

INTRODUCTION

The Enlightenment grew out of 17th and 18th Century thought when Isaac Newton was able to describe some universal order, when Descartes proclaimed the importance of rationalism and when Locke and Bacon introduced their theories of systematic doubt - all within a relatively short time of each other. A revolution in thinking and an impetus to learning evolved. It followed then that rationalism and empiricism could define a new approach to human life: "religion and science as aspects of the social life" (Russell) and political and economic questions.

The rise of new thinking, the "age of reason" became the backdrop for a new democracy and the new humanism.

These papers developed in and grew out of the NACH colloquium held January, 1989, in New York. True to the character of 18th Century Enlightenment, the freethinkers and/or the skeptics - the questioners - in our colloquium group have arrived at positive statements on the nature of humanism today and for hope and optimism for the future of humanism in our world.

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