theology. So, where Secular Humanism crosses over into institutional religious humanism, and theism, for me is a mysterious area now, suddenly, that arises from your question. I'd like you to think about that.

Yes, I feel the same hesitation about saying *what* something should look like. I think that we arrive at that by consensus. But, what I would like people to think about in terms of what our value systems look like is acknowledging the material consequences of our inequalities. We all do not walk into the room as equals. And, to acknowledge how we function with each other on the basis of the inequality that is, as Audre Lorde—an African American feminist—put it: "We actually walk *through* our differences, not around them."

So, what a value system would look like, to re-generate what the wonderful value systems of justice, compassion, equity, respect, and reason and all that, is not to use all of those as weapons of mass intimidation, but to use them in terms of how we differently look at our material needs and how our

values arise from our material inequalities, in a sense that a person who is struggling to survive and wondering where their next meal will come from considers justice or equity or compassion very differently from one who doesn't have to think about those things. How we acknowledge those inequalities within the room and amongst ourselves is the basis, I guess, some of the fertile ground from which our value systems can generate.

Anthony Pinn: This is a treat for me! I've not had an opportunity to talk with Sonita in what, 13, 14 years? So I thank you for that. I think you bring up a good point that I want to push a little bit. It seems to me there are ways in which Paulo Freire informs Liberation Theologies and ethics, but my read suggests clear distinctions. For example, between Paulo Freire and (Father Gustavo) Gutierrez. I think in terms of how issues of moral evil, human suffering get resolved. For Gutierrez, he points to the Book of Job. It isn't very satisfying that there's something redemptive about it. But it seems to me, for Paulo Freire, it's much more grounded in anthropology. It's much more grounded in the human capacity to do good and ill. I kind of think about it this way—that Gutierrez can represent Augustine's perspective on people, right? We're just kind of screwed up and we need some help getting this right. But Paulo Freire is more along the lines of Pelagius: We just follow a bad example, so let's correct the example and get to work.

Moderator: Are we comfortable generally with the content of the values that we have, even if we need to challenge ourselves in terms of how we think about them?

Chris Stedman: I am not always so comfortable with the content of my own values, and this is why I am drawn to community work. I need a space where I can be held accountable to the things that I say are important to me. Because, if left to my own devices, I often will not live those values out. I need people to help remind me, and I also want to help play that role for others. *This* comes back again to *that*. I think it's a fine line to walk—we certainly don't want our communities to feel unsafe; we don't want our communities to feel like spaces that are coercive, and I think the consensus model is at the heart of how we should arrive at the values that we are holding each other accountable to.

But, this is why I am a person who really benefits from and gets a lot of fulfillment out of being in community, because I feel that I am a better person when I am, and I'm living in a way that is more aligned with my highest values when I am in a space where I am being held accountable to those. A lot of that comes not just from being in community with like-minded others, but also being in communities that are engaging in hard

conversations that are bringing voices in that can teach and challenge me, help me see beyond the limitations of my own experiences and perspective, and I think that that is, again, something that, for Humanism, is very important moving forward.

Moderator: As we look at where Humanism needs to go in the next hundred years . . . We've talked about where it's fallen short. What strengths does it have that we can build on, as a movement or as a philosophy?

Chris Stedman: We Humanists . . . we like to talk about what we *don't* agree with, or what we have a *problem* with, more than what we *do* value. Well, I'll speak for myself: I find that easier often. [Laughter]

Phil Zuckerman: I'm a little bit . . . I guess I'm the skeptic today in a room full of skeptics. I don't know; maybe my sugar high from my cereal is wearing off or something. [Laughter] But, I am really struggling with this. I mean, I agree with what's been said, and I especially appreciate that there's many ways—there's a difference between imposing and not imposing, and all my work is obviously about trying to convince people that Humanism is awesome! Every book I've ever written. So I guess I *am* a proselytizer; it's just a different way. So, I never really thought about it. It's obvious, for sure.

But, I guess when I think about the future of Humanism, I think we have a PR problem. So, for example, I am in my child's elementary school, and a mom comes up to me and says, "Oh, I heard you on the radio and I don't know what to do. Me and my husband are raising our children without religion, and when they asked us what we were, you know, I said we're nothing. But that just sounds so bad, to say you're nothing, and I don't know what to do . . ." [Laughter]

I said to her, "Tell them that you're secular humanists!" And their response was, "what is that?!" [Laughter] And it was a fair question! So, I guess I could have taken her to coffee, given her a list of readings, given her the back of *Free Inquiry*. I could have given her a list . . . you know, I could do that. It's just not my style. But I think that most people don't know what secular means in this country; most people don't even know what humanism means. So, yes, I think on a certain level we still have a lot of work to do, even though I'm uncomfortable doing that kind of work—of getting the message out. Because, when I tell people about secular humanism—as soon as I describe humanism—they're like, "oh, yeah: that's me, that's me." They just don't know the word yet.

But, now I am going to get back to my more curmudgeonly self. So, let me just tell you a quick anecdote here. A story about my daughter coming to Macalister College. So, my daughter is 18 years old. I am an agnostic, atheist, Humanist, secular humanist, *et cetera, et cetera*. And my wife is way more secular than me, because she would never even bother having the conversation, couldn't be bothered to even read a book about it because she's way more interested in the things of this world, and doesn't obsess about being a Humanist or religion!

So, our children have been raised very secular at home. However, we are culturally, or ethnically, Jewish. I was raised that way, my wife wasn't. Still, all that means is that we celebrate a few holidays, and my dad's a Yiddish Professor. So, anyway, they know there's some Jewishness there. So, my daughter comes to Macalister a month and a half ago, whenever it started, and what does she do? She finds the Jewish student group on campus, and it's instant community. Instant. She's taking a class taught by this guy, Rabbi Barry. She loves him. Of course, he admits he's an agnostic, although he's a Rabbi. [Laughter] It's like, *of course!* that's no surprise.

So, they're reading literature, and discussing Philip Roth, and they're watching *A Serious Man*, and then on Friday night she's going to Shabbat dinners. She has this instant community that's totally based . . . and I agree with Dr. Pinn—it's not about theism. It's about community, and ritual, and really, most importantly, heritage. They really have this common sense of grandparents, and where our families are from, and what kind of things we remember from our childhood, and so forth. It's very powerful and visceral. But, there's a lot of God in the . . . you know . . . fortunately it's in Hebrew, so nobody understands it. [Laughter]

That's the most awesome part of being Jewish: you don't know the nonsense you're saying. Unfortunately, I went to Israel and learned Hebrew, and that ruined every prayer for me. It's like, ah no! It's like my daughter, she observed Yom Kipper this year. We don't do that, and she's said, "Yeah, it's so powerful; it was just amazing, the space and everything." And I was like, "Yeah, that's great, that's great," and, being the jerk I am, I said, "you do realize that the central liturgy of Yom Kipper is that homosexuals need to be stoned to death—Leviticus 18-22." No Jews know this, cause it's all in Hebrew! [Laughter] And she's like, "Thank's a lot!" and I'm like, "Sorry, sorry."

I *am* coming to a conclusion. How would Humanists replicate this? If my daughter was raised in a Humanist home, and she was told she was a

Humanist, and we went to a Humanist congregation—if there was one nearby—there isn't one where I live; I know there are in other parts of the country. And if she goes off to college, is there going to be a group of Humanists that have a deep heritage that transcends generations; that connects to decedents and ancestors? I think this is the DNA that we talk about. That, to me, is a chain of memory—that linkage—and that's where Humanism . . . again, it tends to be intellectual; it tends to be critical; it tends to be debunking. But, do we create heritage?

I really would like to see that happening, and I now believe that the answer is sort of secularizing religion so that it's keeping religion, it's just de-the-izing it. Keeping the religion, just taking the theism out. But keeping the rituals . . . but then you've got all these silly words. So, I don't know how we're going to navigate that. To me, Unitarian Universalists do it the best. Like that's the answer; the best of religion—the community, the ritual, the heritage—without the silliness. Sorry be a New Atheist, but UU numbers are pretty small. I don't know where we're going to go with that.

Chris Stedman: Yes, I think that is a weakness—not having this, sort of, larger story that we step into. That's something I hear a number of people articulate. I have a friend who's a rabbi, who's an atheist, and he says this is the reason why he does his work in Jewish communities—because there is this rich history and stories that he can access that are instantly familiar to people. We don't have that.

The flip-side is, we have an opportunity—even though it's a great challenge—we have an opportunity to create things without inheriting a certain amount of baggage that comes with having to carry forward traditions that for a lot of people may be associated with trauma, or may be associated with family issues, or harmful experiences they've had in their lives. But, it's the kind of thing that can't just be invented wholesale, and this is where I think borrowing from religious traditions is not just appropriate, but smart. Alain de Botton talks about this in *Religion for Atheists*. He talks about religious traditions being human projects. So we, as Humanists, should see them as things that we can use, and that we can learn from.

We are trying to do that in our community based out of Yale. And yet, we constantly encounter this, sort of, nervousness or this kind of allergy. We don't do music, for example, because for some people collective singing feels too religious. Yet, we did a Winter Solstice event last year where we did music for the first and only time, and people loved it, and it was great, and so my thought was, "great, well, now we're going to do music, because we

did it once and it was great." But, no—no one wanted to do music again!
[Laughter]

They were okay with doing it on the Solstice, and, of course, there are disagreements in the community. Some people want to do it, and some don't. It's both a challenge and an opportunity that we face as Humanists as we try to build institutions. We have the opportunity to learn from what has worked well in religious communities, and what hasn't, but we also have the challenge of not having the same, sort of, platform to build on—the kind of familiarity and the kind of tradition that a lot of religious communities really benefit from.

If you move somewhere else, or if you go off to college, you know that you can walk into a community. Even though each community is different in its own way, there are certain things about it that are going to be familiar; there are going to be touchstones that will feel comforting and connecting for you in a way that I can't say that I can walk into a Humanist community right now and expect the same kind of experience, at all. They vary so much from community to community, and I think that is a limitation that we have.

Anthony Pinn: I think what I find most compelling about Humanism, when it's at its best, kind of revolves around its posture towards life. This is what I mean by that: there's a thinker I'm trying to understand. I wish I had been introduced to him thirty-five years ago. I would have had an easier time in articulating my thoughts and my passions, but I am in conversation with him now and that will have to do. It's Albert Camus. I've been re-reading *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, and there is a line—the very last line—of that short essay. He says, "One must imagine Sisyphus happy." For me, that says it all, because embedded in that is his response to the question, "How does one live without appeal?" It is, "One must imagine Sisyphus happy." What I find compelling about that is a comfort with the need to struggle in a way that is perpetual.

So, what I find most compelling about Humanism coming from that is, at its best, a strong and robust sense of accountability and responsibility, and a measured sense of realism. I am a product of the Civil Rights Movement. Much of what I have is a result of my people who struggled on my behalf, not even knowing me. So I benefited from that. One of the shortcomings for me of the Civil Rights Movement was the assumption that outcomes are guaranteed—"the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice," "we shall overcome." What I find more interesting is an approach to struggle that suggests we do it because we can. It's our last, best effort. Not because there are cosmic handcuffs, but we do this simply because we can.

And rather than this grand, robust sense of outcomes, we find something useful; something that speaks to our integrity and the integrity of life just in the struggle itself.

Sonita Sarker: So many things I want to say, but I want to try out one thing with your cooperation. Music and song are dear to me, and I'd like to do a little bit of collective chanting. [Laughter]

Those of you who want to follow . . . there's a point behind this. Say, "papa" [papa]; "hanau" [hanau]; "moku" [moku]; "akea" [akea]; "Papahanaumokuakea" [Papahanaumokuakea].

Do you know what you are saying? It's the name of the Marine National Monument that President Obama just consecrated off of the Hawaiian Islands. The largest Marine National Monument, and it is designated as a U.N. World Heritage Site. So when you talk about environmental justice, it's part of this. You've got to be able to chant the name. It's just magical—Papahanaumokuakea; what's wrong with that? [Laughter]

But, what you just did demonstrated one of the strengths of . . . I am so gratified that you had the . . . what, faith? the trust? to follow along; and the flexibility to enunciate words that we are not accustomed to. That flexibility is enormously the strength of that continuous struggle, right? What I was calling flexible Humanism earlier.

The hard question behind that flexibility and that trust—and I am really grateful that you chanted with me, the name of something real—is, what are your non-negotiables? That's the hardest question to answer through the struggle. Okay, we say we believe in justice, compassion, charity, progress, and freedom. When you come face-to-face with people who have survived war and violence, and are today struggling against ISIS —where does your notion of a non-negotiable stand? Because, the other side of flexibility is that uncompromising commitment to values. That's what I am struggling with. I don't have an answer. Don't look at me. That's where I wanted to go.

William Hart: By way of trying to respond to the question of what should Humanist values look like, let me just briefly describe my reality. We're Humanists, we're atheists, we're naturalists, and I can talk about how I view the relationship between those at some point, but, we live in the world that we live in. So, this is my reality: I am an atheist; I am quite explicit in my writing and in the way I live my life that I am an atheist, but I am in a mixed marriage. My spouse is traditionally religious. My daughter is traditionally religious. My son is an atheist. My birth family is extremely religious. I am

the white sheep of the family. [Laughter] They are religious conservatives; even, perhaps, Fundamentalists in their beliefs. That's my reality. Now, even though I am an atheist—a self-described atheist—and I am very explicit about that, I still attend church. I attend church because my spouse attends church. But, I also attend church because church isn't only about the affirmation of theism. This goes back to the point that Anthony makes. I'm tied into that institution in a variety of ways, and disavowing theism doesn't disconnect me from that institution in total. I am a part of multiple institutions, all of which are problematic in multiple ways. But I do not disassociate myself from those institutions because they are problematic and imperfect in a variety of ways.

That's my reality as a Humanist, and I would suspect that my reality is not all that different from the realities of others. So, to address the question of Humanist values directly, I guess, I think there are probably some broad commitments that we share. David mentioned some of those in his introductory remarks. But beyond that, I don't see how there can be a set of values that are deeply shared. I know Humanists who are Libertarian, and sort of liberal in their orientation. They accent individualism in a way that I would not. You know, I am basically a Communist, and so I have a deep suspicion of Libertarianism and the kind of individualism associated with liberalism, and so that's a very, very, deep difference in values, and in how we imagine social life, in how we imagine solidarity—what we think we owe to each other. I think that on a very broad, general level, there are some values that hold Humanists together, but I think the deeper you dig—the more specific you become—the more concrete the particular engagements you are involved in become, the less shared Humanist values will be.

Phil Zuckerman: Yeah, I mean, this is where Karl Marx and Ayn Rand join hands, right? [Laughter] They're both atheists and couldn't be more different. Thank you for that.

I guess all I would add to this is—thanks for everything that everybody said—there's so much to respond to. I think, in terms of my values, there's standards that most Humanists would agree on: that here-and-nowness is all there is . . . there's nothing beyond, and all that implies a naturalistic world-view; a morality based on empathy and the elevation of the suffering of sentient beings; a strong emphasis, I would hope, on social justice and human rights.

But, of course you're right, there are a lot of "humanists" or "atheists" who don't share that agenda. What I think we often—if I could just add to your question—what we don't talk about enough is what I would call a sort of

accepting of mystery. I think this is where we just have to acknowledge that we don't have answers to the big questions. That's usually where, when I am engaged with theists, they will throw that out: "Well, where did we come from? How did it all begin?" And one of the most painful parts of being—when Richard Dawkins was being interrogated by Bill O'Reilly and the whole thing about the moon and the tide, or whatever—but Bill O'Reilly did say, "well, where does it all come from?" and Richard Dawkins says, "we're working on it." [Laughter] That's very British, scientific, you know—and I'm always telling my students, my friends, or my poor wife, that I would rather . . . I think that we, as Humanists, should also acknowledge—that I think we are the most humble in these great claims. We are the ones who say we don't really know what it's all about. We really don't know why there's *something* instead of nothing. We really don't have any answers to those big questions.

Now, how do we want to treat the person standing in front of us, or living near us, or by us? How are we looking at the people who are being exploited so that we can sit here and talk about what it means to be a Humanist? Those are the kinds of things that I think we as Humanists should emphasize. Not just, "Oh, we believe in reason, and we believe in science, and separation of church and state, and human rights, and women's rights, and gay rights," but that on these big, grand questions, we're far more humble, actually, I think, than most, because we admit to a certain deep ignorance, and yet we still live accordingly; we still strive to be happy; we imagine ourselves as happy.

William Hart: I just wonder, though, if we can actually take that out. I mean, granted, I think any Humanist will acknowledge that there are mysteries about the universe that we don't know. But not knowing is not liberating us from the responsibility. Let me put it a different way: not knowing does not make us immune from believing. Even though we might not know, we still have beliefs, and we have to take responsibility for our beliefs. We can argue with other people who have different beliefs. I guess I don't shy away from those kinds of conversations—which we might say are metaphysical—that theists have a different answer to.

Anthony Pinn: I would push it a little, Phil. It seems to me I am not quite convinced that there is this humility. So, we'll take science, for example. [Laughter] There may be an element of humility with respect to what science allows us to know, but not with what science does. Right? If there were this humility with respect to what science does, it would be much easier for folks to recognize that science and scientists exist within cultural worlds, so they would not be confused by the need to match their interest in

science with the ways in which “scientific” investigation has solidified and reinforced some really nasty stuff. How else do you explain the Tuskegee Experiment? So, I am not convinced that there is this general humility.

Phil Zuckerman: Let me clarify: I was saying the question is sort of where we are trying to go. I wasn’t saying where we *are there* . . .

Moderator: So, we actually got off a little bit, our strengths. [Laughter] Which is fine because I think that was a great contribution to the question of values. I think most of what I’ve heard as particular strengths from Sonita and Tony, and talking about—and again, this is probably more aspirational than actual in many cases, as Bill pointed out—but having a common place, and a common set of, at least, basic values, even if we don’t rank them the same way, to explore problems. Does that feel accurate to everybody as something that, you know . . .

Anthony Pinn: One more time, please?

Moderator: Even if we don’t agree on exactly what our values are . . . even if we come into conflict with each other . . . Humanism, on the broad scale, gives us a place to stand together, doesn’t it? To have some assumptions that we don’t necessarily need to argue about every time we want to tackle a topic, for example. I’ll bring up the Secular Social Justice Conference because that’s one of the best examples. That, and the Women’s Secular Conferences. People coming together who have a significant set of shared values, and yet, significant differences, and being able to discuss those differences from a place of shared values and a certain amount of trust. That gets us further in terms of the kinds of answers that we can consider; and how much we can move the discussions forward. And, I am wondering if, broadly, that is something that Humanism can be to us. I ask the easy questions!

Anthony Pinn: I won’t fight you on it, but I think just one of the other things that Chris has helped us realize is that the kind of work that Humanists say they want to do can’t be done in isolation. It has to involve partnership with folks with whom we may vehemently disagree. The question from my vantage point is that we often too quickly move to agreement because that’s comfortable. We can hold hands and be comfortable. But the greater challenge is to do the work together, recognizing our differences. Honoring and respecting those differences. So, I won’t fight you on that, but I would want to add just this other element.

Moderator: Thank you! Let's move on with the last of the prepared questions. We might even get in an audience question or two. What voices are currently missing from Humanist conversations, and what do we need to do as individuals, as congregations, as a movement, to make sure they are included moving forward? Sonita? You look like you're ready to say something.

Sonita Sarker: Yes, ma'am! I am going to dispute the question first! Who is missing . . . *Who* is missing, right? Not *what* is missing?

Who is missing, has some advantages, and has some demerits. "*Who* is missing?" tries to pinpoint individuals or communities on the basis of some qualities, such as race or ethnicity, or sexuality, or gender. So it fixes in place and also clarifies, in that sense, who is missing.

The problem with the question is that it *creates* the kinds of compartments that we are trying to fight. It creates what Deborah Jian Lee, an Asian-American feminist, calls "bean counting." And we're used to that. I want to defy bean counting—that is, identifying individuals in terms of their visible differences, putting them all in a room and saying, "now, therefore, we are diverse." That is the problem with the question "*Who* is missing." It helps us to identify whom we can approach, but it doesn't help us talk about the essential differences that lie among us already.

On the one hand I want to answer the question by saying, "Yes, Indigenous Humanism is missing from the conversation." It doesn't show up in the scholarship; it doesn't show up in our events and activities; it doesn't show up in terms of our outreach, *et cetera*. Right? That's one way to utilize the question.

But the problem I have is fixing in place: the fixing in place of identity, in my view, has a lot to do with the consumer capitalist culture we are in. We tend to identify in terms of objects that we *can* identify, consume, embrace, and then congratulate ourselves. That immediate gratification of having diversity is, for me, a mistaken way to go about Humanistic discourse or inquiry. So, that's a non-answer! [Laughter]

Moderator: That's a good answer, actually. It lets me clarify, too, because when I talk about *who*, I also mean people representing particular viewpoints, so for example, Bill talks about being a Communist, and we don't talk about Communism—we haven't since about the 1970s. So, I am also interested in those kinds of answers.

Sonita Sarker: Yeah, here's an example of Consumer Capitalism. I have to read it because I can't put these words together in my head from memory. Who knows about the Renaissance Festival? I don't know if you've heard the advertisement that was on Minnesota Public Radio quite frequently over the last few months? "Wine, Chocolate, Romance, Cupcake Battle, Belly Dancing, Armored Jousting, Mermaids, Fairies, and More." So, that's diversity for you. It's great! [Laughter] I love cupcake battles and belly dancing. Right?

Phil Zuckerman: Is that after lunch here? [Laughter]

Sonita Sarker: I wish! But, first of all, the history of the Renaissance, strictly speaking, does not lie within American consciousness. It's an accommodation or a cooptation of a certain kind of thing. But then, to shove in all this diversity, and to say therefore we have not missed something is, for me . . . it's great fun. I would go to the Renaissance Festival. But it doesn't function in terms of Humanism.

Chris Stedman: One thing I would say in response to this: I really appreciated this conversation about mystery and certainty, and I think that's one perspective that I would love to see lifted up more. It's very much on my mind because just last week a member of our community came up to me and was talking about how she feels that we don't have space in our community for mystery. Not just an acceptance of mystery, but actually a sort of radical embrace of it, an *enthusiasm* for mystery. Mystery as a source of stretching and learning and growing and being challenged. I agree that I think there's a real discomfort with it that I feel, that many feel. And I also pulled up something to read!

A few years ago, I interviewed Monica Miller, who does really amazing work in Humanism, and I wanted to share something that she said in response to a question I asked. I asked her, "What can white atheists do to better address white privilege and systemic racism, and what can they learn from historical and contemporary expressions of African American Humanism?"

I loved her response. She said,

"There is something to be learned from African American Humanism—and African American culture more generally—about a certain knowledge about how to live with uncertainty. Many brands of Humanism, and atheism more specifically, echo hollow suggestions about knowing with certainty that we are alone, that science can help us, *et cetera, et cetera*. To this extent, certain folks, folks we love and

read and listen to as prominent Humanist voices, could do with a dose of humility made possible by recognition that life is uncertain, life is tenuous. Humanism, for many, is a life orientation, and it's a little different, in my opinion, from white Christianity if it acts as if that orientation provides a certain foundation for social life. Life is hard. Life is complicated. It is confusing. None of us has answers as to why humans can seemingly do such dastardly things, fear difference, and the like. If white atheists want to do better to address white privilege, then they would do well to dislodge their epistemological foundations from certain moorings. In less poetic language, I simply mean that white privilege has a lot to do with feeling certain, secure, safe. If atheists want to really tackle such long-standing problems and challenges, then they would start off well by adopting a brand of atheism, of Humanism, rooted in uncertainty—a celebration of difference not simply for what benefits and beauty it holds, but for its efforts to unsettle. Learning to live uncertainly in an uncertain world is what Humanism, at its best, is all about, and I've learned much of this from African American Humanism."

So, I think a challenge that I would put to myself and to others is just to live into uncertainty more. Not as something to accept or tolerate, but rather as a generative source for learning and stretching and growing, and for Humanism becoming a more expansive Humanism that I think many of us have articulated a desire to see.

Anthony Pinn: I agree in large part with Sonita, but if I entertain the question, I have to say I am not quite convinced Humanist movements are ready for it. That it's a PC question—a question of anxiety—but it seems to me the more fundamental question is, "What are Humanists movements, Humanist organizations, ready to give up?" My experience has been what folks really mean by "diversity" are different shades of the same. We want different shades of the same. Come in so we can see you, but don't change anything.

Moderator: Everyone is nodding up here . . .

Phil Zuckerman: I'll just add that I agree with everything that's been said. I think I would like to see a more *global* Humanism; and by that I mean not just limiting to the social constructs here in the United States and the racial formations here in this country, but to look beyond to, for example, India, Asia, Africa, Latin America. There's so many voices of Humanism that come from different parts of the planet that I think we need to be listening to

more, sharing more, promulgating more. To me it's very exciting. I wanted to throw that out.

William Hart: I have nothing to add! [Laughter]

Phil Zuckerman: Oh! I have another one too, on that. [Laughter] I am asking this as a question. I don't think anyone ever talks about Shakespeare (as a Humanist), but I don't see any theism in Shakespeare. Am I missing something? There's no Jesus, there's no blood of Jesus. There's very little theism. I think Shakespeare is the great Humanist voice that no one ever talks about. This guy is writing hundreds of years ago when everybody was supposedly so religious, and I think that that is yet another wellspring. And, maybe I am wrong, but with the limited Shakespeare I know . . . I am no Shakespeare scholar, but I've read a lot of plays; I've performed in a lot of them. I think he's expressing the Humanistic world view par excellence. I think he was secular, even though he didn't have that word in his rich vocabulary. I don't know if others feel that way . . .

William Hart: What about the ghost? What about Shakespeare's ghosts?

Moderator: Also, he was writing in a time of significant religious upheaval. Not talking about religion was probably a good thing. It doesn't necessarily mean he was a Humanist, but . . .

Anthony Pinn: But there's a challenge: how much can you tell based upon what is written? So, for example, if we use that standard, James Weldon Johnson was a Christian because he wrote "God's Trombones." He gives us the Black National Anthem, yeah? So, he would be a Christian? Or, W.E.B. Du Bois. How often have you heard the argument that he's a Christian because he wrote about the black church?

Moderator: We do have time to take at least a couple of questions from the audience. I am going to—[points] here first . . .

Audience member: Since we're here celebrating a hundred years since Dietrich founded this movement, does anybody here have any comments on Dietrich's work?

Anthony Pinn: I like John Dietrich. I started by mentioning that. I think there are ways in which he provides an opportunity. There's a kind of . . . and I'll use this language cautiously . . . there's a kind of grace to the writing. The same sort of grace I sense with James Baldwin. An ability to

engage populations of counterpoint based upon a shared sense of wonder and awe about human life and human capacity.

Dietrich is a bit too optimistic for me, but I've taken the time-frame into consideration. The sense in which he understands—I think there are ways in which he and Thoreau, for example, would have been buddies. The idea that it's not just about doing good stuff. Thoreau says that giving someone something to eat when they're hungry or something to drink when they are thirsty, or some clothes—well you can find a New England dog that can do as much. The challenge for him isn't doing good, it's *being* good. And I think you get that sense of moral and ethical vision, of posture towards life with John Dietrich that revolves around *being* good, and from that posture everything else flows.

Moderator: Did anyone else want to address Dietrich? No? A question?

Audience member: What is the source of Humanist values?

Phil Zuckerman: I don't think we have to pick. All of the above. We don't have to choose between deontological and consequentialist, or, you know, we can enjoy Kant and Mill over our breakfast cereal.

William Hart: I agree totally. In fact, use a plurality of moral languages—we use different moral languages in different contexts. And I actually think that the question is not about the sources, so much, as the types.

Sonita Sarker: Well, to quote some sources, the Seventh Principle of Unitarian Universalism: "respect for the interdependent web of all existence, of which we are a part." Which can be read in theistic, or Humanist, or atheist terms; and the Third Principle of the Humanist Manifesto is—"values are derived from human need and interest, as tested by experience." So the panorama—the whole spectrum—of material, moral, psychological, emotional needs. I would emphasize the material experience as the source of Humanistic inquiry.

Moderator: So, we got a brief comment on Dietrich's views on the future of Humanism, and a question as to whether any of our panelists—and Tony, I think this is going to be you again, because you're the Dietrich fan [laughter] Do you have any comment on his thoughts on the future of Humanism?

Anthony Pinn: There are things he could not anticipate, like social media. But, unless I am mistaken, he's also reading the existentialists near the end,

before '57 he's reading the existentialists and he's toying with ideas concerning pantheism. So, there are a variety of ways in which his thought is shifting and changing depending upon . . . I am not clear on which existentialist he found most compelling, but the idea that he's turning to them would raise questions concerning a modification of his understanding of freedom and what it means to be authentic, and what it means to move through the world. There are some modifications taking place.

William Hart: Yes, I was going to respond to that question as well. I don't think there is any teleology in evolution. So, insofar as Dietrich saw the emergence of humans as sort of the end point of the evolutionary process—I don't view evolution in that way, and this is where my own trying to work through the differences as I see them between atheism, Humanism, and naturalism come into play. I like to embed my Humanism into naturalism. We're part of the natural process, and I think that's an *unguided* process—that there is no teleology in it at all.

Anthony Pinn: And there's an element of caution. It seems to me that Dietrich's great optimism concerning the human and his understanding of quality of life and solid structures of conduct revolve around human well-being. But, I think at this point we have to wrestle with some of the implications and some of the challenges posed by Post-Humanism or Trans-Humanism, which would entail a modification of what Dietrich gives us.

Sonita Sarker: I'd like to answer the question differently. Thanks to my friends for being the scholars of Dietrich that they are, but this calls up the question of whom we invoke as our sources of wisdom and inspiration. So I just wanted to bring up that the neighborhood—the ordinary communities that are working on a daily basis—that they should be recognized as part of that host of philosophy that we are referring to. This is an example of where conversations go far beyond and get intellectualized to where people can't reach it anymore.

So, shout-out to the Black Humanist Association, the Black Atheists Association, and the Combahee River Collective. Look them up; '60s, '70s, and '80s women radicals of the African diaspora in Boston. And, so, if we put Aristotle next to Dietrich, next to the Combahee River Collective, all I can say is, wow! *That's* where our sources of inspiration are from.

Anthony Pinn: And let's throw in Lorraine Hansberry. In "A Raisin in the Sun" there's some brilliant lines . . . when the sister tells the mother, "I am tired of God getting credit for what people do." [laughter] I mean, this is just wonderful stuff!

Moderator: It would not be a Humanist gathering without a conversation about labels. [Laughter] Thinking about the various ways that we all identify; there's a question about whether Humanism is the *right* label for what we are doing, and I think what we want to do going forward.

Chris Stedman: It's a great question. I think the short answer is—the conversation should continue. Certainly, we're not going to resolve it today. But I think it's important to constantly be evaluating and looking at the words that we use, the language that we use, and who feels included and represented in that language, and who doesn't, and why don't they? I think that Humanism has less a, sort of, P.R. problem and more of a problem of just unfamiliarity. There's just not literacy around Humanism as a world-view, as a tradition.

I studied religion for years as a non-theist, and I never heard about Humanism. How is it that I didn't hear about Humanism? If I am not hearing about Humanism, then there are so many people who are not. I didn't hear about Humanism until I was studying at a theological school that has a Humanist library in it, and I still didn't hear about it from that institution! [Laughter] I heard about it from a Muslim colleague at an inter-faith organization who said that the ways that I talked about what I believed sounded to him like Humanism and was it something that I had heard of and was I familiar with it.

So, if I am hearing about Humanism from a Muslim colleague rather than from an institution that has a Humanist library—this is not to put down Meadville Lombard, who does really amazing work and I am very grateful I went there—but, I think it reveals that the conversation around labels and how should we identify and all that is very important, but also it can hold us back from actually using those labels because we get stuck in them. And I know that I am biased because I am a Humanist professional—so I am going to, of course, think that Humanism is the label we should use. I have a certain amount of the work that I do invested in that idea, and so I want to be able to step back from that as much as I can. But, I think where—yeah—where I ultimately land on this is that we should continue the conversation and that we should practice a flexible Humanism. I love that language.

I think about my Humanism, for example, as a Humanism that includes my family members who identify as religious. My sister is a Lutheran—she has three wonderful children—my family is very much on my mind because I've been spending the last few days with them. My sister asked me when she had her youngest child if I would be the Godparent to her child, and my sort

of initial reflexive reaction was that that made no sense, I was not comfortable with that language, that did not map on to the language that I use for myself. So, I asked her, are you sure? Do you really think that this isn't this going to be an issue? What does this mean to you?

Her response, I thought, was quite beautiful, and it represents the kind of flexible Humanism that I hope we will all practice as we continue to have conversations around these labels. Her response was that it's not an issue that I am an atheist, being a Godparent to one of her children. In fact, that is a part of why she asked. That's a part of what she sees as a value that I can bring to that role because she wants her children to grow up knowing that people in our family—though we share this label of "family"—believe very different things, and that they will grow up to be loved and to be respected and be a part of this family even if their identity or beliefs do not match hers and how she identifies and what she believes. I think that as we have these conversations around labels that can get so territorial, and that can become much more fraught than they need to be, a kind of flexibility that doesn't hold us back from using labels and doesn't hold us back from advocating for certain labels that we think are valuable, but that also keeps us open to the process. I think that is important.

Anthony Pinn: I knew what I *wasn't*, but I didn't have a good sense of what I *was* until I discovered William R. Jones—*Is God a White Racist?* Then I had a way of naming myself. But the more I investigated—not for personal reasons but for intellectual reasons—I saw that there's slippage. So, on the level of conversation, on the level of intellectual inquiry, I am more than willing to entertain "what is a Humanist?" but on a practical level it seems to me that we are not building—a movement, or—an organization—we are building *movements* and *organizations*, and people will line up based upon what makes sense to them—right?—and we give people options. It seems to me that that kind of webbing is what's necessary here. And I think we can have these sorts of conversations, but I don't think this is anything that ever gets resolved. Why would we be the exception? There isn't a system of meaning-making in which this has been clarified. Right? How many versions of Christianity are there? Well, how many *Christians* are there? [Laughter]

Sonita Sarker: Let's go with "Humanism"! [Laughter]

Chris Stedman: Resolved! [Laughter]

Phil Zuckerman: Agreed! [Laughter]

Anthony Pinn: You need to drop the mike! [Laughter]

William Hart: I don't think these matters can *be* resolved, either. I just look at the history of the naming practices of African Americans. If you look at my birth certificate—I was born in 1957—I am described as a "colored boy." So, I was born as a colored boy. I became a "Negro," became an "Afro-American," became a "Black-American," became an "African-American."

Now, those changes in nomenclature simply have something to do with people of African descent trying to figure out a way of describing themselves that made more sense, that was more inclusive—whatever kind of language you want to use. It doesn't solve anything. Today, I tend to use Black because for me "Black" is more political than "African-American" is. So, there is no resolution to this naming issue. I mean, personally, I describe myself as an atheist, a Humanist, and a naturalist—and for me those are nested concepts. So, "atheism" tells you that I don't believe that there are any gods; that non-belief in gods is imbedded in my commitment to humanity. But, my commitment to humanity is sort of imbedded in my "naturalism" because that gives me leverage against my own anthropocentrism, an anthropocentrism that I think is in fact an issue within "Humanism." So that's how I negotiate this.

Chris Stedman: Yeah, I think that's really important to the political dimension of the labels that we use, and how we weight them in different ways and in different spaces. This is something that I think about a lot as a member of the LGBTQ community, and how I use "queer" more and more—and, in fact, I have the word tattooed on my arm, in part because I want it to be something that I push myself to be more and more visible about because it's an identity that I can mask in certain ways, or even use certain language to couch if I am trying not to make people uncomfortable.

So, thinking about the language that we use, and perhaps trying to use multiple terms to clarify who we are, but also knowing that in certain spaces we are going to weight them in different ways, especially for the sort of political dimension of it I think is a sort of an important aspect of this conversation.

Sonita Sarker: Okay. *Defined*, but not *confined by*. That's my process of negotiation with labels. On the one hand, I think there is a political urgency to claim labels and to have the power to define them, but not be confined by them. There is also the implicit factor of how I am perceived—not just how I perceive myself. So, rather than saying I have a gender, or a race, or a class—that I am gendered, racialized, and classed. That's based on social perception of me. So, on the surface I look like a brown woman, so I'll claim

those labels for what they are, but I am not confined by them. So, *defined*, but not *confined* by categories or labels enables us to keep doing the work, and yet, be self-reflexive. Which is what we pride in Humanism.

Moderator: We have just enough time for a quick wrap-up, so if each of our panelists would—if there's something you really want people to take away from this panel and walk out of here with and they're thinking about where Humanism is going, or needs to go.

Phil Zuckerman: Hard to follow up. [pointing to Sonita Sarker]. I was like, that's another mike drop right there, what you said.

I guess, what I would just—I am a sociologist, so forgive me: I have to speak from that perspective. We are a really odd lot in this room; and we're really atypical, and we're really unusual. What I mean by that, is that most people who stop believing in God, or the god they were raised to believe in, or Allah, or whatever—most people no longer want to go to church because it's boring, or whatnot—most people that walk away from religion, they walk away from it and then they focus on other things; and their identities are about their career, their family, their sexuality, their politics, their nationality, their language, the music they like—and the laundry list is quite long, and Humanist is nowhere on that list in terms of self-identification, self-understanding, self-orientation.

There is a tiny, tiny, minority of humanity that—when it loses its faith in supernatural beings and no longer subscribes to traditional religion—decides to identify with groups like this one. Anthropologist Frank Pasquale estimates that between two and three percent of secular people would ever bother to join a group predicated on being Humanist, or secular, or atheist, agnostic, or freethinking, so I guess to me we are a unique group in that we care about this, we want to talk about it, we want to mull over it, we want to try and label it—so I think that means we are a *special*—perhaps “odd” was the wrong word—we are *special*, and that means we face a lot of challenges, but it also means we have the opportunity to shape something because it matters to us.

While others may be more apathetic or just move on, we are sitting with this. And I think we sit with it because we are united by—we care about—the big questions, we care about community, we care about making the world a better place; and that's a huge part of who we are, and that's why we are sitting in this odd, special place.

Sonita Sarker: The only thing I want to remind you of is that moment we just had—"Papahanaumokuakea"—and think of all that brings up: our faith and trust in community, in being open to thinking new territories of thought, and . . . come to my breakout session this afternoon! [Laughter]

Chris Stedman: I want to end on a note of—well, I want to start by ending on a note of gratitude for the contributions of my fellow panelists who have deeply enriched me. Thank you very much, and thank you all for being here.

I think one challenge or limitation that I find about events like this is that it's very one directional—right? We are sharing our thoughts—you are listening, but in fact, there is a *collective* wisdom. You all have a great deal that you can teach us, and that you can teach one another.

Part of what we do in our Yale community on Sundays is we have speakers come in and talk about topics and immediately after the speaker we have something that we call a "moment of connection," where we invite people to turn to one or more of the people near them and reflect on a question posed by a member of our community that's reflective of the topic that the speaker addressed. Part of why we do that is we think that being in community is not just hearing from thought-provoking guests and speakers—though that is certainly something we offer and that many members of our community enjoy. But it also means learning from the people around you and having the opportunity to reflect with other people on the content of what you've heard.

What I would encourage you to do moving forward, is to—I hope that you heard things here today that you found challenging or encouraging—whether you agreed or disagreed, there was something here for you. I would encourage you to take the opportunity to talk to the people who were also here with you today, and to the people who weren't here—to talk to the other people in your life about what you've heard and what you're reflecting upon and to continue the conversations outside of this space today, and please also come to *my* breakout sessions today, as well. [Laughter]

William Hart: I guess I'd just like to end with a thank you to the people who organized this session, and to those who listened to us sort of ramble on. And I'd also like to thank my fellow panelists.

Anthony Pinn: This has been a treat for me. These are colleagues and friends, so it's been an opportunity to chat with them that I am grateful for. It's also that I am grateful to be back here. Minnesotans weren't so nice when my Humanism was made public, but this (First Unitarian Society) was the first place to contact me and say, "You know we can't fully understand

your story, but we celebrate it, and we'd like to hear it." So, thank you for that. I'll leave you with what my Grandmother told me when she sent me off to college, she said: "Move through the world knowing your footsteps matter."

[Applause]

